

## **HARRY POTTER SCHOLARLY ARTICLES AND THE HARRY POTTER PHENOMENON**

### **Is Harry Potter Harmful to Children?**

The authors of this article broke the Harry Potter series into five components of religion, occult, fantasy and reality, scary, and death and grief. The authors provide detail of how each topic affects the series and the children who read the novels. Despite the studies and statistics that were used throughout the article, the authors believed that the children were not as vulnerable to the themes as much as the adults believed they would be.

In the first controversial topic of religion, the authors pointed out how Rowling continues to be attacked by Christians in their belief that she is promoting wizardry and magic that is similar to satanic rituals. However, there are some Christian groups who support Rowling and find the series to be admirable in the way that it promotes love, friendship, courage, and moral values of good versus evil. The authors provided Rowling's statements in defense to religious groups who find the series to endorse magic and the devil by explaining that her books have Christian themes such as the questions of after-life, and how love conquers all in the series.

The second topic that was discussed in the article is the occult, with the belief that some find the series to influence children to become interested in satanic cults due to the progression of fantasy role playing games. Many religious groups believe that fantasy role playing lead to satanic practices, and beliefs in magical spells, which young children can be susceptible to. The authors provide another perspective to the argument by stating a study that suggests that the occult and Satanism are different worlds and do not lead to one another.

Another aspect the article addresses is the distinction of fantasy and reality and the effect it has on children. The article explains how concerned parents fear that the series may confuse children in distinguishing between things that are real and fantasy. However, a study shows that children who were interested in fantasy content were better able to distinguish between fantasy and reality. The authors warn parents about how they expose children to magical phenomenon, like Santa or the Easter Bunny, and the messages they send to kids about them. Harry Potter can create discussions about real issues that children and families may deal with.

The fourth topic discussed was about how scary the series is and if it is appropriate for children to read. Many adults assume that children need protection from scary images, but a study shows that television and movies contain more violent visual effects than books. Children have control over what they read and can read faster or skip parts of the book. The authors believe the series can help children master their fear and control it through books.

The final controversial element of the series of grief and death is a delicate topic. The authors explained how the series can be used as a way to start conversations in families or schools and illustrate death as a natural stage of life. The series shows Harry and other characters in different stages of grief and give examples of how to grieve the loss of a loved one. Most importantly, the series gives children an opportunity to ask questions and start conversations.

The article concluded by providing guidelines for parents and teachers to use when reading Harry Potter. The important part is that in each discussion of the controversial aspects, it showed that children were not influenced or affected as much as parents and other adults assumed, and can be used as a catalyst to start difficult conversations.

### **From Sexist to (sort of) Feminist: Representations of Gender in the Harry Potter Series**

The authors of this article discuss how the series hold true to gender stereotypes and holds women in secondary positions of power and authority. The authors explain how the series is full of characters that are mostly male and more males hold higher positions of power than the females. However, the authors are hopeful that the series can serve as a point of discussion of how books can engage and limit themes of gender and sex, and consider who is hurt by the stereotypes.

Despite the dominating males in the story, as the series progresses the female characters develop more and move into higher power, although the males still remain at the top. The authors described how Rita Skeeter held the most power among females in the series, because she controlled how people perceived Harry and discredited him as a hero. The roles of Hermione and McGonagall are analyzed as subservient women. Hermione is always the helper to the boys and becomes a mediator when they argue; she has talent but is interested in low status magic; when she tries to compete in the classroom she is portrayed as nerdy; and she becomes emotional when her feelings get hurt. McGonagall is held in a similar light to Hermione in that she is smart, but is not wise or clever; she is seen as a mother figure and is constantly silenced by the male in power above her. Even though there are admirable female characters throughout the novel, they fail to receive the attention and praise that the males receive.

Throughout the series the females are consistently referred to as giggly girls and are very emotional in the way they cry during various trials and gossip at school. Not only are they portrayed in stereotypical manners at school, but also in regards to each other in the way they are obsessed about their appearance. Hermione is used a prime example, because she doesn't get noticed until she goes on a date with a famous quidditch player and uses a spell to fix her nose and straighten her teeth. The authors explain how she undergoes "plastic surgery" to make herself more attractive for a boy.

Since females are undermined, the males are seen in a position of power and control. This is shown through their prestigious titles held by men in the wizard world and the way that they control their relationship status throughout the series. The article presents an interesting argument in that gender is a culturally created and how society portrays males and females in their culture. Harry is portrayed as the typical masculine boy hero in the way that he must overcome the evil characters. Nearly all the males in the series are in a constant power struggles and those who are in powerful and top positions are easy to see in the series. The likable boys are brave, confident, charismatic, and heterosexual. The lack of homosexuality leaves out an entire section of the population and doesn't give their perspective. The authors explain that this can affect those who are stereotyped and those who do not match the stereotypes presented in the series.

At the end of the article the authors explain that even though the Harry Potter series maintains the gender and sex stereotypes portrayed in society, the books can still serve as discussion topics with

children. The books can be used to discuss how the stereotypes affect people and can affect those who do not match the stereotypes.

### **Harry Potter and the Secrets of Children's Literature**

The secret of children's literature is that there are two distinct characters that are in the J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter series. One of the characters is the traditional romantic hero that is portrayed as having mystical circumstances around his birth, is out of place and oppressed, suddenly comes into unlimited power, innocence and intrinsic benefits, all of which make him superior to evil adult forces. This character alone would not do well in today's children's literature. However, Rowling's uses this character and fuses it together with a modern twist in the way there is no clear cut good and evil due to complexities with each character, and the use of gender transgressions. Due to the depth and intricacies of the characters, the series not only appeals to children, but to adults, even though it is essentially a children's novel.

The author explains how there are hierarchies within the series, such as gender, sex, racism, which are all stereotyped in the books, but she decides to make the central theme of how adults are superior to children. She uses the term carnival theory to explain how the focus of literary depiction when the temporary reversal of the power structures change place. For moments in time in the story, the story has adults in place of power, but there are times when the power switches to the child. The adults tell child he can't be the hero, but he doesn't listen and saves them when others couldn't, and then submits back into his subservient child role, and the adults resume power. This carnival theory is evident throughout the Harry Potter series, where Harry is the child hero who saves the day, but resorts back to his child role at the end of each book.

Throughout the article there were examples of fantasy novels where the removal of the parents' authority is vital to the child to develop and mature in order to be independent and understand the world. This was apparent in Harry Potter with the death of both Harry's parents at the beginning and sets the stage for the rest of the series to give Harry an opportunity to learn how to be independent and learn. However, in fantasy novels there are substitutes for parental authority, where the substitutes provide protection and security for the child and maintains the power of the adult world, but their power is decreased and the child rebels against them. The substitutes of power for Harry are the characters of Dumbledore, Hagrid, and Sirius Black, all of which serve as adult figures of authority that Harry rebels against in some way throughout the series.

The author also discusses how the series of Harry Potter uses a male protagonist like other fantasy novels, but he is not gender stereotyped. Harry doesn't depict the typical male protagonist, because he is seen as nonviolent, nonaggressive, emotional, caring, and vulnerable, which are all considered feminine characteristics. However, Harry is the hero where he has a prophecy about him, is brave, has strong morals, and serves as a model for children. Even though Harry is seen as the hero in the series, at the end of each book, order is restored and the adults hold the most authority once again. This proves the point of the author that adults are viewed as more superior to the children.

Overall, the article pointed out various elements of Rowling's fantasy novels, but believes that the most important element seen in the series is the fact that adults are portrayed as more powerful

and authoritative to the children. It is important for the novels to remove parental authority and show how the child grows and becomes independent, but still needs some adult supervision and authority in order to be successful.

### **Heteronormative Heroism and Queering the School Story in J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter Series**

In the article the authors explain how Rowling's Harry Potter series is seen as a boarding school type story, however she does so in a differently from others in the modern way that she portrays males and females at the school equally and breaks down gender roles. Even though Rowling queers the school story, she maintains the stereotype of the male centered hero who fights evil and the gender role of the hero. This creates tension between sexism and the new ideas of the school story.

As the authors call "gender policing" in the story and other literature, it can create negative effects on all people, and question their place in society. Also, by writing about gender, the stories can contribute to the concept of masculinity can belittle women and the socially accepted behaviors of men. Besides creating a heteronormative heroism in the series, Rowling lacks homosexual characters, and portrays her characters as normal sex roles. There are no homosexual couples or families in the series, which can be seen as detrimental. However, the authors draw a parallel between Harry's discovery of the wizard world to that of homosexuals who discover the gay community. For example, Harry is seen as an outcast in his muggle family, but when he becomes a member of the wizard world he feels at home and comfortable; which is similar to those who are homosexual and feel like an outcast in a heterosexual environment, but become more comfortable when they are introduced to the gay community. The authors, also, make an interesting comparison between homosexuals and the werewolves in the Harry Potter series. Werewolves are marginalized figures in the wizard society much like gays are marginalized in today's society. The fear of the werewolves or a family member becoming a werewolf is much like how people are homophobic in our society. The article discusses how there is a lack of homosexual characters in the story, but draws parallels throughout the series that homosexuals could relate to.

The article discusses the role of women in the coed school story still maintain the typical gender roles in the three sectors of society (government, school, and family). However, as the series progresses the role of women become more important and hold higher positions. The authors discuss how the gender roles are problematic in the descriptions of females and the way that the women decide to take action in the books after the men have already instigated or initiated a confrontation; and when they do take action they are seen as irrelevant or unreasonable. One example of this is how Hermione only uses her talents when she needs to save Harry. The gender roles do not only hurt females, but also harm males with the masculine stereotypes. For example, Harry doesn't address any sexual issues in the series and his masculinity is only challenged by Voldemort. Even though Harry has protectors that could possibly emasculate him, they are eliminated in the series. Also, Ron's character as a sidekick to the hero can harm the image of males in that the hero must have a less talented friend. The authors concluded by explaining how the females in the books are subservient, and Harry is forced into the narrow action figure role, which requires the death of his competitors.

Despite the faults in the series, there is still much to take away from them. The authors explained how we can use the books to analyze the effects of stereotypes and how the genre of the school story is changed on the surface level, and how it could change beyond that. Once again, Harry Potter opens up discussions about gender and sex.

### **Is there Text in this Advertising Capaign?: Literature, Marketing, and Harry Potter**

The author of this article discusses the marketing and literary phenomenon that surrounds the Harry Potter series by J.K. Rowling. The author feels that there are many scholars and critics who analyze the whole Harry Potter phenomenon as one big piece that includes movies, action figures, apparel, and merchandise all lumped together with the books. However, he believes that the marketing phenomenon and literary phenomenon should be analyzed separately. By breaking apart the marketing and literary elements, the author presents an interesting perspective on the whole Harry Potter phenomenon that other scholarly articles haven't presented.

Rowling's Harry Potter series has become a phenomenon due to the books and the aggressive marketing of the products. The major role of marketing is to sell children's literature, but the author feels that the marketing sector focuses too much on selling and not necessarily on the quality of the books they are trying to sell. The author gives another critic's perspective who believes corporate conglomerates have taken over the marketing industry and allows for the business and entertainment industry to become intertwined. With the merging of entertainment and business in the American book industry now relies more on trademark law than copyright law. Even though copyright laws protect the authors and artists, the trademark laws protect the products. The trademarks last for the length of time that the product is in use, where copyrights are for a fixed set of time. In order for Rowling's books to be protected under trademark she had to enter into licensing agreements, in order for spin-off products to be made. The author continued to explain how Harry Potter has become an indication of the design of how the legal system benefits capitalism more than the artists. The legal element shows how marketing and the literary world have come together and changed how books are marketed to audiences to include merchandise and other products.

Many critics have put Rowling's under the microscope for the extent of the Harry Potter phenomenon and have analyzed her earnings from the series. There have been numerous items and merchandise made from the Harry Potter series, whether it is apparel, action figures, or the new amusement park. However, the author explains how Rowling's is not a sellout and has used the money from the marketing to donate to charities. Rowling's uses her characters to teach lessons about over indulgence in the series, such as the Dursley's, and how pleasures from mass produced products can be short lived, like the Quidditch World Cup plastic gadgets in the Harry Potter series. Even though Rowling's can't stop people from purchasing the spin-off products, the author believes she should be praised for her efforts to try to control the marketing sphere of her characters and stories.

The marketing of the Harry Potter products is only one part of the phenomenon. Even though the legal system seems to be in favor of corporations making money off artists rather than the quality and protection of the artist's work, the marketing sphere is only one aspect of the Harry Potter phenomenon—there is the literary perspective. The author explains how the books were popular

before the movie deals were signed and in production. The books became popular through strong reviews and spread through word of mouth by children who read the books. Rowling's helped children enjoy reading and created life-long learners through her series. The author breaks down the literary merits that Rowling's possessed in her Harry Potter series that should be analyzed separately.

One of the literary merits that the article applauds Rowling for is her art of satire, which was influenced on Jane Austen and Roald Dahl. In the book series, Rowling uses satire for her portrayal of The Dursley's and Malfoy's. Despite the families' depiction in the novels, she still provides sympathy for the characters she mocks. Rowling's may have two dimensional supportive characters, but her primary characters are three dimensional and full of complexities. Her use of satire is used in an impactful way that allows readers to sympathize with the characters and understand their background.

Another literary merit that Rowling's should be acknowledged for is her use of "narrative misdirection", in the way she has a third person narrative that follows closely to the first person perspective. The reader feels as if they are in the story and know how Harry and other characters feel, but there is another narrative that guides the reader. Even though the books are narrative, Rowling's expands the narrative in the progression of the books and discloses more about the magical world she created. The books become more complex and longer, because she uses a more intricate plot and character histories. The suspense in the book allows readers to read rapidly or slow down and reread. Rowling, not only uses narrative, but blends together various genres of fantasy, mystery, and realism in her series. Each book is seen as a quest, where the characters are on an epic journey and must fulfill a larger purpose. The books portray an activist spirit in the way Harry helps others and includes simple heroes and morals that readers can relate to.

In the article, many have criticized Rowling's for her use of the board school story, but she uses modern social situations combined with the school story. One modern example is how the main characters must fight against racism in Voldemort's attempt to rid the wizard world of non-purebloods. Harry develops into a leader throughout the series and must defend those who are weaker than him. Peace and understanding are central lessons and themes in the series and Rowling's believes her readers can handle the serious issues that go along with these themes.

Other literary merits that are explained throughout the article are Rowling's use of names to connote physical and personality descriptions of the characters and objects in the Harry Potter series. Also, she shows creativity in her use of prime numbers and money used in the novels. Rowling's uses prime numbers, because they are seen as magical, and she pokes fun at the confusing British monetary system prior to 1971. Each of these merits hold important elements for readers to make the series more interesting and engaging, and have helped create the literary phenomenon of Harry Potter.

The author concludes the article by explaining how the Harry Potter phenomenon is more complex in that it should be critiqued and analyzed based on the literary elements and the marketing perspective, rather than one analysis. Rowling's books are rich in text and the wealth of marketing of products all deserves further study. The initial enchantment of the stories shouldn't get confused with the marketing; instead each should be analyzed based on their individual appeal and attraction.

## **Children's Literature at the Turn of the Century: Toward a Political Economy of the Publishing Industry**

In the past, literature used to be considered an art form, but has taken a turn to become an economic drive based in consumerism. The author of the article believes that historically, literature was above the economy, because everything was based on goods and materials, and the intellectual good was more important and a greater good for the public in which it existed on its own. In more recent years, literature has become another commodity in the economy and the goal of children's literature and publishing is no longer for intellectual reasons, but for the sole purpose of making money. The author believes that we can't analyze the Harry Potter phenomenon without understand the economic factors and reasons it was published and aggressively marketed.

In order to educate the reader, the article discusses capitalism and commodification of the literary community. From the 1970's to present day, our economy has been fast paced with technological innovations and importance on the service sector rather an industry or goods sector. During this fast paced capitalism, the nation has gone through the commodification process where thoughts and ideas are for sale in the technology based economy. Everything is considered for sale and has some sort of value to it. We have become less tangible, where it is no longer important to just produce items, but to sell ideas and intellectual property. The idea of commodification leads us to question if books are a commodity or art? In the past, books used to be considered an art form and an intellectual good; however in modern times they have become money makers for a broad entertainment purpose to create movies and merchandise.

The author provides a concise timeline of children's publishing from the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century to present day. He explains how in the early part of the century there was a structural shift for the literary world to focus on children's literature by having a separate room in libraries and promotions for children's books (Newbery and Caldecott Medals). In the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century federal funds were available to purchase library books in the subjects of mathematics and science, and there was an increase demand with the baby boomers. During the Civil Rights years, the publishing companies became aware of their portrayal of American society and decided to publish multicultural books. Throughout the 1970's and 1980's books became available in various stores and settings and were targeted towards the consumer child and middle class families, where the increase for demand for books increased due to two incomes in the family. The 1990's through present day there has been better funding of libraries that has led to the improved health of the children's book industry where there has been an increase in the number of books available, and an increase in the diversity within children's literature. This timeline helps us understand where children's literature started and what direction it is going in.

There are many other influences on children's literature besides capitalism and commodification, such as copyright laws, tax laws, and the development of chain bookstores. Copyright laws are used to protect American authors and their artwork, but unfortunately does not protect foreign authors. This influences what books are published in our country and which ones receive more attention. The tax laws have made it so that publishers no longer warehouse books because it is too

costly and decreases their profits, has reduced backlists, and has increased the need for quick production of books. This means that it is difficult to get books that were published several decades ago if they were not popular, and has put pressure on publishing houses to produce successful books. Lastly, the move towards chain bookstores and the decline of independent stores have changed the way books are available. Chain bookstores have intensified the competition between publishers, and create a need for books to sell quickly. Each of these factors impacts children's literature and how it is available to our society.

With the change in children's literature it has created a tension between the commerce of books and culture. The tension starts with how books are viewed as an economic commodity rather than an art form, and many feel that it decreases the integrity of the written form. There is a need to make books into blockbuster movies and other media; however sometimes good books are not commercial successes and sometimes big commercial successes are not critic successes. There is more commercialization with the merchandise, marketing, movies, theme parks, video games, and several others in order to make a story appeal to our consumer obsessed culture. Marketing of children's books is no longer simple, but has become a complex aspect that has become important in determining the success of a book. For example, Harry Potter books are considered a huge success, because there are movies, video games, apparel, websites, stores, theme parks all devoted to the whole phenomenon surrounded around the series. It is a recognizable, media friendly story that has commodified its characters to pop culture.

When publishers believe a book will sell, there is tremendous pressure placed on the author to create a sequel or series to the original. The author explains how sequels and series are popular with our culture, because there is a comfort in having the same characters, similar plot, actors, and predictability within a story. This brings audiences back to read the book and see the film (if applicable), and continue to buy merchandise, and produce more money.

Towards the end of the article the author addresses questions that surround multiculturalism in children's literature. There are questions as to how to incorporate and use multiculturalism in stories for children, because it can be done by adding diverse characters, creating a story about a culture, or by having a story told from a specific culture's perspective. The author believes that there needs to be more multiculturalism in children's literature, and that publishers' fear controversy, which leads many authors to avoid writing about controversial topics such as violence, racism, sex, and many others. This proves again that the publishers have an influence over the authors and what is printed to the public.

The author concludes the article by making the main point that he believes there should be awareness of the economic forces that influence the availability of certain types of books. Also, authors and illustrators are pressured to create sequels and series to their work in order to meet the demands of creating a mass media phenomenon and corporate products for consumers. He believes people should be aware of all the influences that impact the literary world and how it has changed how books are written and the publication of them.



## HARRY POTTER AND THE CULTURAL PHENOMENON

Harry Potter has become a culture phenomenon and is seen as an international icon for children's literature. The books have been extremely popular and have international appeal along with reaching people of all ages. The series started out in written form, and then were turned into blockbuster movies, merchandise, and experiences, all of which have helped to enhance the popularity of the book series. Even though the series has become a cultural phenomenon, the books gained popularity before the movies were in production and released to the public. The books became popular through children and adults talking about the books and the positive reviews from critics. In order for the series to become a phenomenon, it is important that it started out as a widely popular story.

I didn't really understand the depth and realm of the Harry Potter phenomenon, or Pottermania as some call it, until we were required to peruse the internet regarding Harry Potter for the course. Through this research of Harry Potter merchandise, information about the author or actors, and general reviews about the books and films, I discovered a world that I didn't know existed—Harry Potter's world that is. I found websites devoted to apparel, merchandise, video games, board games, wands, magical toys or books, action figures, and the high anticipated theme park. This shows how Harry Potter has become part of our culture and recognizable to anyone, whether they have read the books or not. However, it is important to understand how Harry Potter has become such a cultural phenomenon, what it means, and the issues that stem for it all.

The role of the book form of Harry Potter and the various formats it takes place in the current cultural phenomenon should be looked at separately. I agree with the author of the article "*Is there Text in this Advertising Campaign?: Literature, Marketing, and Harry Potter*" where they believe that the book and advertising/cultural phenomenon are two separate entities and should be analyzed that way. As the book as its own entity, many people have found it to be original and unique in the plot and setting of the story. For children's literature, Rowling's created an interesting story by fusing different genres of fantasy, mystery, and romance together to create a story that everyone can relate and empathize with. She created a well developed plot that took place over seven books, where each one was more exciting than the one before, and has complex and intricate characters that reach all people. The villains are not typical where they are just horrible people, but rather have histories and complex backgrounds that make the reader sympathize with them or understand where they came from. However, not everyone agrees with the praise, which I discovered through the scholarly articles that many critics and scholars found the series to be full of stereotypes of gender, sexual orientation, family roles, board school story, and many others. Many critics felt that the gender roles were traditional if the fact that mostly males held positions of power and women were seen as subservient and emotional. Hermione and Professor McGonagall were used as prime examples, where they were portrayed as having tremendous talents, but still in lower positions. Other critiques of the Harry Potter books felt that it lacked diversity in terms of the sexual orientation of characters. There were no openly homosexual characters or families represented in the books, except for an admission from Rowling after the series was finished that Dumbledore was a homosexual character. Despite this revelation, many critics were disappointed, because it seemed as though it was an after-thought on Rowling's part as an attempt to draw attention to her novels. However, I did find it interesting that one scholar wrote that

the trials and tribulations Harry had to undergo were parallel to homosexuals. For example, Harry feeling uncomfortable in the muggle world and when introduced to the wizard world he becomes more comfortable and confident in himself; this is similar to how many gays feel out of place until they are introduced to the gay community. Despite all the controversies, the series is still considered a phenomenon and might even make others take an in-depth look into the literature. At the end of each controversial article, there was an emphasis on how the books can serve as a catalyst to start difficult conversations or discussions about stereotypes, death, grief, and violence. It is important to understand both the praises and critiques of the series and how it can influence readers.

As a cultural phenomenon of the Harry Potter series does not just start with the books, but encompasses everything that is related to the novels, such as the merchandise and movies. This is a phenomenon that we have never seen before with any other books. The series has been a success with children and adults with the way the books speak to all ages, and have lessons and themes that appeals to a wide array of ages. Since the books started out popular to the wide audiences, it set the stage of a large and broad audience for marketing and advertising to appeal to the fans of the series, and those who don't typically read fantasy books, to see the movies and buy into the products. The series has become a cultural phenomenon with the way that it uses different genres to draw in a large audience. It is not just a typical fantasy novel, but has mystery and adventure where the characters must successfully complete each journey in order to fulfill a greater purpose. Some argue that the phenomenon has helped to get children to read and love to read, while others believe that it feeds into our consumer culture that is obsessed with media and entertainment. Also, through the scholarly articles, I realized how the literary industry has changed from books being an art form to the importance of being money makers. Many books are considered for publication, based on their potential to become a movie, or cultural phenomenon, or sequel/series. This has made it more difficult for authors to get published and diverse stories to be told. The role of the Harry Potter book in the cultural phenomenon is that it has served as a great story and basis to get people of all ages to relate to an original story, where the books grew in popularity, and the story was aggressively marketed and advertised in society until it became a cultural phenomenon.

The relationship of the book to the films and cultural "objects" is that the books served as the basis for the popularity. The book became popular before the movies were thought of or even in production. The popularity of the books started out through critic acclaim and spread through word of mouth from the readers. Since the books are mostly fantasy novels, with some mystery and adventure, it allows for a wide array of products and merchandise to go with the story, such as action figures, wands, cloaks, stuffed animals, and many others. Since the books were very popular, the movies were made as strict visual replicas to the written text. The series was turned into films, which meant that there was little room for interpretation, in order for the later movies to correlate with the beloved story that readers and audiences loved. The filmmakers could not change much of the original story, without hindering the rest of the movies and disappointing audiences. The books had such a strong following, that if the movies differed too much from the books, audiences would be extremely upset and might not see the future movies. The merchandise that was created was to increase the hype about the movies and books, and make money for the Harry Potter franchise. Other cultural objects such as groups, blogs, and websites created around the phenomenon, allow people to come together and become part of a

group that centers on a common interest, which is their devotion to the Harry Potter books. The book versions serve as the original form of the story and were used for the films and for the cultural products that were made based around the innovative plot, setting, and characters.

Since Harry Potter turned into such a phenomenon there are many interpretations of the text. Many view the text to be well developed and a great piece of children's literature that has created a love of reading for kids all around the world. However, others feel that the text is full of stereotypes of gender, racism, and sexual orientation. In the gender stereotype, many critics and scholars believe that the series portrays men as powerful and women as weak. The series is male dominated with men in powerful positions, and women as weak and undermined. For example, Hermione is very talented and smart, however she only uses her smarts to save Harry when he is in trouble, and is considered as a class pet when she tries to be competitive in the classroom. Another example is the portrayal of women in the family setting, such as with The Weasley's and Dursley's. Mrs. Weasley is the typical homemaker wife who tends to the needs of her children and takes care of the home, while her husband goes off to work and earn the money for the household. The same story is true in the Dursley family where Mrs. Dursley cares about spoiling her child and having a clean home, while Mr. Dursley is concerned about his family's image and is the breadwinner. If a female is of a somewhat powerful position, many critics believe she is demeaned through her physical description. For example, Rita Skeeter is a woman who holds power in the way that she can discredit the hero (Harry), but is given unpleasant physical features. This also happens to McGonagall where she is a clever witch, who cares about fairness, but her physical traits make her seem like a spinster. It is important to note that there are some women who are in some positions of authority and power, and that the role of women progress throughout the series. Even though there are gender stereotypes, the topic can be used a point of conversation with children and other readers about the stereotypes and why they are present and what influence it may have on readers.

Another interpretation of the text would be the stereotype of racism in the series in the way that the villain, Voldemort is trying to make the world pure blood wizards by getting rid of those who are not. The wizards and witches that are not pure blood are not seen as worthy enough to be part of the wizard community and are sometimes bullied at school. For example, Hermione is often bullied by Draco, despite her incredible talents, due to the fact that one of her parents is a muggle. The conflict that erupts in the wizard world revolves around an evil group of people who want to discriminate against another group who cannot help their ancestry. This is a familiar story to many and can be rooted in racism. I believe it is important that Rowling's touches on this issue, because it is a moral and social issue that is still present in the world and many can learn from. It can help create discussion about racism, even if the fantasy world of Harry Potter, is used as examples and how it relates to the real world.

The interpretation of the Harry Potter text as a heterosexual stereotype of society is examined by many critics. Rowling's has received controversy over her acknowledgement of Dumbledore as a homosexual male in the series, after her books were published and some of the movies were already released. Many questioned her motives as to whether it was to get people talking about her books again, or if she had the purest intentions. But the questions still remain as to why she waited until after they were published and released for several years, before she acknowledged his sexual orientation, and

does it really matter? These questions are still unanswered and up for debate. What has been criticized in the series, though, is the lack of homosexual characters and families, or any homosexual representations. One of the scholarly articles discussed how Harry's life can be relatable to those in the gay community. For instance, Harry lived in a closet for over a decade of his life while he lived in the muggle world, which could be referenced to homosexuals who are in the closet and don't want to reveal their true selves in a world that may not accept them. Also, the way Harry is seen as an outsider in the muggle world can be related to those in the gay community who feel like an insider in a heterosexual world. An interesting perspective that was brought up during one of the readings was how the fear of werewolves in the series is similar to homophobia in our society. All of the parallels that were concluded were very interesting and eye opening about the series. There are many interpretations of the Harry Potter text that serve as important factors that can start conversations about diversity in children's books and the importance it has in how our society is portrayed through children's literature.

My reading of the Harry Potter books and film fit into my reading of the cultural phenomenon in a way that I feel the cultural phenomenon is deeper than just the books and films. I believe the whole cultural phenomenon that surrounds the Harry Potter series is driven by people's attitudes and opinions, and the current economic conditions of the publishing and literary community. As some of the scholarly articles have pointed out, the goal of the literary community is no longer to create an intellectual good, but rather to make money for the publishing houses and entertainment industry. In the past, books were created as a way to share good stories, and spread intellect; however, today, there are pressures on authors to make entertaining stories that could possibly turn into movies, or have sequels that will make more money for those connected to the book. In the cultural phenomenon, there are people who have no relation to the text that buy into the phenomenon due to the movies and merchandise. For example, the toy company that is making the action figures does not have any relation to J.K. Rowling or the original story, but they are making money off of that item. I find it bittersweet that such a unique and original story must have mass media in order for it to be successful. With Harry Potter the story was successful before the media, but it gained more attention and success as the movies grew more popular, and more merchandise was created. At the same time, it is making people interested in the story and possibly getting them to read the novels. The book serves as the basis for the story, but the economy and society of literature has turned into a big business designed to make money. The Harry Potter books led to the films, which in turn manifested itself to this entire cultural phenomenon.

When the Harry Potter merchandise floods into the market, it can be difficult to trace back to what and where exactly the original came from. I feel that the original form is the written version of the story by J.K. Rowling in that she provides the initial story. However, I feel that the original can be found in people's imagination in how they view and interpret the story in their own minds. The original can also be found in the media, since it is what is driving this whole cultural phenomenon. Without the media there wouldn't be merchandise in the market, but without the original text there would be no media! When the fans are out consuming the products, the original is in their imagination, because they are the ones who read the books and have the story in their minds and serves for their reasoning for why they are consuming the products. Overall, the original is the book series, and it can be found in the imagination of the readers when they are out buying and consuming the merchandise in the market. It

is a vicious cycle that is difficult to track and understand who is really driving all of it. Is it the media and marketing, or is it the demand from the fans? What is obvious is that Rowling's created and initiated the potential of the phenomenon through her widely popular story in an economic industry that is driven by consumption.

Based on the readings of the cultural phenomenon that surrounds Harry Potter there are some issues that come up when I think of the scale of it all. One of the big issues that arise is if the commercialism of a piece of literature is a good thing? I question whether the artistic and intellectual integrity of the book is lost when it becomes commercialized and hyped in the media. Some people might feel that it is a form of flattery when their work is marketed and advertised, because it means that it is popular with audiences. It is great to get children into reading and to advertise towards them to engage them in books, but from the author's perspective, I feel that it somewhat demeans their art when it becomes too commercialized. Another issue that comes up is as a teacher I wonder if the reliance on one specific phenomenon or genre is what it will take to encourage reading. I love that children get excited about reading Harry Potter and love the characters and plot, but I fear that children will be bored with other forms of literature if they are not as good and do not compare to Harry Potter. A final issue that surrounds Harry Potter is the gender stereotypes that concern me and the popularity the book has with the stereotypes. I feel that children who read the books are reading about the gender stereotypes that we shouldn't be teaching our children about. We live in the post feminist world where women hold positions of power in government, careers, and the home, and are sometimes the sole income provider to a household. I agree with the articles that stated that the stereotypes are presented in the story, because it is something that people are comfortable with and used to seeing. This stereotype and others in the book, along with the issues that I have that surround Harry Potter can be used as discussions about the book and how it is used in society. Despite the faults that may surround the series there is always a positive spin in the way that it can be used to talk to children and teach them about what they are reading.

After studying the Harry Potter phenomenon and piece of children's literature in an in-depth perspective has been extremely interesting and useful in my future uses of the book in my classroom. At the beginning I viewed the whole phenomenon at a surface level with the books and movies, but through the readings of the scholarly aspects have brought up concerns of gender, sexual orientation, racism, and economic concerns of the literary community. I believe that the hype surrounding Harry Potter has encouraged children and adults to develop a new love for reading, which I believe to be more a benefit than a hindrance and can serve as a catalyst for conversation about the many controversies of the series.