

THE WOMEN IN HARRY POTTER'S WORLD: A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

By

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CHAPTER I

Harry Potter took America by storm first in July of 1997. The author, J.K. Rowling, spent six years writing the manuscript of the first Harry Potter novel, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*. Now, more than 450 million copies of the book have been sold worldwide (Because it's his birthday, 2014). In total, the series contains seven different books. Because the series became a huge hit, a series of movies were released throughout the next decade and replicated the storyline of the Harry Potter series. The total gross of those movies was 7.7 billion dollars (Because it's his birthday, 2014). Rowling started with a small idea and one manuscript and has built a legacy that has lasted through multiple generations of childhoods.

“Me? Books and cleverness. There are more important things: friendship and bravery. And Harry, just be careful,” Hermione said (Rowling, 1999, p.16). Throughout the series, this quote is what best depicts Hermione. She is first and foremost an outstanding friend but also is created by Rowling to be the most clever and knowledgeable witch at Hogwarts. Hermione is the character who can put the lives of Harry and Ron into perspective. Rowling emphasizes on her wit, but also the budding friendship that needs to grow in order to withstand all that the trio face in the book series. The Harry Potter series is a fictional story of bravery, defeat, and defending the honor of loved ones and places like the main setting of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Throughout the storyline, Harry Potter, Ron Weasley, and Hermione Granger – the three main characters - grow, through friendships and trials. Hermione stands out as

the smartest one of the batch who can cast any spell because she has taken time to learn them.

My analysis uses a feminist perspective to examine the gender roles portrayed in *Harry Potter*. In this analysis, I place an emphasis on two of the female characters in the book series, Hermione Granger and Minerva McGonagall or Professor McGonagall. Although Professor McGonagall and Hermione are fantasy creatures of the wizarding world, their characters represent so much more than just women of the book series. Both are fighters, pioneers, historians, liberators, and heroes.

By studying the construction of gender in these two characters, my thesis helps others understand the gender roles in society and how they should or should not be treated. Hermione is among the biggest of characters in the book series. She's an advocate for equal rights, being strong, smart, and feminine all at the same time. "Hermione's behavior is as an allegorical smoke-screen for gender issues" (Kellner, 2010). Hermione is one of the strongest advocates not only for the power of women in the books, but also for equality with male and female characters.

Although the Harry Potter series is fictional, it still mirrors a society in which we live that often places women in less powerful roles. Throughout my thesis, I analyze these two powerful women and the impact that they have on the book series. The following question is studied throughout this thesis.

Research Question: How does the construction of gender created by Rowling for the characters of Hermione and Professor McGonagall empower women throughout the book series?

Description of the Artifact

The artifact I have chosen for rhetorical analysis is the *Harry Potter* book series, written by British author J.K. Rowling: *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (1998), *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (1999), *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, (1999), *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (2000), *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (2003), *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* (2005), and *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (2007) (Scholastic, 2014). The wildly popular fiction novels cover a multitude of plot twists, scenes, and battles throughout the series. From internal battles with characters to the conclusion of a battle versus good and evil, the books contain vivid characters and stories. The series covers a fantasy world of magic where humans are called Muggles and witches and wizards exist. Harry Potter is known as “the boy who lived” and takes on the heroic persona from day one. “The boy who lived is a reference to when Voldemort (the evil wizard) tried to kill him after he killed Harry’s parents, but failed. Harry’s two best friends, Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger, while helping him, are more known as his sidekicks. However, it is in crucial moments that Hermione saves Harry repeatedly.

Despite both her parents being Muggles, Hermione is one of the brightest witches of her age. Her character proves to be one of the smartest throughout the novels saving

not only Harry, but also others time and again from the trenches of dark magic (Fife, 2006, p. 160).

While at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, Ron, Harry, and Hermione become best friends. From the time they arrive they help decipher which teachers are good, whose side to take, and which classes to avoid. Professor Minerva McGonagall is one of their teachers. Although quiet, Professor McGonagall proves to be strong in her magic skill and plays a major role toward the end of the story.

While these are only a few of the characters, Hermione and Professor McGonagall are the two who are the focus of my study. This thesis will take a look at the construction of gender, which studies how men and women are depicted in the book series. Examining these two fictional female characters provides a way of understanding how the series both reinforces and challenges gender stereotypes.

Theoretical Basis

For this thesis, two separate theories have been chosen: hooks' Rhetorical Theory and Daly's Feminism Theory. Both were chosen based on the rhetorical insight provided. hooks grew up with five sisters and one brother and immediately noticed the brother's rights were greater and so were his privileges. "Male domination particularly was evident in her family's daily communication" (Foss, Foss, & Griffin, 1999, p. 70). hooks, who was also verbally and physically abused, found a solace in "critical engagement for ideas" (Foss, Foss, & Griffin, 1999, p. 71). hooks focuses on how domination is sustained in our culture.

hooks' major scholarly work sought to eradicate domination. hooks looks at certain types of options including enactment, confession, cultural criticism, education, and community outreach. "The rhetorical options featured in hooks' rhetorical theory are designed to intervene in practices of domination. All of her options involve the basic process of decolonization, or developing the critical consciousness necessary to challenge and transform the ideology of domination" (Foss, Foss, & Griffin, 1999, p. 83).

The second theory, Daly's Feminism Theory, looks at two different components, foreground and background. Foreground focuses on patriarchy – which eliminates the power of women. The foreground is usually marked by violence and aggression.

Background is the basis of this theory where rules are broken. This is where the life-affirming images are created for women. Two different views are looked at in Daly's theory; one group reinforces the realm of the foreground and the other participates in the realm of the background. "The foreground is misogynistic __ antiwoman and oppressive __ and Daly sees this misogyny as linked to the hatred of all lifeforms. The Background, in contrast, is the realm in which women move beyond oppression and hatred and journey into a life-loving and life-affirming state of Be-ing"(Foss, Foss, & Griffin, 1999, p. 134). The two types of feminism she describes are opposites but fit into the mold of how women are viewed.

Described in a magazine article written by Audrey Bilger, in hooks' book, *Feminism is for Everybody*, hooks states, "Imagine living in a world where there is no domination, where females and males are not alike or even always equal, but there a vision of mutuality is the ethos shaping our interaction. Imagine living in a world where

we can all be who we are, a world of peace and possibility” (hooks, 2000 p. 36). To hooks, feminism is not one gender over another; it’s being who you are rather than fitting into a mold. To her, “feminism is the struggle to end sexist oppression” (hooks, 2000, p. 37).

Mary Daly, reformed feminist theories with her foreground and background approach. In Daly’s book (1998), *Gyn/Ecology: The metaethics of Radical Feminism*, Daly recalls her own “coming to” of her ideals with feminism and what they mean. “The voyage could also be called *innercourse*, since it involves delving deeply into the process of communication with the Self and with others -- a process that demands profound and complex Passion, Re-membering, Understanding. It could also be called *Countercourse*, since it requires Amazonian Acts of Courageous Battling” (Daly, 1990, p. 12). Both of the ways she describes are processes of finding true self.

In hooks’ book, *Where We Stand*, she describes class and feminism. Although talking about the real world, these theories can be based in the wizard world as well. The parallelism between the Harry Potter series and the real world matches except for the use of magic. Hooks describes the issue as collusion with social structure and the price of so-called liberation (hooks, 2000, p. 106). This so-called liberation led women to the working world but they found disappointment as women still did the majority of household chores. Women, in turn, felt betrayed. “To succeed within that system we had to develop strategies enabling us to do our work without compromising our feminist politics and values” (hooks, 2000, p. 108). While looking at characters in the book, Hermione fits this mold well. She refuses to compromise her knowledge because she is a

woman and fights to gain power in the classroom, with her peers, and with Harry and Ron.

Both of these theories examine the different perspectives of feminism.

Throughout the series, Hermione and Professor McGonagall face a balance of power and their own struggles. While overcoming some of these struggles, both are faced with problems because they are female.

Summary

Chapter one discusses the history of the *Harry Potter* novels and the plot behind the books. Focusing on Hermione Granger and Professor McGonagall, and using the lens of feminist criticism with Daly and hooks, Chapter one explained the rationale for my study and provides a better understanding of why we should study the construction of gender in *Harry Potter*. Chapter two presents the literature review and supporting statements from Chapter one. Chapter three explains the methodology. Chapter four provides an analysis and results of applying feminist criticism. Chapter five offers a discussion of findings and a summary of the study.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

Chapter two provides an in-depth analysis of the concepts of Feminist Rhetoric in the Harry Potter book series. Chapter two also provides background about hooks and Daly's feminist theories. These topics are important in analyzing feminist rhetoric because, although Harry Potter provides a fictional world, the concepts ring true in real-life societies. In order to understand the background and analysis of Harry Potter, one must look at the research provided about the gender roles and culture of Hogwarts School for Witchcraft and Wizardry as well as the female power roles of Hermione Granger and Professor Minerva McGonagall.

The Harry Potter series, a total of seven books and eight movies, provides an understanding of the challenges that reinforce gender stereotypes. From the beginning of the novels, gender roles are challenged. Hermione Granger, the smartest witch, consistently outsmarts Harry Potter and Ronald Weasley, her two best friends. When

looking into the Harry Potter series, there are countless power male roles: Harry, Ron, Dumbledore, Voldemort, Snape and Malfoy, just to name a few.

Gender roles play a significant role in the series. From the beginning of the books, Harry has to make crucial decisions about friends, family, and where he belongs. “Read one way, Harry’s decision to align himself with Ron rather than Draco is as predetermined as his overall role as hero; but read another way, Harry is for the first time taking responsibility for his relationships rather than merely enduring them” (Mills, 2010, pg 292). Harry, although the lead male, is highly reactive rather than proactive in his early choices. Destined to be the hero, he can only get by with the ones who surround him. Even Harry’s character can be seen growing through the book, right alongside Hermione and Ron.

Enduring the anguish of this decision (to become a sacrifice to save the wizarding world) and its consequences is the culmination of a long series of ordeals in which he has increasingly taken responsibility for the lives of others as well as his own, starting with the rescue of Hermione from the troll in *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*, then the rescue of Ginny from Tom Riddle in *Chamber of Secrets* and onwards to the saving of all sentient beings in *Deathly Hallows*. (Mills, 2010)

Harry’s character develops into his leading male role while having the support of the two subjects of this thesis, Hermione and Professor McGonagall. From the beginning of his life, Harry was well loved and taken care of by women, excluding his aunt who he escapes from. “The key action before the first book of the series begins is Lily Potter’s

choices to protect her son at the cost of her own life. Later, Hermione Granger makes the heroic choice to challenge the racism behind the slavery of the house elves” (Klein, 2012, p. 33). With these actions, there are choices that specifically counter or accept the gender roles and stereotypes.

Leading Women

While Harry is subjected to some gender stereotypes, research shows that his masculinity is questioned throughout the book series. Harry’s role is pivotal but not without help from his female counterparts. For example, in the last book in the series, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, women play a significant role in the climactic final battle. During this final battle, the most satisfying duel occurs between Bellatrix Lestrange and Molly Weasley, who no longer is the sweet homemaker knitting sweaters. Weasley uses a slew of spells and kills the murderous adversary while calling her expletives. Also during this final battle, Professor McGonagall plays an important role in defending the legendary school, Hogwarts (Pugh & Wallace, 2008, p. 189). While the lead male character, Harry, finishes the final battle, he could not stand-alone. The final battle scene is one of equality as neither male nor female roles are favored, but all are used to prepare Harry for his duel.

McGonagall, the reserved leader, always comes through for Harry in his time of need. She plays the motherly figure but when at school, the disciplinarian, and the professor. While the Harry Potter series is features on Harry, more research shows that his partnerships and friendships are what create his story of survival.

While the hero is Harry, one can see that he relies on others to act as his voice of reason as opposed to Harry's "normative script" of being impulsive. "Ultimately, friendship allows Harry to overcome this character flaw and to realize his promise for a virtuous life" (Mogg & Tully, 2012, p. 77). Friendship is a key role in the series. Ron, more specifically Hermione, watches out for Harry as he acts on impulse to try to save the day more times than not. Quite frequently, Harry acts without thinking, like walking around school after hours, messing with hidden secrets, or breaking into other dorms. "Hermione initially pulls Harry back from this impulsive act, arguing that Harry's vision is unlikely and urging him to verify it before he acts" (Mogg & Tully, 2012 p. 732-34). From the beginning, Hermione never backs down from "The Chosen One," the name given to Harry Potter for surviving the most evil wizard's killing spell. Comparatively in our society, men tend to have control and more of an upper hand. By Hermione challenging Harry and rightfully so, she asserts her dominance and her knowledge of school and decision-making. "The benefit of Harry, Ron, and Hermione's friendship is most clearly demonstrated in *Deathly Hallows*. In this novel, Harry, Ron, and Hermione venture on a treacherous journey, which tests their personal strength as well as the strength of their friendship" (Mogg & Tully, 2012, p. 84). The three work interdependently and learn by the end of the series the strengths.

Harry, with Ron and Hermione at his side, is constantly being supported by his friends. Hermione is one example of this: She knows the spells he doesn't know, she has studied places that Harry hasn't, and she knows her way around the castle. "In the friendship between Harry, Ron, and Hermione, Hermione accepts the role of the planner.

She uses her wisdom to deliberate, but action seems to terrify her, as shown in her response to Harry's natural inclination to action" (Mogg & Tully, 2012, p. 84). Hermione is consistently the "voice of reason" for their friendship group. Although she has wisdom, she learns bravery and action from Harry and Ron.

The Culture of Hogwarts

While the characters themselves suggest gender roles throughout the novels, the school, Hogwarts School for Witchcraft and Wizardry, gives a culture unlike any other. The hierarchy of roles at Hogwarts nearly mirrors the muggle world (real world). The *Harry Potter* series is an extremely important source of social norms. The Potter world takes place in a magical world that coexists with a muggle (nonmagical) world. In this magical realm, objects come to life: statues, pictures, and walls even talk. To enter into one of the school's four houses, there is a password that a student speaks to a talking door. This is vastly different from anything that is seen by the muggle society. While the school's physical and spiritual system are very different, male and female roles are identifiable.

The Headmaster at Hogwarts, Dumbledore, is male. Nearly all teachers are male except for McGonagall and Trelawny at first, then Dolores Umbridge, who is known as the evil teacher to most students, and a few more scattered in between. The house elves throughout the series are male. The sorting hat (the ritualistic talking hat that sorts students into their houses) is even a male persona. Also, inside the house, there are ghosts

that fly around and talk to the students. Most of these ghosts are male, including the one most students know as Nearly Headless Nick. Inside Hogwarts and the wizarding world, males are the dominant gender. Janet Brennan Croft (2009) describes the dichotomy of Hogwarts School for Witchcraft and Wizardry while looking at the wizarding world. The division of the house is equal with Hogwarts being founded by two witches and two wizards. However, there are stereotypes in their characteristics. The two male houses represented more masculine features: purity of bloodline and power for Slytherin and bravery and strength for Gryffindor. The female houses sought after more feminine qualities: wisdom and cleverness, and loyalty and inclusiveness with food-related charms. Just with the house division, both gender stereotypes are seen. However, Hogwarts has an equal representation when it comes to the actual school. The houses, classes, and the wizard sport, Quidditch, are all completely co-ed opportunities. Also, like most presidents or leaders, the Minister of Magic during the time of the novels is male (Croft, 2009, p. 105). This describes how J.K. Rowling was setting the scene for a type of feminist comeback, including the characters of Hermione and Professor McGonagall. The power shift is almost even described above.

In *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (Rowling, 2003), Dolores Umbridge slides into the picture as the Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher. “Umbridge immediately meets with active resistance from the students. Her imposed ideals clashes with the existing culture and, therefore, are rejected out of hand” (Crews, 2013, p. 18).” Umbridge wanted change and actually clashed with the other female characters. It was a

simple battle between good and evil: Umbridge wanted change; Professor McGonagall wanted peace amongst the students.

During the power struggle between good and evil with Umbridge, Harry, Hermione, and Ron make it a point to fight back. Hermione encourages Harry to lead a group of students who would fight to maintain the good within the castle. Again, Hermione steps up as the influencer, changing the game around from victim to champion.

Oppression in Hogwarts

Kellner (2010) argues that “enslaved house elves of the ‘Harry Potter’ series should be seen as indirect and perhaps unintentional representations of the unemancipated and unempowered women of the past, and those in oppressive societies today” (Kellner, 2010, p. 367). The house elves in the *Harry Potter* series were essentially slaves. The only way for a house elf to be free was for the owner of the elf to give that elf a piece of clothing, symbolizing his freedom. In such a developed society, although not real, the wizarding world oppresses these elves because of their weaknesses, even though their magic is some of the most powerful.

Through her representation of house elves as akin to stereotypical oppressed women, J.K. Rowling projects an ambivalent attitude towards feminism. Thus, despite the fact that in many ways Rowling creates a world of impressively emancipated and empowered women (two of the founders of Hogwarts were witches, not wizards; Hogwarts has had many headmistresses, not only

headmasters; Hermione Granger may be book smart, but she is also a member of Gryffindor House, the house of the brave; the sports coach is a woman, not a man; other examples abound), still, in the world she creates the nuclear family is intensely traditional and patriarchal, and the books, of course focus on a hero, not a heroine.” (Kellner, 2010, p. 367)

Kellner’s view, while giving credit to the female characters, shows the representation of women and the oppression that they may face in the series.

While the house elves are enslaved, one major observation is that Hogwarts School for Witchcraft and Wizardry is completely run by the elves. While they do the dirty work at Hogwarts, the “house elves are treated fairly and with respect by their employer” (Kellner, 2010, p. 369). However, while they are treated fairly, Hermione is outraged by the slavery. She is, likely, the first person to be upset about this. “Rowling’s affectionate but not very respectful depiction of Hermione’s campaign for house elf rights appears to reflect her own socially conservative stance” (Kellner, 2010, p. 369). Here, Kellner is referring to Hermione’s upbringing. She is half witch, half human. Her parents are fully human causing her to be the source of mockery with the enemies of Hogwarts. “Hermione’s response to the plight of house elves is, an unselfconscious response to greater feminist issues, or in other words a sublimation of problems with the way she is treated because she is a girl” (Kellner, 2010, p. 370). There is no doubt that Hermione is discriminated against because of her gender. She constantly has to prove her quick wit and knowledge. Hermione ultimately leads the rebellion of house elves and frees Dobby,

Lucious Malfoy's (Voldemort's right hand man) elf. Hermione ultimately is the one to question the house elves' freedom at Hogwarts. In the fourth book, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, Hermione notices the house elf oppression and she wants something to be done. In one scene Hermione exclaims that she has never seen a house-elf, although she knows that house elves run the castle at Hogwarts. The male ghost mentioned previously, Nearly Headless Nick, informs her that the house elves hardly leave the kitchen and at night they come out to clean and check on the fires. The mark of a good house elf is never seeing them. Hermione is perplexed at this news and wonders if the house elves get payment. As Nearly Headless Nick has been a part of the culture at Hogwarts for centuries, he laughs at the thought of the elves getting sick leave like Hermione demands. Hermione eventually refuses to eat the food because it is made with "slave labor" (Rowling, 2000, p. 182). Just that section alone, along with numerous others, shows Hermione's resilience and strength when she believes in something.

This resilience is brought not only to free the house elves but also ultimately help end the battle between good and evil and free Harry Potter from years of torture. In the series, torture takes on a new shape. If found not obeying Voldemort, witches and wizards would suffer spells that make them writhe in pain, kill them, or make them do things they would never do in a real state. Immediately upon finding out about the oppression, Hermione takes a stance. She builds a society to fight back against the slavery and recruits Ron and Harry. Not only is this showing initiative, she's fighting back against the blatant oppression she and the elves face. "Since house elves remind us so much of unemancipated women in chauvinist societies, it is no surprise that Hermione Granger,

the central female protagonist in the ‘Harry Potter’ books, is bothered by the social injustices concerning the house elves (Kellner, 2010 p. 383).

Along with the house-elf oppression, some Rowling studies have given off the vibe that Hogwarts and the wizarding world itself were racist. There are races within the wizarding world, wizards associated only with Dark Arts, Giants are a sub group that are left out in the woods, house elves, and Centaurs (Horne, 2010, p. 80).

Women in Harry’s Life Before and During Hogwarts

Before entering the world of Hogwarts, Harry had more women in his life than just Hermione and Professor McGonagall. This thesis focuses on these two main characters; however, there were other women who that helped shape the story. Harry’s aunt and uncle were his substitute parents, and they did not treat him well. Harry has no celebrations, he is not welcome, and he gets the worst chores to do and is unloved considering their other son (Seden, 2002, p. 298). From an early age, Harry is taught not to trust adult figures in his life. He knew he was different.

The Weasleys are another role. They are a wizarding family who don’t have a lot of money, but they love each other. Mrs. Weasley is a kind parent to Harry and protective of him like she would her own children. Until the end of the novels, Mrs. Weasley is about protecting Harry, Hermione, and Ron.

Last, besides Dumbledore, who protects Harry from day one, there is the role of Professor McGonagall. “She is also a very practical kind of carer, for example when

Harry is anonymously sent a new broom to play the sport Quidditch, she checks it in case it is jinxed” (Seden, 2002, p. 302).

Women have played a huge role in his life, whether Harry realizes this or not. They also play a role in the series that is unforgettable. Without the women in the series, there would not be much of a story.

Hermione and Professor McGonagall

Looking more into Hermione and Professor McGonagall’s characters, we can see the parallelism in the lives of others around them. Hermione is the fierce friend who is smart and can find a spell for almost any situation. She is beside Harry as he goes on this heroic journey. On the other hand, Professor McGonagall is always keeping an eye out. She is not side-by-side with Harry but acts as his protector when situations arise.

In this section of the literature review, I discuss the role of both characters. Hermione is known for being clever. Repeatedly, she has proven to be dependable and driven. From the beginning, Hermione is known as one of the smartest students. In the third book, *Prisoner of Azkaban*, Hermione takes extra classes that overlap each other. Due to this, she is given permission to use the time turner, a device that lets her go back in time to take the classes she needs to.

Her breadth of knowledge renders her a vital aid to Harry in solving problems and finding a practical course of action, but her comportment toward learning also informs her character and shapes her ideals, most notably her devotion to the

cause of justice. Possessing a blend of curiosity, discipline, and self-direction that distinguishes her from the other characters, Hermione's eagerness to learn renders her open to new perspectives and capable of broadening her understanding of diverse people and complex events. As a result, her story demonstrates the liberating capacity that the love of learning has in overcoming the provincial limitations of powerful purposes. (Shade, 2012, p. 90)

Shade points out Hermione's cause for justice, which is apparent through the novels. Hermione also possesses a will to learn. Hermione's character, coming from a muggle house, faces many challenges but overcomes throughout the whole series with her will to learn and fight for justice, whatever the cause. "Despite her limitations, Hermione possesses a breadth of perspective that is grounded in and fueled by her eager, unflinching commitment to learn. Before exploring Hermione's case more fully, we should reflect on what we mean by 'the love of learning'" (Shade, 2012 p. 92). Shade describes this phrase "love of learning" as a phrase that teachers use. The use of the phrase has justification therefore citing that Hermione does not require motivation outside the classroom, she already has the will to learn.

Hermione distinguishes herself at the very beginning of the novels differently than most students. Perhaps growing up in a muggle household put her at a different standard. "From the beginning of the series, Hermione's relation to books distinguishes her from others. She is a voracious reader, a fact about which she boasts, telling Harry and Ron Weasley, 'I've learned all our course books by heart, of course'" (Shade, 1999,

p. 105), even before the school year has begun. She shows initiative that distinguishes her and points her towards Harry and Ron.

While standing alone, Hermione is a strong character but with friends, her love of learning increases.

Hermione's more intimate interaction with Ron and Harry provides the other significant context relevant to her love of learning. Acting with friends increases the scope of needs and interests in a manner that prompts further growth in learning. Hermione's knowledge has clear value in that it helps Harry to face numerous challenges throughout the series, from figuring out who Flamel is to defeating Voldemort by destroying Horcruxes rather than pursuing Hallows.

(Shade, 2012, p. 103)

Most sources would agree that the character of Hermione was one of the most vital roles because of her actions and knowledge through the series.

Coincidentally, Professor McGonagall plays a significant role but is more of the mentor and protector for Harry, Ron, and Hermione. She plays a huge leadership role in the last book, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, by leading the rebellion against the Dark World and the dark wizard Voldemort. In the beginning of the books, Hermione mirrors the character of Professor McGonagall. "As Hermione matures, she becomes less bossy and much more perceptive and insightful, developing into a truly wise woman" (Fife, 2006, p. 160). In *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, Professor

McGonagall orders Harry to listen to Hermione and when he didn't, it resulted in his godfather's death (Fife, 2006, p. 160). Playing a background role, Professor McGonagall is the protector, disciplinarian, and perhaps one of the most underrated characters in the Harry Potter series.

Hermione can arguably be one of the reasons Harry Potter was such a strong force. Over time and the first five books, Hermione grows in her abilities and skills, which help her become powerful when she's using magic and when she's not using magic. In each book, she has a plan that helps lead the trio (Harry, Ron, Hermione) to solve the problem. In the second book she creates a plan using Polyjuice Potion to sneak into the Slytherin House to spy on Draco (Chamber, 159). She unmasks Rita Skeeter in the fourth book and is able to silence her. In the fifth book, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, she convinces Harry to teach a Defense Against the Dark Arts class and creates a system to notify members of this class meeting times and locations. Hermione plays a pivotal role through the series in not only these moments, but countless others that keep them from being killed or expelled.

All of the moments above would not have happened without Hermione's judgment and knowledge. She is a critical character to round out the novel and provides a powerful role model for both the fictional and "real" world.

Last, as studied in an article written by Michele Fry (2001), Hermione and Harry together make one unified hero. It is uncommon for a woman to be in that role, but

Hermione with her sensitive side, coolness, and her use of logic overcomes the gender boundaries and steps into the role of the hero.

This literature review has presented a detailed analysis of the characters of Harry Potter, the culture and gender roles inside Hogwarts and a critique of Hermione and Professor McGonagall. “In accordance with the vast differences between feminist theories, various literary critics apply differing sets of criteria to J.K. Rowling’s novels” (Mikulan, 2009). Although the female characters in the Harry Potter series set themselves apart, there is still not equality for the male and female characters.

Daly’s and hooks’ feminist theories help analyze the power structures in the *Harry Potter* books. Looking through the feminist lens, the power structure in the books is challenged and reinforced by both characters: Hermione and Professor McGonagall. In the series, although Hermione and Professor McGonagall play a supporting role for Harry, they are already on top of their game in knowledge, wisdom and power.

In looking at the portrayal of Hermione and Professor McGonagall in the book series, it is necessary to understand how gender is constructed through the seven books. Daly, in the journal article titled, “Wives, Mothers, and Citizens: The Treatment of Women in the 1935 Nationalities,” writes about British rule during this time. This parallel fits into the realm of the *Harry Potter* series. “In Britain the provision that a woman who married an alien should automatically lose her British nationality and assume his legal status appears to have first attracted significance during the war years...” (Daly, 2003, p.

246). In another world with wizards, being a half blood or married to half blood is looked down upon.

In historical context, the Harry Potter series, in the wizarding world itself, starts out with the death of Harry's parents in 1981. From there, the books and series take us through Harry's adolescent years up until his twelfth birthday where he is told he is a wizard and taken to Hogwarts. For millennials now, this is the series they grew up with. The contrast of historical context is similar as the books are set in the end of the 20th century while they were released in the beginning of the 21st century. The books certainly resonate with the young and old, because of the ease of understanding and reading that comes with the setting.

Summary

Chapter two has presented a more detailed look at previous studies of Harry Potter, focusing on Hermione and Professor McGonagall and how their characters are depicted throughout the series. Both characters offer new forms of leadership and supporting lead roles lending themselves to challenge societal expectation for woman.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The previous chapter discussed feminist analysis in the book series *Harry Potter*, with a focus on the characters of Hermione and Professor McGonagall. This chapter explores Daly's theory of foreground and background at greater length, as well as discussing some of hooks' ideas regarding domination.

Daly's Approach to being a "Woman-identified Warrior"

Mary Daly struggled with what she wanted to identify with, boy or girl, growing up. She knew if she identified as a woman, she would be challenged and have to step out in a male-dominated world. Growing up, Daly knew she was different; she wanted to be a philosopher, an occupation not open to women in this time (Foss, Foss & Griffin, 1999, p. 130). Daly had strong ideas about roles for woman and man. "Ever since childhood, I have been honing my skills for living the life of a Radical feminist Pirate and cultivating the Courage to Sin" (Daly, 1996, p. 78). Daly's belief is that a woman trapped in patriarchy, the religion of the entire planet, is to live in sin. She believed women must get back to the pleasures of being women and share the experiences together.

During the peak of Daly's education between 1950-60, the role for women was the opposite of what Daly wanted it to be. Although her parents cheered Daly on, they were not educated, but always pushed her to be more educated. Most women who attended college, who were also mostly white, were there to follow a generation full of homemakers, jokingly earning the M.R.S. degree. Expectations for women were to be married, bear children and run a home (People and Events, 2015) Daly saw beyond this. "One day, when I was sitting in class, I suddenly had a vision of myself standing at a blackboard teaching theology. This was mystifying, since I had no ambition to pursue the

subject” (Daly, 1996, p. 79). While teaching at Boston College, she wrote her first book *Gyn/Ecology*, which critiques patriarchy and discusses the demons that keep women from having full lives (Foss, Foss & Griffin, 1999, p. 133). “Within a culture possessed by a myth of feminine evil, the naming, describing, and theorizing about good and evil has constituted a maze/haze of deception” (Daly, 1978, p. 4). This deception involves countering the demons of the foreground who block the way to the background.

Foreground

The foreground in Daly’s theory is a dangerous place for women. It is a sexist social system and limits women. It is also marked by violence and aggression (Foss, Foss, Griffin, 1999, p 135). Mary Daly breaks down the foreground ideology based on science, theology, psychology, biology and the most important, the pornographic lie. The pornographic lie sends the message that “women want it.” The pornographic lie creates false images around women and keeps them from being their full selves (Foss, Foss, Griffin, 1999, p. 135).

The foreground challenges women and devalues them. The role of women in the 1960’s was limited in every context: workplace, at home, and in society. Like Daly, more women were becoming college educated but could not go beyond that due to gendered attitudes toward women. “We have noted with grief that meanwhile another phenomenon has appeared in the foreground of male-controlled society: pseudo-feminism has been actively promoted by the patriarchs” (Daly, 1972, p. 4). This is against what Daly believes, to have a male-controlled society. “The metapatriarchal journey begins with hearing the dissonant voices of the foreground and dis-spelling them” (Daly, 1972, p.

254). Dis-spelling these voices is the main idea of the getting out of the foreground into the background.

Background

While the foreground demeans women and puts them below men, the background “breaks rules.” This is where life-affirming images are created for women. Background is a journey that functions in opposition to foreground. “Thus women's journey of Self-centering becoming, passing through the ‘gates of god’, which block us from our own Background, means confronting these deceptive incarnations and demons, naming them and naming their games” (Daly, 1972, p. 26). Women in the background are to confront the demons to move past them. This is what makes women powerful, where the foreground has no more meaning.

The background is where women resist the ideologies of the foreground and the deception of patriarchy and define their own lives (Foss, Foss, Griffin, 1999, p. 137). Background is much more what society is used to today, women speaking out, owning their own possessions, and even their thoughts. “Moving into the Background/Center is not navel-gazing. It is be-ing in the world” (Daly, 1978, p. 15). Daly describes the journey into the background as paradise. Her belief is that women should not be tricked into the theology that they aren't enough. “Patriarchal myths are distorting lenses through which we can see into the background. We must see the lie before we see truth” (Daly, 1978, p. 35).

The background is the major approach that is taken in this thesis. Hermione and

Professor McGonagall both defy the laws of society by leading with knowledge and power. In the series, both characters have to overcome obstacles to be in the “background” of their lives, but they both have control and at times, more power than the male characters. “Not insipid “tolerance” but strong truthfulness about such complex conditions will enable Furious women to bond and to move deeper into the Background” (Daly, 1972, p. 221). Moving deeper into the background requires more bonding together of ideas and against patriarchal societies.

Spooking, Sparking, and Spinning

Daly describes different forms of rhetoric. This form of rhetoric takes a deeper look at how women are “spooked” by the patriarchal males in the foreground.

Yet the Other side of this Otherworld Journeying is dis-covered at every turn. This is the ecstatic side. It involves speaking in various modes: Spooking, Sparking, Spinning. Although there is no “one-to-one” correlation between the exorcising and the ecstatic movements, there is a kind of moving pattern, a spiraling of counterpoints, a harmony of hearing and speaking. Our acts of exorcising are Rites of Passage, by which we win the rights of passage. (Daly, 1972, p. 27)

This part of the theory involves women’s right of passage and how they move forward in the journey they are creating for themselves. “Spooking” involves unpainting foreground images and roles and exorcising the demons of the foreground. It also involves questioning everything and asking wild questions to create a sense of self for characters.

“Sparking” is defined as “igniting the divine spark in women.” This means recognizing the spark in oneself and in others and accepting this spark. “The sparking of ideas and the flaming of physical passion emerge from the same source. The bonding of woman-loving women survives its transformations because its source is the Sister-Self” (Daly, 1972, p. 234). In the series, sister-self can be displayed through Hermione and Professor McGonagall as they both emerge as leaders and Professor McGonagall, a mentor.

“Spinning” involves living on the boundary and using whatever materials are at hand to save others from the foreground (Foss, Foss & Griffin, 1999, p. 152). Spinning, A-mazing, Surviving is coming out of the shadows into a fullness of light which reduces the ‘spotlights’ of the fathers' fixations to invisibility/impotence” (Daly, 1972, p. 19). Spinning involves going above and beyond to know what needs to be done. In the series, spinning has a significant role in how the characters of Hermione and Professor McGonagall become powerful throughout.

Spooking, Sparking, and Spinning play an important part in my analysis of the rhetoric of the Harry Potter series. The background and foreground are at polar ends of the spectrum. In the case of Spooking, Sparking and Spinning, the characters of Hermione and Professor McGonagall take control of their destinies by defying their marginalized status.

bell hooks' Feminist Theory

To first understand hooks' feminist theory, one must consider her childhood that she claims as her first experience with male domination. She grew up with five sisters and one brother, who was given more privileges than she and her sisters. She also remembers her dad verbally and physically abused her mother to assert his domination. hooks thought of her mother as a strong woman and could not stand to see her victimized. She was often in trouble for being outspoken (Foss, Foss & Griffin 1999, p. 76).

To hooks, school was her escape. Writing was her way of identifying with herself even after a childhood that left her questioning her place in the world. Although working in academia, hooks' dreams of a day where she can express her views and is disappointed in life in the academic world. "For some of us, that meant working to get Ph.D.'s even though we were not that interested in academic careers. To succeed within that system we had to develop strategies enabling us to do our work without compromising our feminist politics and values" (hooks, 2000, p. 108). hooks is an advocate for being able to eradicate any form of oppression against women. hooks uses the non-capitalization of her name to defy power.

hooks' idea of feminism is eradicating the idea of domination (Foss, Foss & Griffin, 1999, p. 78). Ending sexist oppression is a main goal. In the early part of hooks' life, she was subjected to gendered power and violence. hooks' not only examines women being marginalized but also the intersection of race with gender domination. "Our very presence is a disruption. Everywhere we go there is pressure to silence our voices, to co-opt and undermine them" (hooks, 1990, p. 148). Oppression was not something hooks

took lightly. It was the only way she knew up until she found a place of radical openness. “For me this space of radical openness is a margin – a profound edge. Locating oneself there is difficult yet necessary. It is not a ‘safe place’. One is always at risk. One needs a community of resistance” (hooks, 1990, p. 149) By going to the margin, hooks describes it as being part of a whole but being on the outside of the main part. This is living on the edge feminism; a radical change rather than watching supremacy dominate. hooks describes marginalization as a place of “radical possibility” and a space of resistance (hooks, 1990, p. 149). Living in a place of marginality is a way of counteracting the oppression received by women, and in the case of hooks’ life, black women as well. hooks describes black women’s point of view as a group who has had their identity taken from them and a long haul to earn it back. hooks’ theory focuses on decolonization of white supremacy and ideologies. It’s a different view from exploiters and oppressors (Foss, Foss & Griffin, 1999, p. 84).

Decolonization is a term that feminists often use when talking about power that has been conceived as patriarchal. hooks knew nothing different apart from patriarchal power. Her fight was against it. “This contradictory longing to possess the reality of the Other, even though that reality is one that wounds and negates, is expressive of the desire to understand the mystery, to know intimately through imitation, as though such knowing worn like an amulet, a mask, will ward away the evil, terror” (hooks, 1992, p. 166). hooks explains that the reality of patriarchy is to wound but decolonization also involves breaking out into “colonies” to fight against the powers that be. “These sexist men were not interested in joining with radical and/or revolutionary feminist thinkers to overthrow

reformist feminist control of the movement and put in place more progressive strategies” (hooks, 1992, p. 107). In patriarchal societies, men are dominant and want to win at all costs.

Throughout the *Harry Potter* series, oppression takes place when women, house elves, different houses, and even classes are victimized. Professor McGonagall and Hermione speak up for those who are oppressed, bullied, or are not having their voices heard.

Hermione and Professor McGonagall are both characters who use their actions as their stepping point. Professor McGonagall engages as a teacher and mentor and uses silence as an example that strength doesn’t come from a loud mouth but from skills and knowledge within. Hermione, while more outspoken, uses her power, knowledge, book skills, and memory to dominate the house she lives in and to assist the other two main characters, Harry Potter and Ron Weasley.

Summary

This chapter examined the theories developed by Daly and hooks. Chapter 4 includes the application of these feminist perspectives and an analysis of these female characters.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS

Chapter four uses the theoretical lens provided by Mary Daly and bell hooks' theories to discuss how gender is constructed for the characters of Hermione and Professor McGonagall in J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series. As detailed in the following analysis, these two female characters develop greater power as the story progresses. I first apply Daly's concepts of *foreground* and *background* and then discuss *spooking, sparking and spinning*. Finally, I apply hooks' concepts of marginalization and decolonization. My research question is: How does the construction of gender created by Rowling for the characters of Hermione and Professor McGonagall empower women throughout the book series?

Foreground and Background

Daly explains that the *foreground* is a challenging place for women where their opinions and power are devalued, while it is the *background* where life-affirming images are created for women. Such seems to be the case for Hermione and Professor McGonagall in the Harry Potter series. A close textual analysis of the series reveals that both of these female characters gain power as the story unfolds. When the reader first meets Hermione on the train to Hogwarts, societal expectations for her abilities are low. She is Muggle born, not blessed with a great heritage of wizards in her family, and yet it is Hermione who corrects the spell Ron is unsuccessful in spinning on the Hogwarts Express.

In the case of Professor McGonagall, her power also emerges incrementally as the series continues. Not as commanding a figure as Dumbledore or as frightening a figure as Snape, Professor McGonagall's quiet courage and wit continues to expand, as the showdown with Voldemort becomes a reality. McGonagall's power is challenged by expectations for women at Hogwarts. She is not placed into a leadership role until the series nears its end. The life affirming images created in the background allow both the characters of Hermione and Professor McGonagall to emerge as courageous, intelligent and fearless leaders.

Hermione's courage is one of the constants in the series. From her lowly start to becoming the youngest, smartest witch of the series, Hermione proves that those life-affirming images can be created within any circumstance. Rowling creates a sense of overcoming in and throughout the novels with Hermione. As the series continues, her bravery, tenacity, and determination are seen through a lens of the background life-affirming images.

When Hermione sees a problem, there is a will for her to not only solve the issue at hand but also to become the most knowledgeable person. The end of the first novel is one of many examples of how Rowling creates Hermione as a problem solver and a doer. Hermione becomes aware of a secret hiding behind a trap door that is securely guarded by a three-headed dog. With her first knowledge of the sorcerer's stone, she suspects this might be what is being held captive.

Without thinking of the consequences, Hermione jumps right into the library to read more about the sorcerer's stone and the maker behind it, the dark wizard, Voldemort.

“ ‘See?’ said Hermione, when Harry and Ron finished. “The dog must be guarding Flamel’s Sorcerer’s Stone!” (Rowling, 1997, p. 220) In this Hermione defeats every negative stereotype about women, muggles, or mudbloods.

While not given immediate power, Professor McGonagall is still able to rise into a leadership role as the series progresses. Rowling empowers Professor McGonagall by giving her a feminine communication style that focuses on relationships with the students.

Wood (2013) has defined feminine communication style and masculine communication. Feminine communication, which relates to Professor McGonagall, is defined as a primary way to establish and maintain relationships with others (Wood, 2013, p. 129). This type of communication is usually known as talking. Talk is at the essence of relationships. Feminine communication uses talking and language to gain support and understanding. A second important characteristic of feminine communication is establishing equality between two people (Wood, 2013, p. 29). This is anything in the realm of agreeing with the person or making sure he/she is not alone in expressing what is felt. Other characteristics of feminine communication style are support for others, sustaining conversation, tentativeness, and responsiveness. All of these characteristics are maintained in a feminine style of communication.

On the opposite side of the spectrum, a masculine style of communication tends to use communication to establish concrete goals, exert control, and promote independence. Talking, in masculine communication style, usually involves enhancing dominance in the conversation over the other person. The characteristic of masculine communication style

is establishing control, instrumentality, command, direct and assertive and less emotionally responsive (Wood, 2013, p. 132). Both of these communication styles are featured in the Harry Potter series, particularly with Professor McGonagall show a feminine communication style while other characters like Umbridge, Snape, or Draco show a masculine communication style.

Since the beginning of the series, Professor McGonagall has a maternal relationship with her students. While she is their mentor, and is strict, she garners respect because the students know she will be fair. She is the transfiguration professor at Hogwarts, and also the head of the Gryffindor house, the house of Hermione, Harry, and Ron. Since Harry's youth, Professor McGonagall has taken on a role as his secret motherly figure at Hogwarts. After all, she was with Dumbledore the night he dropped Harry off after his parents died.

Beyond that, Professor McGonagall has a feminine communication style with the rest of her students and even with some professors throughout the series. One of the first instances where a more feminine style of communication is seen is in the first book, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*. Professor McGonagall realizes Harry's potential to fly very well after Harry breaks the rules in class and flies to catch something. Professor McGonagall appearing angry at first, takes Harry to a classroom to meet the captain of the Quidditch team. (Quidditch is a flying sport). Professor McGonagall then introduces Harry to the captain. "Wood—I've found you a seeker. I've never seen anything like it" (Rowling, 1997, p. 151). Professor McGonagall has the strength and ability to believe in her students in a way they couldn't even think possible.

Professor McGonagall is the first to explain to the students about the houses they will be sorted into and how the houses earn points. McGonagall is the instructor of the Sorting Hat Ceremony (Rowling, 1997, p. 114). This foreshadows the next six novels. Although Dumbledore is Headmaster, it is Professor McGonagall who orchestrates much of what goes on within the student realm and plays a mentor role throughout the series.

She is a strong leader when she has to take over for Dumbledore. In the fifth book, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, Professor McGonagall is put in charge, and it becomes her goal to see that students succeed. In one instance, against the Ministry's efforts and Dolores Umbridge, the awful professor sent by the ministry, Professor McGonagall cheers Harry on in his ambition to further his education to become a more powerful wizard. Professor McGonagall is his cheerleader and protector against the evil powers of the Ministry (Rowling, 2003, p. 655). Relationships are very important to Professor McGonagall, which is a trait of a feminine communication style.

Rowling shapes Hermione into a character meant for the background by the end of the book series. As the books continue, so does the pushback towards Hermione. Knowing she is a smart witch, men especially are constantly trying to put her "in her place," because she is muggle born and a woman. Draco Malfoy, the enemy of Harry, Ron, and Hermione is depicted as a misogynist.

The more Hermione expresses her opinion, the more Draco cannot stand it. He even goes as far to call her a "filthy little mudblood" after she stands up for Harry (Rowling, 1998, p. 112). A mudblood is the equivalent to a racial slur in the wizarding world and considered one of the most insulting names. Rowling paints this picture in the

second book, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*. As the foreground explains, women are devalued. However, Rowling allows Hermione to emerge from the encounter as smart and resourceful. In *The Chamber of Secrets*, Hermione falls victim to Voldemort and yet she clutches tightly the secret to the chamber. While Ron and Harry take action and save the students, it was Hermione's efforts that empowered them to do so.

As the story progresses, Rowling allows Hermione to have a breadth of knowledge and power as she takes on more classes than any other student at Hogwarts. In *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, Hermione maintains multiple classes with a time-shifting device called the time-turner. Her professors trust her enough to take on an extra class load, which involves her needing to go back in time to take the actual class. The time shift development not only leads to her being more knowledgeable but leads to her ability to change the outcome of a bad situation with Hagrid's beloved pet, Buckbeak (Rowling, 1999, p. 412). Again, Hermione triumphs because of great intellect.

Both characters continue to grow in the series as Rowling is building their knowledge, power, leadership, and ability as the story unfolds to a classic, climatic, and final battle of good versus evil. In *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, Professor McGonagall becomes more protective as a leader and as a woman. During the Triwizard tournament, one name from each school is chosen to be a Tri-Wizard champion and compete for the cup. Only three are supposed to be chosen over a certain age limit but somehow Harry's name is drawn out of the Goblet of Fire. An outraged McGonagall says:

Dumbledore, you know perfectly well you did not make a mistake! said Professor McGonagall angrily. Really, what nonsense! Harry could not have crossed the line himself, and as Professor Dumbledore believes that he did not persuade an older student to do it for him, I'm sure that should be good enough for everybody else! (Rowling, 2000, p. 276)

Professor McGonagall is a stern voice of reason in this situation but also knows she has to protect her students. Professor McGonagall steps into her role as a mentor, which Rowling created for her to be protective and to state her opinions.

In each book, Hermione is constantly creating her own way while pushing Ron and Harry to be their best. In the fifth book, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, Harry, Ron, and Hermione form a group called Dumbledore's Army. This is around the same time the Ministry sent a spy into the school to take over and promote ideals that were not true. Hermione knew it was time to gather students together to learn how to fight.

Instead of Harry calling and organizing the meeting, Hermione was the front-runner. Rowling puts Hermione at the forefront of this movement to fight. She is the ultimate leader: when she sees something that needs to be done, she takes action. Hermione even thought of the idea to use "The room of requirement" an imaginary room that popped up when a student needed to use it (Rowling, 2003, p. 350). Hermione's leadership skills are highlighted in this example.

Much like Hermione, Rowling creates Professor McGonagall's character to be a mentor and a leader as the story progresses. In the last book, Professor McGonagall has

some of her most outstanding moments. In the final battle at Hogwarts, good and evil are fighting against each other. Harry, Ron and Hermione have all come back to defend the school. During the final battle scene, Voldemort's army has taken over Hogwarts. Professor McGonagall, in her strongest sense of self, has taken it upon herself to protect Hogwarts. She exclaims to the statues that she made come to life, "Hogwarts is threatened! Man the boundaries, protect us, do your duty to our school!" (Rowling, 2007, p. 602). This was Hogwarts' last stand and also Professor McGonagall's. The courageous professor was determined to fight the forces of evil despite the overwhelming odds against her.

Professor McGonagall also has an undying loyalty to Dumbledore. This plays into how she protects Hogwarts once Dumbledore is gone. Her allegiance toward Dumbledore depicts even more that she wants to defeat Voldemort and his dark powers. In the second to last book, *Harry Potter and the Half Blood Prince*, Dumbledore is murdered at the very end. Professor McGonagall is first to stand up for his legacy and where Dumbledore wanted to be buried. She also had Dumbledore's interest in mind when reverting back to keeping the school open the next year (Rowling, 2005, p. 627). She is a strong character and a never failing supporter of Dumbledore.

Spooking, Sparking and Spinning

Daly explains spooking, sparking, and spinning in how women are spooked by patriarchal males in the foreground. Spooking is the idea of unpainting foreground images and exorcising the demons of the foreground where women are victimized and demeaned. Sparking is just that, igniting a spark in women, and recognizing the spark in

oneself and others. Spinning involves living on the boundary and using whatever materials are at hand to save others from the foreground.

Rowling created these two strong female characters to stand alone but not without adversity. A patriarchal male spooks both Hermione and Professor McGonagall, to a degree. The foreground, as mentioned earlier, is a place where women are devalued. One of the most significant patriarchal male characters in this series is Voldemort and the death eaters. Both Hermione and Professor McGonagall, at some point during the series, have to battle for their lives against them. Spooking also involves reversing the foreground beliefs by questioning everything and creating a sense of self for the characters.

Rowling uses Hermione as the one with knowledge who asks questions that need to be answered. During the first book, the three friends find out about the Sorcerer's Stone, which is somewhere hidden in the castle. They realize that this stone is something that Voldemort is using to destroy Hogwarts, and immediately Hermione begins to question Hagrid about it. Hermione seeks her own knowledge in the restricted section of the library. There she finds out about the stone and the power it has (Rowling, 1997, p. 219). Hermione takes the initiative to seek answers, not waiting for approval from her male peers.

Professor McGonagall chooses, at times, to defy the male authority around her. Many times in the series, Professor Snape and Professor McGonagall find themselves pitted against each other. In the second book, Snape tries to expel students while

Professor McGonagall undermines his authority to keep them at school (Rowling, 1999, p. 82).

Sparkling is igniting the spark in women by recognizing potential in oneself and accepting it. Hermione does this throughout the series. In the fourth book, Hermione realizes something is very wrong with the way house elves are treated. She takes it upon herself to liberate the house elves and organizes a full-blown movement to free them. She thinks the house elves need to be paid and she wanted something done about this (Rowling, 2000, p. 379).

Throughout the series, Professor McGonagall is the backbone of Hogwarts, keeping students in line, teachers in check, and exercising her authority. Professor McGonagall ignites the spark in her battle against Voldemort's patriarchal society at the very end. In the sixth book, *Harry Potter and the Half Blood Prince*, McGonagall sacks Severus Snape and leads a siege of students through the castle to fight. A spark is ignited in her to fight Snape and to lead the rest of the professors into full-blown protection mode (Rowling, 2007, p. 600). At this point Professor McGonagall clearly is a courageous leader who is willing to sacrifice her own life for Hogwarts.

Spinning involves living on the boundary and using whatever means necessary to save others from the foreground. During this time while Umbridge was at Hogwarts, she was named High Inquisitor, meaning she had more control than some of the professors. Professor McGonagall, however, still protected the students.

Growing up, Umbridge despised her parents, one was a wizard and one a muggle. This made her despise her parents but also she lacked the pureblood mentality. While

climbing her way up the ministry ladder, she is appointed at Hogwarts at the wishes of the Ministry. As Alison Flood (2014) writes:

She has a fondness for fluffy pink cardigans and lace, and speaks in a “sweetly girlish voice”. But Harry compares the black velvet bow on the top of her head to “a large fly perched unwisely on top of an even larger toad”, and when she gives him detention for speaking out in class about the return of the wizard Voldemort, she makes him use a magical pen to write the lines “I will not tell lies”.

Rowling uses contrast and irony to highlight the difference in Umbridge and McGonagall. Umbridge was a woman with a sadistic mind. While McGonagall exerts her power through kindness and respect, Umbridge exerts her power through intimidation and fear. Professor McGonagall has a serious concern for students and expresses empathy. Rowling explains: She [Umbridge] is an immensely controlling person, and all who challenge her authority and world-view must, in her opinion, be punished (Rowling, 2014). Professor McGonagall used reason with her students for punishment. Umbridge used fear, pain, and control when it came to punishment. Professor McGonagall, on the other hand, would simply take points away or give detention.

There is a stark contrast between Professor McGonagall and Umbridge. This allows spinning to take place. First, taking a deeper look into Umbridge, she is a half-blood and very insecure because of this. Her insecurity drives her leadership style. Her leadership style is cruel and harsh and, slightly sadistic. The way she dresses as opposed to her dark personality is one that is ironic. In one instance when Umbridge gives Harry detention, she has him write, “I must not tell lies.” When Harry asked for parchment,

Umbridge said, “Oh, you won’t need ink,”(Rowling, 2003, p. 266) with a hint of a laugh in her voice although she had no sense of humor, just evil. As Harry begins to write, he experiences searing pain. The quill Umbridge gave him cut his hand engraving those words in his flesh. At the end of the session, she examines his hand and does not think the cuts are enough (Rowling, 2003, p. 268). Her leadership style is based on creating fear.

Although McGonagall dresses in dark colors, mostly black, her style of leadership is very feminine as she approaches students and other teachers at Hogwarts. Professor McGonagall has a sense of humor but uses it as an understatement, especially toward Umbridge. While Umbridge was named High Inquisitor above all other teachers, she chooses to inspect every classroom for wrongdoings of the professors. While Umbridge is in Professor McGonagall’s class, Professor McGonagall refuses to be interrupted. When Umbridge asks if she received note of her inspection that day, McGonagall with her quick wit says, “Obviously I received it, or I would have asked what you are doing in my classroom” (Rowling, 2003, p. 320). Professor McGonagall is the epitome of being stern but kind, to students and professors alike. She also makes it a point to care for others and puts them before her own interests and leads with love. In Chapter 21 of the fifth book, Voldemort attacks Harry’s mind to let him see that someone was being attacked. When Harry awakes, Professor McGonagall is there, asking if he was okay, and what hurts him. Professor McGonagall stays with Harry the whole way even though it was the middle of the night (Rowling, 2003, p. 465). Professor McGonagall leads with love: a love that she has for Hogwarts and her students.

In the fifth book, McGonagall knew that Harry was sending owls back and forth between members of the Order of the Phoenix, Professor McGonagall says, “Bear in mind that channels of communication in and out of Hogwarts may be being watched, won’t you?” (Rowling, 2003, p. 359). Professor McGonagall knew the Ministry sent Umbridge to spy on the happenings at Hogwarts and Professor McGonagall was looking out for students, especially Harry, Ron, and Hermione who were resisting evil while still at school. While Umbridge unsuccessfully exerts control with her masculine communication style, Professor McGonagall is nurturing and appreciates her relationship with students. There is a significant contrast between the two female teachers that allow us to see why the Ministry, a patriarchal society, would send Umbridge to Hogwarts to enforce their edicts.

Umbridge also monitored the teachers. Umbridge believed she had greater authority than the professors with more seniority. She tries to fire one of the professors after evaluating her class and trying to control her actions, but Professor McGonagall stands up and fights for this professor saying she will not have to leave Hogwarts. “There, there, Sibyll... calm down... blow your nose on this. It’s not as bad as you think, now... You are not going to leave Hogwarts” (Rowling, 2003, p. 598). McGonagall used her power to undermine Umbridge’s and the Ministry’s and held herself with grace and power. Professor McGonagall triumphs over Umbridge, demonstrating her superior leadership skills.

Hermione is a pioneer for this movement, too. Throughout the series, she wants to save Hogwarts, her friends, and the Wizarding World from destruction and uses whatever

means necessary to do just that. In the fifth book, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, Harry is left out of the loop of some very important information. There was an army rising up that he had no idea about. The Order of the Phoenix had been created to protect Harry but Hermione kept Harry from the secret most of the summer. After being caught with dementors on their street, Harry was rescued by the Order and brought to a safe house.

Hermione withholds information to keep Harry safe (Rowling, 2003, p. 63). This all plays a part in the fifth book and the Ministry of Magic recognizes that Voldemort has come back. After the fourth book, when a student dies at the hands of Voldemort, the Ministry chooses to take a hand in all that is going on at Hogwarts. However, Professor McGonagall is not outsmarted. She and Dumbledore remain calm during this time. A new Defense Against the Dark Arts Professor is named, Dolores Umbridge. Although the Ministry of Magic is a very patriarchal society, it is ironic that they would send (Umbridge) to be their enforcer. Umbridge uses a masculine communication style, as she demands command and control immediately of Hogwarts. She is extremely controlling with a communication style of directness. The Ministry wanted the students to believe that everything was fine and that returning to school was the right choice. While Umbridge is controlling, she does not develop relationships with students or anyone else at Hogwarts. In fact, she is depicted as having no supporters.

Rowling, using irony, pits Umbridge against McGonagall. Though her outward appearance appears to be “soft” and feminine, Umbridge’s insecurity and her own self-

interests undermine the authority she has been assigned. Her lack of mercy makes her a villain.

Marginalization in Harry Potter

hooks' feminist theory focuses on marginalization and decolonization.

Marginalization describes a point of view of a group who has had their identity taken from them. As shown in this chapter, Hermione and Professor McGonagall are two characters who are marginalized in the series. Hogwarts and much of the Ministry of Magic is a man's world. Dumbledore is the Headmaster of Hogwarts, while there is a male Minister of Magic, equivalent to a president. Even Voldemort is male. The series doesn't emphasize powerful females; Hermione and Professor McGonagall break that mold.

Throughout the series, women are not given powerful roles. Although Professor McGonagall is a professor, she constantly has to prove her authority, especially over Severus Snape. In the final book of the series, Professor McGonagall fights Snape to take over Hogwarts. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, the two duel and Professor Snape flies out. "Every eye was fixed upon Professor McGonagall, who was speaking from the raised platform at the top of the hall. Behind her stood the remaining teachers, including the palomino centaur, Firenze, and the members of the Order of the Phoenix who had arrived to fight" (Rowling, 2007, p. 608). The authority that Professor McGonagall was given at this point shows how Rowling painted her character throughout the series.

Leading from behind through most of the series, Rowling equipped Professor

McGonagall with the leadership and knowledge to have the whole school, male societies, students and other professors support her stance.

On the other hand, Hermione proves herself to many of the male characters; especially to her two friends, Harry and Ron who, at some point during the books, doubted her abilities. In the second book, as all three friends are anxious to find out who opened the chamber of secrets, Hermione takes it upon herself to do her own research. When the beast in the chamber petrifies her, Ron and Harry are not sure they can figure out the puzzle. But, as created by Rowling Hermione saves the day by having the answer to the puzzle in her hand in the hospital allowing the chamber of secrets mystery to be solved (Rowling, 1999, p. 290).

One of the last marginalized groups that I discuss is an assortment of mythical creatures. There are many examples of these such as centaurs, giants, and other animals that can only be viewed by magic folk. Hermione is an advocate for mythical creatures and saving them and is a freedom fighter in the movement against the prejudice toward magical creatures. In the third book, Hermione strategically uses her time-turner to allow her to save Buckbeak, Hagrid's beloved pet (Rowling, 1999, p. 409). There are also other times when she defends the centaurs but specifically she also defends giants. Hagrid, the groundskeeper of Hogwarts, is part giant. In the fifth book, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, Hagrid goes off on his own "adventure" only to return to Hogwarts with his brother, a full-blown giant in tow. Grawp, is his name, and he is as tall as the trees in the dark forest. Hermione befriends Grawp and is able to understand his frustrations of being stuck out in the forest. At the end of the book, Hermione tricks the ministry-sent

Professor Umbridge into the forest. As the centaurs try to attack Umbridge and Hermione, Grawp saves Hermione (Rowling, 2003, p. 759). Speaking from the margins in this situation helped show that Hermione not only has power but also compassion to protect those who are oppressed. By speaking to Grawp, and defending him, Hermione gains more power than anyone else because Grawp joins her for the battle. Hermione and Professor McGonagall both speak for those in the margins and both gain power through the alliance they form.

Decolonization in Harry Potter

Another part of hooks' theory of feminism is decolonization. Decolonization is used when talking about power that has been conceived as patriarchal. The act of decolonization is when the patriarchal power is challenged and various members of the group break away, or decolonize. In the Harry Potter series, decolonization is prevalent. There are many different forms of patriarchal power in the Wizarding World. The three main types of patriarchal power are through Voldemort and his pureblood society, Dumbeldore's Army, and the school Hogwarts itself. Hermione and Professor McGonagall play an important role in asserting their power, whether they are overcoming one group or stepping into a leadership role for the other.

The first patriarchal society involves two main subjects: Voldemort himself and his followers, the death eaters. This group is a ravaging group of witches and wizards who want the whole group to remain pureblood, meaning pure witch and wizard. Voldemort wants to create a world with himself and death eaters who are all pureblood and followers of him.

While this group makes attempts to defeat Harry, Hermione and Ron along with parts of the Order of the Phoenix, Hermione takes a stand each time to help ward off the death eaters. Perhaps because she is a muggleborn, her need to defeat this pureblood supremacy is even greater. In the third book, where the death eaters first appear, she helps fight them during the battle where Harry's Godfather dies. Through the fourth book she fights death eaters at the Quidditch World Cup, in the fifth book she fights death eaters in the Ministry of Magic, and in the sixth book, she fights death eaters who are trying to break into Hogwarts. In the seventh book of the series, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, Hermione, along with Harry and Ron set out to defeat the death eaters and their leader, Voldemort.

From the beginning of the final book, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, Hermione is prepared for something to go awry. From the beginning the Ministry is taken over by the death eaters and Voldemort's Army. Hermione, being the knowledgeable witch she is, knew she had to be prepared for this type of takeover. As predicted, the takeover happens and Hermione saves Ron and Harry and leads them to the middle of London to conceive a plan. While in a small coffee shop, Hermione realizes there are two death eaters inside waiting to kill them. Without hesitating, Hermione disarms one and hurts the other (Rowling, 2007, p. 166). While this isn't her first instance of fighting a death eater, Hermione's keen sense allows her to defeat them and essentially decolonize the power structure.

Another example of decolonization is Dumbledore's Army (D.A.). Although the D.A. has the opposite motives as the death eater society, it is a highly patriarchal group

within Hogwarts society. During the fifth book, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, students create Dumbledore's Army. Although Hermione is the organizer and instigator of Dumbledore's Army, students are drawn to join because of Harry's reputation.

Hermione, realizing a need for the use of spells to repel dark magic, as the evil world was rising up, suggested that the D.A. was created as the underground version of Defense Against the Dark Arts Class. Hermione, who did most of the recruiting, was actually the leader instructing students on where to go, and how to get there. Upon arrival, she states, "Well, you know why you're here. I had the idea – that it might be good if people who wanted to study Defense Against the Dark Arts – and I mean, really study it, you know, not the rubbish Umbridge is doing with us...because nobody could call that Defense Against the Dark Arts. Well, I thought it would be a good idea if we took matters into our own hands" (Rowling, 2003, p. 339). Seeing the need to step up for Harry, Hermione led the organization of the first meeting, although Harry would actually teach the class.

Hogwarts itself is a very patriarchal society. Run by the Headmaster, Albus Dumbledore, Hogwarts is an anti-Voldemort school therefore teaching against dark arts. Dumbledore was also the leader of the Order of the Phoenix, the secret society that was solely responsible for its attempts at taking out Voldemort. Hogwarts is the site for the final battle where Voldemort, death eaters and evil come together to fight Dumbledore, Dumbledore's Army and the good magic. Hogwarts is a school accepting of any type of witch and wizard. While Voldemort's leadership was much like a dictator, Hogwarts

School for Witchcraft and Wizardry is run as a benevolent patriarchy, meaning mostly men are in charge of the school but the men rule with kindness and concern for others, much like Dumbledore.

Professor McGonagall steps in when she is needed as Headmistress. In the second book, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, Professor McGonagall was placed in Dumbledore's position as he was suspended for a short period of time. While Dumbledore was gone, Professor McGonagall carried out the will he had for the school. "Professor Dumbledore's instructions were to keep the school running as normally as possible" (Rowling, 1999, p. 284). Professor McGonagall's role as interim head decolonizes the power structure.

Without Hermione, Ron and Harry would not succeed. Hermione decolonized the typical female role and made a way for herself. From the very beginning novel, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, Hermione was able to explore the library and discover the owner of the stone. While Harry and Ron were fixed on an immediate answer, Hermione used her intellect to discover the secret behind who owned the stone (Rowling, 1997, p. 220).

Chapter Summary

This chapter discussed how Rowling constructs the gender of Hermione Granger and Professor McGonagall, using the theoretical lens provided by Daly and hooks. It also highlights the different communication styles between Professor McGonagall and other professors. This chapter paints a clear picture of how Rowling uses these two characters to fight for the oppressed, stand up for Hogwarts, and themselves. The next and final

chapter discusses the implications of the Harry Potter series and feminism, limitations, and areas for future study.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The central focus of my thesis is an analysis of the construction of gender by J.K. Rowling in the Harry Potter book series, specifically in the case of two female characters: Hermione Granger and Professor McGonagall. My analysis has relied on the theoretical framework provided by Mary Daly and bell hooks. Chapter Four used Daly's and hooks' concepts of foreground and background, marginalization, decolonization and spooking, sparking and spinning to analyze how these two female characters gained greater power as the story unfolded. Chapter Five summarizes my major findings and discusses implications for further research.

Summary of Major Findings

Using the lens provided by Mary Daly, my analysis discovered that Hermione is granted power by virtue of her intellect and her tendency to take the initiative in problem solving, claiming power for herself in the background. Likewise, Professor McGonagall's leadership abilities are revealed in the background to resist the stereotypical views present in the foreground. But it is in the contrast with the leadership style of Dolores Umbridge that Professor McGonagall establishes her authority. Rowling, using the device of irony and wit, allows McGonagall to aid both Hermione and Harry in the quest to defeat the Dark Lord. Additionally, the feminine style of communication that Rowling created for Professor McGonagall is in sharp contrast with the more masculine and controlling leadership style of Dolores Umbridge.

The character of Professor McGonagall plays a significant role throughout the series. She establishes authority and also uses whatever means she can to defend

Hogwarts and The Dark Lord. Research from Pugh and Wallace (2008) state that Professor McGonagall plays an important role in defending the legendary school, which supports my analysis. Professor McGonagall is loyal to her students, staff, and school, which is part of her feminine communication style.

Although, McGonagall proves to be a leader inside of Hogwarts, when Dolores Umbridge enters the picture, her power is challenged. In previous research, Croft (2009), noted like most presidents or leaders, the Minister of Magic is male. This is true, however, the ministry sent a woman to represent them during a time in which they thought trouble was at Hogwarts. Both students and faculty members rejected her masculine communication style. While Umbridge may have been sent as an “enforcer,” Professor McGonagall outsmarted her.

Professor McGonagall and Umbridge were pitted against each other. “Umbridge wanted change and actually clashed with other female characters, Professor McGonagall wanted peace among students as emphasized by Crews, (2013, p.18).

Lastly, Professor McGonagall is the epitome of a mentor throughout the series. Although Hermione and Professor McGonagall worked closely, I did not find evidence that Hermione mirrored Professor McGonagall’s character as stated by Fife (2006).

Hermione, had strong intellect and problem solving skills, which led her to be a leader in many ways. Hermione was a voice for the oppressed. Hermione seeks change wherever she feels it is necessary. Kellner (2010) suggests that Hermione’s plight to fight for the house elves was a response to the way she is treated because she is a girl.

Kellner's analysis does not conflict with my observations, but rather strengthens the argument that Hermione challenged the status quo.

While the series created Hermione as a muggle, that never stopped her from being a powerful force. Throughout the series, she helps lead Harry and Ron, is first to try her new ideas to find out the secret. In the fifth book, she convinces Harry to create Dumbledore's Army and actually takes the first initiative to do so (Rowling, 2003).

Hermione is a smart witch. Her knowledge is one characteristic of leadership that allows her to be successful. Shade (2012) seems to agree when stating "Hermione's eagerness to learn renders her open to new perspectives and capable of broadening her understanding of diverse people and complex events. Hermione's will to learn holds her at a standard above other peers because she uses her knowledge to bring her farther" (p. 90).

Implications for Future Research

I used a feminist lens in analyzing the Harry Potter series. However, there are other rhetorical approaches that can be discussed for future studies. Some of these other lenses could be fantasy theme, dramatism, or a metaphorical criticism.

My study was limited to Hermione Granger and Professor McGonagall. In future studies, other characters could be focused on and their different roles. Other supporting characters can be observed and interpreted for a different perspective of characters. Some other characters that could be observed are the whole Weasley family and how they interact as a unit. Molly Weasley is very much the leader of their household and keeps everyone, including Harry and Hermione together. From a completely different

standpoint, the death eaters and the rhetoric of the characters surrounding The Dark Lord can be studied, in order to find out more about the darker kind of society. Lastly, Professor Snape could be studied and how he was an advocate for both good and evil in the book series.

Another topic to be explored is the impact that the Harry Potter series has had on children's literature. From 1999, Rowling has made a significant impact on the world by writing the Harry Potter series, as noted by Lebrecht (2011):

Harry, nevertheless, arouses greater empathy because he seems to be a child liberated from the control of dull, distracted adults, rejecting his soulless environment. No sensitive child would want to grow up to be Harry's Muggle relatives, Mr. and Mrs. Dursley of No. 4 Privet Drive. Harry Potter allows children of the suburbs to loathe their Little Boxes, to fly a nebulous broom, play non-televisable sports and aspire to a life out of the ordinary. Whether read in Seattle, Sarajevo or Soweto, Harry gives children a license to judge the adult world—and find it wanting (Lebrecht, 2011).

The Harry Potter series gives a chance for children to create their own worlds in which they can explore a magical world where intellect is the key to winning. Harry is a relatable character. He starts off as an outcast and in some ways, stays that way, but he also transforms himself into a powerful wizard.

This study looked at the concept of how Rowling constructed gender for the characters of Hermione Granger and Professor McGonagall in the book series, Harry Potter.

This study provides a basis for further research of the characters in Harry Potter. Rowling wrote Hermione and Professor McGonagall's characters to be game-changers. Analyzing the series using the feminist concepts of Daly and hooks, provides a rich foundation for further study of the book series, as well as the films based on the books.

My discussion of marginalization and decolonization can be expanded to examine the power held by other key characters, such as Ron. Ron Weasley always stands in Harry's shadow, and yet the friendship Ron provides for Harry is a sustaining force in the series. As stressed by John Granger (2014), the Harry Potter books are "not a departure from the traditions of English fantasy," but rather "edifying Christian reading" The Christian content and value of Harry Potter could be the focus of future studies.

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