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Gender Roles in Harry Potter

Stereotypical or Unconventional?

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Abstract: In this essay I will analyze the three main characters in the Harry Potter books based on how they perform gender. My main focus is if the characters challenge gender stereotypes or if they build on clichés, norms and stereotypes when it comes to performing gender. By performing a close reading of the novels and by theorizing them with the help of Judith Butler's theory on gender as something performative I have come to the conclusion that the Harry Potter novels both challenge and do not challenge the stereotypes of gender. However, all characters show both masculine and feminine characteristics and that is what makes the novels unconventional in this aspect.

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1. Introduction

Since the first Harry Potter novel was released in 1997 the series has gained huge popularity and commercial success worldwide. It is the best-selling book series ever and has been translated into 67 languages ("Rowling 'makes £5 every second'"). The question is then why the Harry Potter series has become so popular among both young and adult readers. One plausible explanation is that the author J.K Rowling has made readers feel comfortable by presenting them with recognizable characters. When a reader is shown familiar cultural situations in a literary work he or she feels pleasure, or as Roland Barthes calls it 'plaisir'. According to Barthes the effects of a text can be divided into 'plaisir' and 'jouissance'. 'Plaisir' is translated as pleasure and when the effect of a text is 'plaisir' the text does not challenge the reader's norms and conventions. However, if the effect of a text is 'jouissance' the text challenges the reader's views of life and society (4).

In this essay I will focus on something closely connected to the notion of plaisir, the stereotypes of gender. I will investigate whether the characters are stereotypical (and therefore recognizable), and if they are, in what way? In doing this I will mainly discuss how gender is represented when it comes to the three main characters Harry Potter, Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger, but I will also examine how masculinities and femininities are portrayed in the books as a whole. Thus, I will distinguish between the notion of sex and gender and then try to apply the terms in my analysis. I will also discuss how the characters change throughout the book series through a close reading of the narrative and using critical sources to highlight the representations of gender.

I will argue that J.K Rowling has managed to create characters who sometimes conform to gender stereotypes but also, time after time, challenge these stereotypes and therefore are as complex as real human beings. In my opinion the Harry Potter books both break and do not break the norm in children's literature and the notion of plaisir (at least when it comes to gender stereotypes) may or may not be the reason to the books' success. I will also explain and show how the characters, on some occasions, can be stereotypically male/female and on others break these norms.

1.1 Aim and formulation of questions

My main purpose with this essay is to examine gender roles and stereotypes in the Harry Potter novels. How are the three main characters portrayed in the story when it comes to gender and how do they change throughout the series? Do the books build on clichés and stereotypes when it comes to gender? Are men and women, or boys and girls, portrayed as equal or unequal in the books? These are some of the questions I will try to answer in my essay.

2. Previous research

2.1 Gender theories

To be able to write an essay or to understand gender roles and stereotypes one has to be able to make a difference between the two terms sex and gender. Sex refers to the biological features and characteristics which define men and women, while gender refers to what society considers masculine or feminine, for instance roles, behaviour, activities and attributes. This means that the notion of sex does not vary much between different parts of the world while the notion of gender may vary a lot. For instance knitting and taking care of children may be seen as something belonging to the feminine *gender* in one culture but not at all that gender-specific in another. All the same, men have male genitals, deeper voices and are often more muscular than women because of the biological differences between the *sexes* (Connell 2009:5). Simone de Beauvoir stated in her book devoted to women, *The Second Sex*, that "[o]ne is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (301). She states that sex is something natural but that gender is something constructed. One can interpret this statement to mean that being female and being a woman are two different things.

Candace West and Don H. Zimmerman state in their article *Doing Gender* that a person's gender is "not simply an aspect of what one is, but, more fundamentally, it is something that one does, and does recurrently, in interaction with others" (140). They mean that everyone inevitably does gender as a routine in everyday interaction. According to West and Zimmerman, gender, which we see as something 'natural' having to do with our sex, is really an outcome of socially organized activities. In *Gender Display* Erving Goffman has given this phenomenon the name gender display. He writes: "[i]f gender be defined as the culturally established correlates of sex […] then gender display refers to conventionalized portrayals of these correlates" (69). These portrayals are seen as the ideal way of being masculine or

feminine. As human beings we quickly learn to recognize and then reproduce such gender displays. Thus, these differences are not natural, essential or biological, but none the less they are used to "reinforce the 'essentialness' of gender" (West and Zimmerman 137). Gender is, once again, what you do, not who you are (127). Thus, our gender is always on display, we are always doing gender and are always being categorized as either man or woman based on our behavior. In some places, for example public toilets or organized sports, everything is organized to divide us into men and women. If someone would challenge these routines the gender norms would be broken (137).

Like Simone de Beauvoir, Judith Butler states that gender, and whatever roles and behaviour come with it, is totally apart from sex. Just because you are a woman does not have to mean that you are feminine and just because you are a man does not mean you have to be masculine (Butler 1999). Butler also states that gender is performative and bases this on the idea of doing gender. She argues that a person's gender is constructed by that person's repetitive performance of it. People tend to think that our gender is an internal reality, a fact that is simply true about us, but according to Butler, gender is a phenomenon that we produce and reproduce all the time, by doing the things we do and acting the way we act. Simone de Beauvoir claimed that nobody is born a woman. Butler states that nobody can ever be born a gender since gender does not even exist until it is performed. These performances, the acts that people do, are merely a repetition of acts that have been around for a long time. Butler argues that gender is an impersonation of the gender ideals, of the gender conventions, that nobody actually lives up to (Butler 1999). She also argues that there is no gender without language and discourse. We always have to name the sex (either "girl" or "boy") of the new born baby and from that moment on the baby is processed into the one suitable gender. Thus, Butler does not suggest that we have a choice whether to enact one sex or the other. It is determined from the start and the child can do nothing but try to re-enact the norms of the suitable gender.

2.1.1 Masculinities and Femininities

In my essay I will argue that in her books about Harry Potter J.K. Rowling has repeatedly challenged the gender stereotypes and by doing so broken the norms. To be able to follow my argument one has to be familiar with the terms masculinities and femininities. What are the stereotypes for a man and for a woman and how do they affect the way we view sex and gender?

Lois Tyson discusses the notions of sex and gender in her book *Critical Theory Today: A user-friendly guide* and states that there are some gender roles that are seen as traditional. Men are viewed as rational, strong, protective and decisive while women are emotional, irrational, weak, nurturing and submissive. She claims that these gender roles have been used successfully to justify the inequalities between men and women and to view women as inferior to men. She goes on to say that we have been lured into thinking that this has something to do with our sex, our bodies, and not with the constructed notion of gender (83).

However, one big biological difference between men and women is the fact that women bear children and men do not, something that Nancy Chodorow has given some thought to in her book *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Psychology of Gender*. Chodorow claims that women are mothering and nurturing. She also tries to understand and theorize why this is. She says that "women's mothering is one of the few universal and enduring elements of the sexual division of labor" and that this has always been taken for granted (3). It is the mother who is the child's primary carer, that is just the way it is. Chodorow expands the term of mothering so that it not only is applicable to children but also to men. Women have to be the moral mothers of their husbands when they get home from work, and they have to nurture and take care of them in the same way that they take care of their children (5). Furthermore, Chodorow states that "women's mothering role has gained psychological and ideological significance, and has come increasingly to define women's lives" (4). A woman is defined by her mothering, caring and nurturing features. Chodorow also notes that women's mothering is not a product of biology or of intentional role-training, but that it reproduces itself in the relation between mothers and daughters (7).

Being nurturing is one of the stereotypical norms of being feminine, but what are the correlating norms of being masculine? R.W Connell has named the traditional male roles and norms, and the privileges that come with being a man, hegemonic masculinity. She has derived the concept of hegemony from Antonio Gramsci's analysis of class relations, and she states that the concept "refers to the cultural dynamic by which a group claims and sustains a leading position in social life" (Connell 1995:77). All men are expected to, if not live up to (according to Connell no one can successfully live up to these norms), at least try to reach this masculinity (a way of acting and looking that women of course 'should' stay away from adopting). Connell defines hegemonic masculinity as "the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently

accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (77). The concept of masculinity and what the norms for masculinity should be have varied over time and from place to place (and still do) and therefore Connell argues that we should talk about plural masculinities instead of one single masculinity (185). If you take into consideration the interplay between gender, race and class (intersectionality) we can easily see that there are multiple masculinities: black/white, working-class/middle-class etc. (76). There is of course a hierarchy among the different masculinities, with hegemonic masculinity always on top. For instance, if you are a homosexual man you can never reach hegemonic masculinity, since you will always be subordinate to the heterosexual man. Homosexuality can be seen as the opposite of what norms should be maintained in hegemonic masculinity because it is closely associated with femininity. Hegemonic masculinity's need for dominance makes it acceptable to suppress both women and the men that do not wish, or have failed, to conform to hegemonic masculinity (39). However, masculinities are not simply divided between the hegemonic kind and the suppressed and marginalized kind. There is a large group of men who end up close enough (to not be subordinate and still be superior to women) to hegemonic masculinity but who do not fully represent it. Connell calls it complicit masculinity and explains it like this: "[a] great many men who draw the patriarchal dividend also respect their wives and mothers, are never violent towards women, do their accustomed share of the housework, bring home the family wage, and can easily convince themselves that feminists must be bra-burning extremists" (79).

Connell also writes about true masculinity, something shown in popular culture to be fixed and impossible to change. This true masculinity is most often seen as originating from or having to do with the male body. This true masculinity can either direct the action of the body (e.g. men are more aggressive and they perpetrate rape and other violent acts to a much higher extent than women) or set limitations to the actions of the body (e.g. men do not naturally take care of infants). As we can see it is the biological differences that are focused on when speaking of true masculinity and according to Connell this is a "strategic part of the modern gender ideology" (45). Along the line of body as an important part of true masculinity, sport has become one of the leading definers of masculinity. With sport come the institutional organization of it and the competition and hierarchy among men and at the same time the exclusion of women.

Another concept which is important when talking about masculinities and femininities and the power relations between them is the phenomenon of the male gaze. The concept of the gaze was firstly introduced by Jacques Lacan. He stated that the gaze has to do with us in our existence being looked at from all sides, though we can only see from one point (72). It was Michel Foucault who later took the concept of the gaze further and introduced a power dimension to it. He meant that when the gaze occurs, which can be at any point in time, there is always a subject, the gazer, and an object, the one who is gazed upon, and that the object always has to self-regulate in order to please the subject who might or might not be looking (195). "The gaze is alert everywhere" (195) which means that the object, in Foucault's case the prisoner, can be disciplined in an effective way. Laura Mulvey later took the gaze to feminist theory and named it the male gaze. She was most interested in the way that men viewed women in films, but the concept is applicable to everyday situations as well. The concept means that when a subject views an object the gaze occurs and there is inevitably an asymmetry of power between them, just as between Foucault's prisoner and the prison guards. In this case, however, it is women who self-regulate and conform their behavior to please men (Mulvey).

2.2 Sex and gender in children's literature

Researchers first became interested in sex and gender in children's literature in the 1960s and 1970s. At first they only studied and analyzed the characters' stereotypical sex roles. Their main interest was to see whether the characters acted in accordance with these roles. In these prevailing norms girls were supposed to be nice and well behaved, like the March sisters in Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women,* while boys were meant to be mischievous and adventurous, like Tom Sawyer in Mark Twain's novels (Nikolajeva 129).

In his essay *Gender, Genre and Children's Literature* John Stephens constructed a schema for masculinity and one for femininity (18), which has many similarities to Lois Tyson's stereotypes. Below we can see his schema, with the male characteristics on the left and the female ones on the right.

Male characteristics	Female characteristics
strong (inner strength)	beautiful (outer beauty)
violent	non-violent
unemotional	emotional
aggressive	submissive
transgressive	obedient
competitive	sharing
rapacious	caring
protective	vulnerable
powerful	powerless
player	prize
independent	dependent
active	passive
rational	intuitive

Figure 1. Stephens' schema for masculinities and femininities

To validate his schema Stephens says that the "socially desirable male" conforms to the male stereotype and that he works hard not to step over the line into the female features. In the same way "the 'good' woman" conforms to the female stereotype. If she did not she would be "undesirable" (19). Stephens also writes that the male characteristics normally are seen as superior to the female ones. If a female character shows signs of male characteristics, thereby subverting the stereotypes, she is often forced back into the female norm, as Jo March is in *Little Women*. In her book *Archetypal Patterns in Women's Fiction* Annis Pratt states that in literature boys grow up while girls grow down (30); boys are allowed to develop while girls are held back by the norms.

Researchers of today are also interested in discussing the gender aspects in children's literature. Do the characters show us their performative gender, and do some of them have a gender that does not correlate with their biological sex? Stephens takes up the problem with traditional plots in children's literature being derived from the masculine myth or hero saga. He writes that the stereotypes are already embedded in the plot. For instance, the popular quest-narrative is built around "a male career pattern which follows a structure of anxiety, doubt, conflict, challenge, temporary setback, then final success and triumph" (19) However, there is a lack of a female

counterpart in fiction. Feminine plots are different from the masculine ones and can be hard to spot since they are not as distinctively marked by a beginning, middle and an end. However there are a few feminine patterns that have been identified. One is the green world, where the girl character lives close to nature, and often escapes to it from the city and the parents (Pratt 22). Another female archetype is to grow up grotesque, where a girl faces the difficult task of uniting her personal freedom with the demands from society by isolating herself or sinking into a depression (Pratt 31). This has also been called abjection, the state when a young girl is disgusted by her own body turning into the one of a young woman. The so called tomboys in children's literature are examples of abjection. Instead of embracing their new feminine bodies they suppress it by acting in a male way (Nikolajeva 131).

2.3 Sex and gender in the Harry Potter novels

Much has been written about equality between the sexes, sexism and gender roles/stereotypes in the Harry Potter novels. The big question, about which there seems to have developed two opposing groups, is whether J.K Rowling's works are sexist and stereotypical or feminist and gender equal. I will look at both of these critical views before I present my own research.

In her essay "Harry Potter & Women: Are Women Treated Equally in Harry Potter Stories?" Austin Cline takes up both sides of the argument. On the one hand she says that women are treated equally in the novels and that Hermione Granger is one of the most important characters. Cline says that Hermione "is often depicted as superior when it comes to wielding magical powers. She knows more than Ron and Harry and is often called upon to perform spells which they cannot." She finds Hermione to be confident in herself and not relying on male characters to save the day. Cline goes on by stating that Hermione is not the only example of the books showing equality between men and women. She takes up the Triwizard Tournament and the Quidditch games where girls and boys compete together and against each other. On the other hand, Cline writes that the novels are not gender equal at all. She states that "women are depicted in secondary positions of power and authority — women are never in charge in their own right or on their own terms; instead, their power is entirely secondary to that of the men." Hermione is and will always be secondary to the male character of Harry Potter and her knowledge is primarily used to help others (male characters), not herself (Cline). Heilman and Donaldson claim something similar in their essay "From Sexist to (Sort of) Feminist": Hermione is only an assistant to the hero, who is and will always be Harry (145).

In Meredith Cherland's essay "Harry's Girls: Harry Potter and the Discourse of Gender" she seems to agree with the latter view of Cline's when she says that Hermione is not a good feminist role model for young readers. She also states that Hermione is not a very credible character since she takes up so many different subject positions: she is the giggler, helpful and capable, emotionally expressive and clever (278). However Liz Feuerbach, a writer for the feministic blog Canonball, argues that this is exactly why she "can't think of a better role model for young readers"; Hermione is logical and emotionally expressive at the same time (Feuerbach).

Heather Sammons has written an essay on the portrayal of women in Harry Potter based on the seventh book in the series, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*. She comes to the conclusion that men and women are treated equally most of the time but that they have different strengths; the "male characters are often at their best in the heat of battle" while "female characters often use their wit and logic to get out of dangerous situations" (12). This general point is repeated in Mark Barnett's essay about gender roles in children's picture books. He writes that females in children's storybooks are usually comforting, consoling and providers of emotional support, while males are more likely to be shown reaching a goal or overcoming an obstacle (343).

As I stated in the beginning of this chapter there have been many contributions to the debate whether J.K Rowling has managed to write a book series with independent women or if she has recycled old gender stereotypes. Before developing my analysis of the texts, I will say something about the method used in my essay.

3. Method and structure of the analysis

I will base my argument about gender stereotypes in the Harry Potter books on Judith Butler's theory of gender as something performative. Thus, I will look at how the three main characters, since they are the ones the reader get to know the best, perform their gender in everyday activities and when interacting with each other or other characters. In order to do this I will develop a critical close reading of the seven Harry Potter novels and pinpoint scenes where the characters perform gender in a visible way. My reading of the Harry Potter books will vary from other critic's interpretations. Everyone reads a text affected by their own

experiences and ways of viewing the world. That means that our background to a high degree affects the way we interpret a text, what kinds of connections we see and what we find most important or interesting (Johansson and Svedner 57). Since my essay is about gender stereotypes my close reading and my questions have been about things concerning sex, gender and how the characters are portrayed, and my reading has probably been influenced by that. Unavoidably, my reading has also been influenced by the feministic theories I have chosen to apply on the text.

I have chosen to structure my results based on the schema for masculinity and femininity found in John Stephens' essay "Gender, Genre and Children's Literature". I will use different dichotomies to analyze the characters and by doing so I will achieve a focused result and a level of transparency in my analysis. The dichotomies I will use are inner strength/outer beauty, violent/non-violent, unemotional/emotional, protective/vulnerable, competitive/sharing and independent/dependent.

4. Results

4.1 Inner strength/outer beauty

Traditionally, inner strength is seen as a masculine characteristic while outer beauty is seen as something feminine. In the Harry Potter books J.K. Rowling has both followed and subverted this stereotype.

Ron is always quite aware of his own appearance, but even more so before the Yule Ball held at Hogwarts. It might have something to do with his crush on Hermione, for whom he desperately wants to look nice, but it also just might have something to do with the fact that he has never had the opportunity to have nice clothes due to his family's economic situation. For instance, he hates the dressing robe that he has to wear to the ball:

> Harry, Ron, Seamus, Dean and Neville changed into their dress robes up in their dormitory, all of them looking very self-conscious, but none as much as Ron, who surveyed himself in the long mirror in the corner with an appalled look on his face. There was just no getting around the fact that his robes looked more like a dress than anything else. In a desperate attempt to make them look more manly, he used a Severing Charm on the ruffs and cuffs. It worked fairly well; at least he was now lace-free, although he hadn't done a very neat job, and the edges still looked depressingly frayed as they set off downstairs. (Rowling 2000:358)

Ron is a boy who shows a feminine trait of wanting to look good, but the most important thing is however not to look like a girl. This is exactly what Stephens mentions in his essay. He says that the socially desirable male must conform to the masculine stereotype and by doing so also work very hard not to cross the line into the feminine features (in this case represented by the feminine looking robe covered in lace). When talking about outer beauty it is very interesting to do so based on the concept of the gaze. As I wrote in the section above devoted to masculinities and femininities, the gaze is a way of looking at someone else and thus confirming one's higher ranking in the power hierarchy. The "gazer" is the subject, and therefore has more power than the "object", who is being looked at. As we can see in the scene above Ron's masculinity is not as strong as the other's, he is effeminate by his robe and therefore has less power than the other boys have, and he is therefore subjected to the gaze.

The concept of the gaze is also very useful when talking about how women adapt their behavior and look to satisfy men. It can easily be applied when analyzing Hermione's behavior and anxiety when it comes to her looks. When we first get to meet Hermione she is described as a girl with "lots of bushy brown hair and rather large front teeth" (Rowling 1997:79). Throughout the series Hermione's appearance is brought up for various reasons, however mostly in situations where she feels worried about not looking the way a girl is supposed to. In *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* Harry, Ron and Hermione use a potion to transform into other students. While things go well for Harry and Ron, Hermione is transformed into a cat and is so ashamed about the way she looks she hides in the bathroom (Rowling 1998:168). She cannot stand the fact that two boys are going to see her looking like that. Harry's and Ron's transformations go well but they still look ridiculous since they have transformed into two of the ugliest boys at Hogwarts. However, they do not feel ashamed at all and merely see it as something funny. This can be read as a situation where the girl feels ashamed of her looks because she knows she will always be the object, and therefore always be the one getting her appearance judged by the boys (the subject). The boys, on the other hand, are not in this particular situation exposed to this disciplinal gaze and therefore do not take their looking ridiculous as seriously as she does.

Before the ball Hermione, once again, is concerned with her looks and also with getting a date. Hermione, as we learned when we first met her, has quite large front teeth and decides to do something about it using magic.

>'Hermione,' said Ron, looking sideways at her, suddenly frowning, 'your teeth …'
>   'What about them?' she said.
>   'Well, they're different … I've just noticed …'
> […]
>   'No, I mean, they're different to how they were before he put that hex on you … they're all … straight and – and normal sized.'
>   Hermione suddenly smiled very mischievously, and Harry noticed it too: it was a very different smile to the one he remembered. (Rowling 2000:352)

Hermione has to adapt her looks to become more feminine and thereby satisfy the male gaze. By shrinking her teeth she succeeds in getting a date with the most coveted boy, Viktor Krum. Krum on the other hand gets to symbolize the socially desirable man, the man who possesses true masculinity, as Connell calls it. True masculinity is often seen as having a masculine body. As Krum is an athlete his body is his most important tool and obviously very well taken care of. Hence, Krum embodies many of the stereotypical male traits: he has a strong and masculine body, he is a successful sportsman and he is very competitive. This is why Harry, but mostly Ron, look up to Krum and admire him in a childish way. When Harry realizes that Hermione is Krum's date he cannot believe his eyes. I think that this might be because Hermione has not openly been concerned with her looks before, and therefore Harry and Ron have not seen her as a girl, and even more not a girl who can get a date with the most masculine boy in school. To get a date with a masculine boy a girl stereotypically needs to be feminine, something Harry and Ron do not think of in relation to Hermione.

>   His eyes fell instead on the girl next to Krum. His jaw dropped.
>   It was Hermione.
>   But she didn't look like Hermione at all. She had done something with her hair; it was no longer bushy, but sleek and shiny, and twisted up into an elegant knot at the back of her head. She was wearing robes made of a floaty, periwinkle-blue material, and she was holding herself differently, somehow […] (Rowling 2000:360)

It is quite interesting to see how Harry and Ron manage to get dates with lovely girls without doing anything to their appearance at all, while Hermione (the girl) feels she needs to do an almost complete makeover. This is, as I mentioned above, also the moment when Harry and Ron realize that Hermione is not just any member of their adventurous gang: she is a girl and

a soon to be woman. She had to dress up and make herself beautiful for them to realize this. She had to become an object to the male gaze.

It is also revealing how Hermione at that moment transforms from being a tomboy who fits well into the adventurous gang to a feminine woman-to-be. This can be viewed as a subversion of one of the most popular female archetypes in children's literature: abjection. As the girl grows up and her body is turning into the one of a young woman she is disgusted by herself and instead of embracing her feminine self she suppresses it by acting in a male way. However, I would say that Hermione does the opposite. She embraces her new feminine body and replaces her old self, the tomboy, with a new more feminine one, both when it comes to her looks and her behavior. On the one hand, one can say that she is conforming to the gender stereotypes by doing so, but one could also argue that she is celebrating her womanhood.

However, Hermione is not just looks, she is also portrayed as an individual with much inner strength, maybe even the strongest character in the series. Even though she tends to undervalue her own knowledge and her importance to the group, she is still portrayed as a complex character. The fact that she always has two things working against her might have something to do with this; she is both a girl AND a 'mudblood' (a muggle born witch). Being a mudblood is something terrible according to certain wizards and witches. However, she always manages to get by, maybe because she has had to work up an inner strength for this reason. You also get a sense that Hermione feels she needs to compensate for the fact that she is a muggle born (and a girl?) by being intelligent and well-read instead, something that takes much inner strength to be able to handle. By giving Hermione so much to struggle with Rowling makes readers aware of the diversity of attributes a human being has. Hermione is not just "the girl" but has many more characteristics and roles.

4.2 Violent/non-violent

Stereotypically, men are seen as violent, whilst women are non-violent. However, Rowling portrays Harry Potter as a non-violent character. When Harry and a fellow student of his get hold of the Triwizard Cup they realize it is bewitched by Lord Voldemort and it takes them straight to him. Voldemort kills Cedric and then tries to kill Harry Potter as well, using a death curse. Even though Voldemort had just killed Harry's friend and is about to kill him as well, Harry only uses a disarming charm (Rowling 2000:552). This shows Harry's non-violent side. He knows that Voldemort wants to kill him, but still he would rather disarm him

than cause him any pain. A similar point is when Harry has his wand at the ready to use an unforgiveable curse on Bellatrix Lestrange after she has killed his godfather. When his spell does not work Bellatrix laughs and tells him:

> You need to *mean* them, Potter! You need to really want to cause pain – to enjoy it – righteous anger won't hurt me for long – I'll show you how it is done, shall I? (Rowling 2003:891)

Connell talks about the male aggression but as we have seen Harry Potter does not possess any of these violent characteristics and neither does the other main male character Ron. One plausible explanation is that Rowling wanted to distinguish Harry and Ron from other characters who are overly violent and also unemotional, such as Draco Malfoy (at least in the first books), Voldemort and Peter Pettigrew. It is also interesting to see how a female character, such as Bellatrix in the quote above, is so violent. When reading the novels it is clear that Rowling has made the evil characters violent, regardless of whether they are male or female. I will return to this question in the next section.

4.3 Unemotional/emotional

All through the series traditional male features, such as having power, the will to revenge, being ambitious, callous and competitive, are closely linked to the evil characters, regardless of whether they are male or female. One of the reasons why Rowling portrays Harry Potter as emotional and non-violent might be to distinguish him from his evil school friend Draco Malfoy and his nemesis Lord Voldemort, with whom he otherwise has quite a lot in common. Harry has so far only had negative experiences with the men in his life, namely his bullying uncle and cousin. This might be why Rowling made Harry more feminine and more emotional. But it could also be seen as a critical comment on hegemonic masculinity. All characters in the book that have mostly male characteristics are evil or at least not very sympathetic or likeable.

Ron, like Harry, is also quite emotional, but in a different way. While Harry often shows his emotions when he thinks about his friends or his family, Ron more often shows signs of fear and concern. For instance, when Harry and Ron set out to follow the spiders in the Forbidden Forest, Ron is petrified with fear, while Harry is able to keep calm (Rowling 1998:202). Ron is also more worried about consequences than Harry is. In *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* Ron begs Harry not to wander around the halls late at night of fear that they might get

caught and expelled (Rowling 1997:155). To show signs of fear and worry is something traditionally seen as feminine and by doing this Ron once again shows us that he is not a hegemonic man, and that his masculinity is "less worth" than Harry's.

However, Hermione is the one character of the three who most often tears up or cries and the boys often feel the need to console and comfort her. According to Butler a person's gender is constructed by that person's repetitive performance of it. We ourselves produce and reproduce gender all the time, simply by the things we do and the way we act. Since Hermione is the one of the three main characters that most often shows her emotions, mostly sadness, concern and anxiety, she reproduces herself as the emotional and therefore also feminine woman:

> 'Don't!' squealed Hermione. Startled, Harry looked over just in time to see her burst into tears over her copy of *Spellman's Syllabary*.
> 'Oh, no,' said Harry, struggling to get up from the old camp bed. 'Hermione, I wasn't trying to upset –'
> But with a great creaking of rusty bedsprings Ron bounded off the bed and got there first. One arm around Hermione, he fished in his jeans pocket and withdrew a revolting-looking handkerchief that he had used to clean out the oven earlier. (Rowling 2007:82)

When it comes to her feelings for Ron Hermione's emotions are however not explained in an obvious way. We have to figure it out ourselves by noticing that she often looks at Ron, argues with him over the smallest things, gets angry when he does not ask her to the Yule Ball or gets sad when he does not want to talk to her. It is only in the last book that Ron and Hermione finally kiss proving our, and Harry's, suspicions to be true. It is quite interesting that we get to know quite early on that Ron has feelings for Hermione, but that we need to wait for Hermione to show him that she feels the same way for him. It seems that Rowling did not want to impose any girly feeling of teenage love onto Hermione, but instead made the boy, Ron, the one who is desperately in love. This stands in contrast to all the other feminine feelings that are found in Hermione. She openly shows that she is sad, anxious, scared and confused, but she will not show that she is in love. Instead it is Ron who makes us aware of the feelings between himself and Hermione, and by doing so he shows us another weakness and once again reveals that he is not the strong hegemonic man.

Obviously, also Harry shows signs of being in love, first with Cho Chang and later with Ginny Weasley. However, he never loses control and never shows signs of weakness because

of these feelings in the same way that Ron does. I interpret this as just another way of showing the readers which male main character is the strongest.

4.4 Protective/vulnerable

In children's books boys have often been described as active, loud, independent, strong, adventurous and tough. Girls, on the other hand, have been portrayed as passive, quiet, dependent and shy. Susan Lehr writes in her essay "The Hidden Curriculum: Are We Teaching Young Girls to Wait for the Prince?" that by the age of eight many children, both boys and girls, "identify passivity and waiting for the prince as the girl's ultimate role" (1). In a large number of children's books there is a female character waiting for a man to come and rescue her, for instance in *Cinderella*, *Little Red Riding Hood*, *Sleeping Beauty* and *Snow White*. Children at a young age are taught that men are supposed to protect and rescue damsels in distress while women should devote their lives to waiting for the prince.

This can also be seen in the Harry Potter novels. At first Harry and Ron have trouble getting along with Hermione and they think she is an irritating know-it-all. The question is if this has to do with the fact that Hermione is a girl, or would the boys react the same way towards a boy know-it-all? Could it be the fact that Hermione lacks (or at least does not show) much of the feminine traits that makes the boys resent her? If we look closer at the text we realize that it is not Hermione's cleverness that Harry and Ron dislike, but her lack of vulnerability and her way of showing a strength and a confidence mostly seen in men. Hermione's gender display is not normal, according to the gender stereotypes, and by acting in ways not correlating to being feminine Ron and Harry feel threatened by her. In the first book, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, Ron has no luck with a spell and when Hermione tries to help him he gets really frustrated, probably because he does not want to be dependent on the skills of a girl. Traditionally, it is the man who is supposed to help the woman and not the other way around. After class he has to discuss this with Harry:

> 'It's no wonder no one can stand her,' he said to Harry as they pushed their
> way into the crowded corridor, 'She's a nightmare, honestly.'
>   Someone knocked into Harry as they hurried past him. It was Hermione.
> Harry caught a glimpse of her face – and was startled to see that she was in
> tears.'
>   'I think she heard you.' (Rowling 1997:127)

When Hermione realizes that the boys do not like her she can no longer maintain her strong façade, gets really upset and hides in the girls' bathroom. When Ron and Harry later realize that there is a troll in the dungeon and that Hermione is in danger they rush to her rescue. They find her just as the troll is about to kill her but manage to save her by showing off their manly protective characteristics, while Hermione is portrayed as a vulnerable woman (Rowling 1997:128). After this Harry and Ron accept Hermione as one of the gang. She had to be put in a vulnerable situation for them to like her. This can be seen as the starting point in Hermione's process of girling; she has to conform to the norms in order to remain a viable subject. This process is, according to Butler, used to discipline, regulate and punish women. If a woman does not conform to stereotypical and suitable behavior, men do not want her (1993:232). If Hermione had not been vulnerable the boys would not have liked her and would have still felt threatened by her masculine and confident way of being.

There are several other situations where the boys need, or at least feel the need, to save or comfort Hermione. When they find themselves in a fight with two evil wizards at a café, Ron's first thought is to save Hermione even though she was well able to handle it herself (Rowling 2007:138). In the second book *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* Hermione is the one who gets stunned by the basilisk making her no longer a part of the adventure (Rowling 1998:190). However, in the end it is a piece of paper found in her hand that saves the day (Rowling 1998:215). Even though she is stunned, and is placed in a very vulnerable position, she is the one who eventually solves the mystery. This makes the reader aware of the juxtaposition between the vulnerability of her position and her ability to still be able to protect and save her friends (normally seen in male characters). This is a telling example of when a character is both masculine and feminine, and therefore both breaking and not breaking the norms.

In a way we can also see Hermione as a protective character when she is taking care of the boys. Thinking back to what Chodorow said about women being nurturing (3), we can easily fit this in Hermione's behavior throughout the entire series, but even more so in the latter books when she really is taking care of the boys, for instance by setting up a safe place for them to sleep. According to Chodorow women are not only mothers to their children but also moral mothers to their men. However, Hermione shows her awareness of the situation when she and Ron discuss the cooking:

'It's impossible to make good food out of nothing! You can summon it if
you know where it is, you can transform it, you can increase the quantity if
you've already got some –'
    '- well don't bother increasing this, it's disgusting' said Ron.
    'Harry caught the fish and I did my best with it! I notice I'm always the
one who ends up sorting out the food; because I'm a *girl*, I suppose!'
(Rowling 2007:241)

Here, the stereotypes are intact. The man hunts, kills and gathers the food while the woman
stays at home ready to cook whatever the man brings home. However, Rowling seems to be
very aware of this since she makes Hermione add an irritated comment about the division of
labor.

Throughout the series, Harry Potter is an overly protective character. For instance, in the
Triwizard Tournament he cannot stop being protective about his fellow champions even
though this might cost him the first place he so desperately wants. He sends up red sparks to
help both Fleur and Krum get out of the maze and he saves Cedric from a giant spider even
though he definitely would have won if he had not (Rowling 2001:548). Here we can see how
two male characteristics clash; his protectiveness overpowers his competitiveness.

4.5 Competitive/sharing

In the previous section I argued that Harry Potter is an overly protective character and that
this sometimes also overpowers his competitiveness. However, he is still a very competitive
character and on some occasions his competitive side overpowers the protective side. One of
the scenes from the fourth book, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire,* is when Harry and the
three other Triwizard champions enter a maze to race to the finish line. In this scene Harry
shows off his competitiveness. After a while one of the champions, Fleur, has to give up.
Harry hears her screaming but still he cannot stop thinking about winning; he has that
aggressive advantage and go-getting reflex:

        Harry took the right fork with a feeling of increasing unease … but at the
        same time, he couldn't help thinking, *one champion down …*
            The Cup was somewhere close by, and it sounded as though Fleur was no
        longer in the running. He'd got this far, hadn't he? What if he actually
        managed to win? Fleetingly, and for the first time since he'd found himself
        champion, he saw again that image of himself, raising the Triwizard Cup in
        front of the rest of the school … (Rowling 2000:543)

Connell claims that male competiveness has to do with how boys are raised. The construction of masculinity often happens in sport where boys "are not just learning a game, they are entering an organized institution" (1995:35). These institutional structures are hierarchical and competitive in order to prepare boys for a similar structure found in most workplaces (36). It is also important that young boys learn the male way of go-getting. They are trained to have an aggressive advantage, towards women, which helps them in their career and everyday life because it makes them stay focused (Connell 2009:53). This is also closely connected with Connell's concept of true masculinity having to do with the male body and the will to perform in sports.

In the wizarding world the sport most played is Quidditch. The teams are gender mixed and even in the Quidditch World Cup men and women perform alongside each other. It is a very violent sport and you need a large dose of courage and competiveness to make the team try outs. No-one ever questions the fact that women are just as natural players as men are. But it seems as though the female players are not seen as female but as a part of a male team, highlighting that sports and being athletic are characteristics of hegemonic masculinity:

> Wood cleared his throat for silence.
> 'OK, men,' he said.
> 'And women,' said Chaser Angelina Johnson.
> 'And women,' Wood agreed. 'This is it.' (Rowling 1997:136)

However, being a successful Quidditch player is in the story equal to being a successful man. When Harry joins Gryffindor's Quidditch team the girls notice him and the most coveted date to the Yule Ball is Viktor Krum, a very talented Bulgarian Quidditch player. When Harry shows Ron the mirror Erised, that reveals your greatest desire in life, Ron sees himself being a Quidditch captain holding the Quidditch cup. This means that Ron desperately wants to be a part of the male sports collective and that he wants to be the winner. Harry, who is a part of this collective already, as a very successful Quidditch player, instead sees himself as a part of a loving family, something he has never had (Rowling 1997:154). Sport is a very important part of hegemonic masculinity, both in the our world and the world of Harry Potter, and even if the teams are gender mixed we never get to hear about a girl whose highest wish is to be a successful Quidditch player. In one way Quidditch is still a male activity and can be used to exclude women, just as most of our sports do today.

Hermione does not play Quidditch and does not seem to want to either. However, she competes in something else instead; she competes in knowledge. This is something mainly seen in the first book, where she really takes pride in reading all the books she can get her hands on and always has the right answers to the teachers' questions. Then something interesting happens; Hermione becomes insecure of herself and her knowledge. She starts to underestimate her own importance and seems to feel that the one thing she was proud of, her knowledge, now is unimportant:

> 'Harry – you're a great wizard, you know.'
> 'I'm not as good as you,' said Harry, very embarrassed, as she let go of
> him.
> 'Me!' said Hermione. 'Books! And cleverness! There are more important
> things – friendship and bravery and – oh Harry – be *careful*!'
> (Rowling 1997:208)

Her way of diminishing herself might have something to do with the fact that her knowledge is used more and more to help the other characters and less and less to help herself. This will always make her secondary to the boys. She is merely the hero's helper, just as Heilman and Donaldson stated in their research on gender in Harry Potter. Their analysis shows that Hermione uses her knowledge of magic to aid Harry in his quest, rather than to further her own interests. She is "so wrapped up in Harry's goals that hers may be suppressed or unrealized" (145).

4.6 Independent/dependent

In the section named "Protective/vulnerable" I stated that men traditionally are seen as the ones needing to save the women. Men are therefore stereotypically seen as independent while women are seen as dependent (on men).

One of the biggest issues concerning Harry Potter's changes throughout the series is whether he becomes more or less independent. On the one hand, I think that Harry matures, becomes more confident and less dependent on his friends. In the first books Harry is insecure, shy and boyish but evolves into a stronger, more confident, more grown-up and less dependent character. He gets to know himself and learns to get by on his own, whatever tasks are given to him. On several occasions Harry believes he can do things on his own. In the last book, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, Harry, Ron and Hermione are leaving Hogwarts, their friends and families behind to go looking for the only few things keeping Voldemort alive: the

Horcruxes. They have all decided to go together, but Harry suddenly changes his mind showing the readers that he still wants to be an independent male figure:

> 'I know you said, after Dumbledore's funeral, that you wanted to come with me,' Harry began.
> 'Here he goes', Ron said to Hermione, rolling his eyes.
> 'As we knew he would', she sighed, turning back to the books. 'You know, I think I *will* take *Hogwarts: A History*. Even if we're not going back there, I don't think I'd feel right if I didn't have it with – '
> 'Listen!', said Harry again.
> ' No, Harry, *you* listen,' said Hermione. 'We're coming with you. That was decided months ago – years – really.'
> 'But – '
> 'Shut up,' Ron advised him. (Rowling 2007:83)

Harry thinks that he could manage by himself, even though what he is about to do will be the toughest task any wizard has ever been faced with. This makes him seem a bit "stuck-up". Harry's way of being protective, for example not wanting Ron and Hermione to come with him so that they would not get hurt, often shows him being full of himself. If it is indeed so that Harry gets more and more independent throughout the series this might have its explanation in the fact that in the beginning Harry is completely new to the wizarding world. Of course he will need a lot of help from his friends who apparently know their way around this new magical world much better than he does. After a while when he gets the hang of it he finds himself no longer in such great need of the help his friends offer him.

However, while reading the books I also found it plausible to interpret Harry's development in a way that he becomes more and more dependent instead. Harry is carried forward by the people around him. Without them he would not have managed to destroy Voldemort. Hermione and Ron help Harry by solving mysteries, finding solutions in books, knowing the right spells and by always being there for him.

Whichever way one interprets Harry's dependence or independence, he is still a more independent character than Ron is. Heilman and Donaldson state that the protagonist's masculinity must be stronger than all of the other male characters', therefore Harry can act independently in situations where Ron cannot (155). Apart from the fact that Rowling clearly wanted to make a difference between the protagonist and his 'sidekick', the difference in independence between the two boys might have something to do with her making Harry more

self-confident and making Ron a character who lacks the same. Harry has quite a high level of self-esteem while Ron never believes in himself and his ability to do things right. This is closely connected to the fact that Ron is a vulnerable, passive and dependent character but it can also be connected to Ron's lower class background which can be seen as something which effeminates him. Ron's family has never had much social or economic capital, something which is brought up by Rowling throughout the series. Ron can never buy new books for school, a new broom or even a sandwich from the trolley on the train. His family is seen as slightly unintelligent and odd due to their way of living. Harry, on the other hand, has a bank vault full of money and he is famous for being the boy who saved the entire wizarding world which makes him a stronger male than Ron. From the very beginning Ron's masculinity is weaker than Harry's.

However, I think that Ron changes throughout the series to become a more independent character. He seems to develop a feeling toward Harry that is mostly based on jealousy. This can first be seen in *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* when Harry gets to be one of the Triwizard champions:

> 'Oh, Harry, isn't it obvious?' Hermione said despairingly. 'He's jealous!'
> '*Jealous*?' Harry said incredulously. 'Jealous of what? He wants to make a prat of himself in front of the whole school, does he? '
> 'Look' said Hermione patiently, 'it's always you who gets all the attention, you know it is. I know it's not your fault,' she added quickly, seeing Harry open his mouth furiously, 'I know you don't ask for it … but – well – you know, Ron's got all those brothers to compete against at home, and you're his best friend, and you're really famous – he's always shunted to one side whenever people see you, and he puts up with it, and he never mentions it, but I suppose this is just one time too many…'
> (Rowling 2005:254)

Ron has always been the friend of Harry Potter. He has never had the fame, the money or the skills in for instance Quidditch that Harry has. However, this openly shown jealousy is something new. In the first books you get the feeling that Ron is proud to be friends with Harry, but as time goes by Ron gets more and more competitive and wants to break from his dependency. He has always been dependent on Harry and has always been the weak one next to him. Ron is the object to the subject Harry. They are both men, but in the hegemonic masculine hierarchy Harry will always be on top because he possesses more stereotypically male characteristics. If Harry in these books is supposed to represent hegemonic masculinity,

Ron is at most representing what Connell calls a complicit masculinity, a man who ends up close to hegemonic masculinity but who does not fully represent it. The jealousy and the feeling of always being second best climax when Ron leaves Harry and Hermione in their struggle to find and destroy the Horcruxes:

> He turned to Hermione.
>   'What are you doing?'
>   'What do you mean?'
>   'Are you staying, or what?'
>   'I …' She looked anguished. 'Yes – yes, I'm staying. Ron, we said we'd go with Harry, we said we'd help –'
>   'I get it. You choose him.'
>   'Ron, no – please – come back, come back!'
>   She was impeded by her own Shield Charm; by the time she had removed it, he had already stormed into the night. Harry stood quite still and silent, listening to her sobbing and calling Ron's name amongst the trees.
> (Rowling 2007:254)

This obviously has to do with the jealousy of Harry being 'the one' but just as much Ron's feeling of being not good enough for Hermione. However, after that breakdown Ron comes back a stronger person. Actually, the first thing Ron does when he gets back to Harry and Hermione is to save Harry from drowning. He also manages to get the one thing they need, the sword of Gryffindor, to destroy one of the Horcruxes and in the end it is Ron who destroys it, taking them one step further towards winning against Voldemort, letting Harry and Hermione depend on him for once (Rowling 2007:302).

Hermione is essentially a very independent character. She solves problems on her own and she mostly depends on her own knowledge and skills to do so, but as she is formed into a woman she realizes that independence is not a very feminine trait and that she will be more successful if she shows some dependence once in a while (which she does to get Harry and Ron to like her in the beginning of the series). This could be seen as a critical comment, by Rowling, to the fact that women have to be dependent damsels in distress and that the norm is so strong that not even Hermione could resist. On the other hand it can also be seen as a female character once again conforming to the stereotype, maybe because the (female) author did not have the strength to let her character break the norms and by doing so become a role model to young girls, and norm-breaking boys, all over the world.

5. Conclusion

In this essay I have analyzed the three main characters in the Harry Potter novels based on how they perform gender. My main focus was if the characters challenge the gender stereotypes or if they build on clichés, norms and stereotypes when it comes to performing gender.

Based on my analysis one could argue that the three main characters perform gender in different ways. Harry Potter and Ron Weasley belong to the same sex, being men, but their gender roles and their characteristics differ in many ways. Harry shows more of the traditional masculine characteristics, such as strength, protectiveness, competitiveness and independence, while Ron's characteristics are not as masculine. Ron shows signs of feminine emotions such as fear and concern, he is very dependent (mostly on Harry) and he is much too aware of his own appearance to fit into the cliché of the traditional man. Thereby, Harry can be seen as a part of the hegemonic masculinity while Ron's masculinity is at odds with it.

Hermione is the only main character of the female sex. She is also the character who most often shows signs of feminine characteristics such as being self-conscious when it comes to her looks, overly emotional and vulnerable. However, Hermione can also be seen as the strongest character of the three. She overcomes most obstacles without the help of anyone else, she is very independent and she takes care of the boys and protects them.

The three main characters show signs of both female and male characteristics and one can thereby draw the conclusion that they question a simplistic binary thinking. No-one has either all male features or all female features. It is very refreshing to read about characters who are complex in their gender roles and who also show gender awareness. In the Harry Potter novels boys are allowed to cry and girls can be the protectors. However, girls are also allowed to giggle and boys are also allowed to dream about a career in sports. This is what makes the Harry Potter novels unconventional when it comes to gender stereotypes: the characters are as complex as you and I.

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