

## ABSTRACT

Inclusion in Fandom: How Harry Potter Fans Rhetorically Create Representation

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Drawing on Jenkins' concept of textual poachers, this thesis looks at how Harry Potter fans rhetorically invent representation by drawing on aspects of the original story and reinterpreting them in more inclusive ways. I examine how fans use fanfiction to depict and normalize LGBTQ+ representation, how the Tumblr platform serves as a central space for fans to visually characterize diversity through the fan practice of racebending, and how meta narratives developed on Tumblr construct a greater understanding and significance of women in the Harry Potter universe. In each of these case study's, I examine how fans use the common fan practices of fanfiction, fan art, and meta narrative blog posts to provide greater depth to the Harry Potter fan community and rhetorically invent greater representation and inclusion. The diversity that fans rhetorically construct of established characters becomes commonly understood within fan communities and normalizes greater representation.

Inclusion in Fandom: How Harry Potter Fans Create Representation

by

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A Thesis

Approved by the Department of Communication

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## DEDICATION

To my family, thank you for always supporting me

## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

These days most individuals participate in fandoms. Whether through sports, politics, movies, or books, fans are active and prolific. Jenkins (2013) describes fandom as a “participatory culture which transforms the experience of media consumption into the production of new texts, indeed a new culture and a new community.” Enacting fan activities requires social processes wherein individual interpretation is shaped through ongoing conversations. The most visible demonstration of fan activity in mainstream culture occurs through sports. Sports fans engage with ongoing conversations regarding players and scores. Sports fans gain their canon information through sports channels and other media spaces; participate by watching games or creating fantasy tournaments; and demonstrate their fan identity through team-themed colors and clothing. Fans use their fan objects to reflect their own interests and incorporate them into discussions and activities. Because fans create a participatory culture, fandom is a unique space to study how fans use texts as rhetorical objects for their own inventions. The purpose of this thesis is, ultimately, to examine how fans incorporate diverse identities and representations into their fan objects.

For this thesis, I will focus on fan activity within the Harry Potter universe because it is a robust fandom with many distinct components. The seven Harry Potter books have sold over 500 million copies and the final book of the series, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, “is the fastest selling book of fiction of all time” (Pottermore).



Based on Harry Potter's Wizarding World universe, Warner Bros. has developed ten movies, with more on the way, a Broadway play, and theme parks. The fandom has engaged with these primary texts to create fan fiction, "Wizard Rock bands (Wrock), puppet shows, three full-blown Harry Potter musicals and countless examples of fan art" (McManus, 2015). The Harry Potter universe has a wealth of content and is a strong and recognizable fandom. For instance, within each of the two most popular sites for fanfiction, fanfiction.net and archiveofourown.org, the Harry Potter fandom has the largest number of published stories in comparison to other fan communities. Furthermore, this wealth of material has shaped an entire generation. The first book was published in 1997 and official canon material within Harry Potter's Wizarding World continues through the *Fantastic Beasts* movie series. Spanning over 20 years of story, the Harry Potter texts are emblematic of a generation and central to the growth and development of fans (Lee, 2015).

With a wealth of material, Harry Potter fans have created a vigorous community, and a significant component of the fandom revolves around representation. Ongoing discussions within the fandom surround representation and diversity, and these conversations often reflect fans' desires to create greater inclusivity. Fans participate heavily within a gift culture, a practice of reciprocal gift exchange centered around shared interests, that works intertextually where fans create fanfiction stories for each other or commission artwork to satisfy fan interests and desires (Hellekson, 2009). I argue that fandom is a unique site for rhetorical action, wherein fans use rhetorical invention to reflect inclusivity within the Harry Potter universe. For my thesis, I intend to illustrate my argument through these fan produced texts that work as centers of expression for

reflecting fans' desires for representation. Specifically, through fanfiction, fan art, and discussion threads, particularly on Tumblr, where fans can more explicitly articulate instances of inclusivity. Examples of these texts reflecting fans' desires for representation are included in the two figures below. In figure 1, the three main characters in Harry Potter, Harry, Ron, and Hermione, are depicted embracing each other. In the artwork, both Hermione and Harry are drawn as people of color. In figure 2, following a common fan meme framework, a brief conversation between Harry and Draco suggests a relationship between the two. Both examples reflect fans' desires to see greater representation of BIPOC and LGBTQ characters.



Figure 1.1, Lackadaisycalart



Figure 1.2, loopylupin

This thesis will study how fans use textual resources and their own rhetorical inventions to create a fandom that reflects what they want to see. My own familiarity and participation within the Harry Potter fan community informs my analysis of this fandom. Using my own personal knowledge and examples of fanfiction, fan art, and fan conversations, I will examine how fans rhetorically invent a more inclusive understanding of the Harry Potter universe and the fandom as a whole. This prospectus will examine the literature surrounding fan studies and contribute to my argument of fans rhetorically inventing representation with the Harry Potter fandom.

This literature review will provide an overview of existing literature within fan studies that describes how fans participate and derive meaning from their fan works and fan communities. Then, I will evaluate existing literature on Harry Potter and Harry Potter fan activity, and the ways that they engage within the fandom and the discussions that emerge within the fan community. This is particularly important in light of recent

comments by the author, J. K. Rowling, regarding transgender individuals that has received significant backlash from the fans (“JK Rowling,” 2020). To that point, many fans have removed themselves from the community or separated their dedication to the story from the author (Yandoli, 2020). Bielby and Harrington (2020) in discussing loss within fandom describes how the community “is socially constituted by fans’ emotional investments determined according to their sensibilities.” Fans are emotionally invested in fandoms and must negotiate how to cope with Rowling’s anti-trans remarks that are such a departure from the themes within the Harry Potter story.

Certainly, the “loss and grief at the collective level” caused by Rowling’s comments will shape the collective memory of the Harry Potter fandom going forward (Bielby & Harrington, 2020). Although, just as fans have previously wrestled with issues surrounding the racial and ethnic tropes in the original Harry Potter books (*Harry Potter and the Contradictions about Racial Justice*, 2015), fans will continue to use the textual material to “poach” the story for their own purposes to shape the characters, derive meaning, and change practices. Fans will appropriate and re-interpret Harry Potter to see themselves reflected in the story. The backlash to Rowling’s comments show how fans have interpreted a more positive and diversity driven meaning from Harry Potter than the author portrayed (Yandoli, 2020). With these positive interpretations, fans use rhetorical practices to continuously shape the Harry Potter universe.

Fiske (1992b) describes fandoms as a cultural economy containing its own systems of production and distribution. This cultural economy is structured through the subcultural styles deviant from the “dominant value system” and through the circulation of texts and styles unique to the specific subculture (Fiske, 1992b; Hebdige, 2002).

Hellekson (2009) utilizes Fiske's theory of fandom as a cultural economy to examine the online fan gift culture. In engaging with the original texts, fans exchange gifts in the forms of fanfiction, artwork, and narrative analysis of texts, whether the original or fan created texts. This gift culture is also highly gendered as fans "exchange personally charged aspects of themselves... whose field of value specifically excludes profit, further separating their community from the larger (male-gendered) community of commerce" (Hellekson, 2009). Fans place heavy emphasis on community exchange and gift, and the Harry Potter fandom is no different from others in maintaining its own unique cultural economy.

Fandom communities center their activities around specific areas, and Harry Potter fans, consisting mainly of millennial and gen z individuals, center their fan activities in online spaces. Fans seek spaces to create a community dedicated to the discussion and production of fandom. Booth (2018) describes physical locations, such as the geek store, as a "space for interaction among participants... communities of practice... sanctuaries from mainstream hierarchies of taste and status." Online spaces function similarly where the community of fandoms can come together to surround themselves with others who participate within fandoms in a unique sanctuary space separate from mainstream culture. In fact, fans will often enact a deliberate self-othering to maintain a distinct and unique community apart from mainstream culture (Booth, 2018). In examining the variations of fans and fan communications, Abercrombie and Longhurst repeatedly emphasize how "media are becoming more important in social organization" (Abercrombie & Longhurst, 2014). Thus, media and online spaces are becoming central locations for the enactment of the cultural economy that is fandom.

As fandoms develop as unique cultures with their own distinct styles, space, and culture, they come to function as equipment for living. Burke (1974) calls literature “equipment for living” or tools through which individuals can understand and manage their social world. The Harry Potter books themselves already impact readers in profound ways. The original story has encouraged young children to further engage in reading and to navigate issues of morality and identity (Beach & Willner, 2002). The books’ exploration of ambiguous characters and institutions encourage critical thinking of systems of power, particularly political institutions and the media (Rosado, 2015). In the study, *Harry Potter and the Millennials*, Gierzynski (2013) evaluates the political attitudes of Harry Potter readers and argues that readers of the series are more critical of authoritarianism and are more likely to show greater tolerance for others and promote equality. Fans that participate in fan communities will take these attitudes and the themes of justice in the books and expound on them within the fandom.

The literature of Harry Potter that functions as equipment for living is enhanced in community. Fandoms through “the form and content of the online world functions as a tool fans use to understand and cope in the offline world” (Burr-Miller, 2011). Burr-Miller (2011) situates the way individuals use new media to understand texts and fan activities in new ways within a postmodern context and emphasizing how intertextual fan experiences allows fans to construct new meanings and their identities. Busse (2017) argues for fandom’s inherent intertextuality as fan activities are often built upon ongoing discussions within the community. Busse (2017) is specifically discussing the intertextuality of fanfiction, which is often written in community and within the conversations occurring amongst the fandom at large. But the specific example of

fanfiction highlights how the fan communities' function within ongoing conversations in their online social world and utilizing this community as equipment for living.

Central to the idea that fans utilize their fan communities as a tool to negotiate and understand their social world, is the question of how fans use the textual material for their own purposes. Harry Potter fans have come to understand the series as fundamentally advocating themes of justice and inclusion, despite negative tropes in the books or the actions of J.K. Rowling. Jenkins' (2013) central argument in *Textual Poachers* addresses how fans negotiate texts for their own use:

Fans construct their cultural and social identity through borrowing and inflecting mass culture images, articulating concerns which often go unvoiced within the dominant media. Because popular narratives often fail to satisfy, fans must struggle with them, to try to articulate to themselves and others unrealized possibilities within the original works... fans cannot dismiss them from their attention but rather must try to find ways to salvage them for their interests... fans actively assert their mastery over the mass-produced texts which provide the raw materials for their own cultural productions and the basis for their social interactions... they become active participants in the construction and circulation of textual meanings (p.23-24).

As fans are constantly reinterpreting fandom in conflict with mainstream ideologies, fans "poach" the themes of inclusion and justice from Harry Potter and appropriate them to include diversity within fandom and disrupting the dominant cultural hegemony.

Although I will argue that the Harry Potter fandom often works as a site of resistance as fans seek to rhetorically invent representation within the fandom, fan communities are never entirely resistant. Fan communities do create their own internal hegemonic structures that can make fandoms, at times, sites of exclusion (Johnson, 2017). The fan community as a whole is very much affected by the producers of the original texts, particularly if the fan object has not reached a conclusion. The fantext-producer-fans relationships may create conflict internal and external to the fandom, and

Johnson (2017) argues that this “fantagonism structures hegemonies of textual interpretation” as fans assert interpretative dominance. “Fantagonism” often shapes the narratives within a fandom which would exclude less popular or successful interpretations of the fantext.

The Harry Potter universe is unique in that the original texts have reached their end, and the fan community has, for the most part, developed its identity as one focused on inclusion, justice, and equality (Yandoli, 2020). However, Rowling continues to add to the Wizarding World of Harry Potter with the *Cursed Child* play, *Fantastic Beasts* movies, and her own frequent commentary on the story. Harry Potter fans continuously negotiate Rowling’s new additions with the established understandings of the original texts, and this has caused conflict on what is considered canon to the fan base. Furthermore, fandoms are culturally understood as white, heteronormative spaces and the presence of nonwhite fans is often marginalized (Stanfill, 2011). This conception of fandom adds to the struggle within the Harry Potter fan community that comes with Rowling’s increasingly problematic emphasis on a heteronormative story and the fans negative reactions to Rowling’s exclusion of diverse representations. Rowling is criticized for her lack of representation, yet continues to provide new information for the universe and has so far squandered her opportunities to create the inclusivity that her fans want.

Therefore, fans “poach” the aspects of text they value that fits within the identity the fan community has developed for themselves. Fiske (1992a) draws on Althusser’s theory of ideology and Gramsci’s hegemony to describe the concept of interpellation, defined as a “process whereby language constructs social relations for both parties in an



act of communication and thus locates them in the broader map of social relations in general.” Fiske understands ideology as socially constructed through which language sets the parameters for social relationships and is reproduced in practice. For example, concepts of gender are shaped socially, but individuals choose their subjectivity within ideologies of gender. In terms of fans, the original fantext presents an ideology that fans negotiate within the community. In this way, Harry Potter fans rhetorically invent a fandom identity promoting inclusivity, equality and representation. Fans articulate an ideology of representation and create inclusivity in the production of fan activities, including fanfiction and fan art. As the fans continue to reinforce this ideology of inclusivity, fans increasingly distance themselves from the producers of the fantext.

My interests in pursuing research within fan studies is derived from my own participation in fandom culture. My experience in fandom has been positive, but, after Rowling’s anti-trans comments this summer, I, like many other fans, struggled to reconcile Rowling’s position with everything I had come to understand of the Harry Potter universe. From the backlash Rowling’s comments received, I questioned how fans came to understand representation in the series. In finding the original texts to be lacking diversity, I wanted to explore how fans took valuable themes from the story, concerning justice, equality, and tolerance, and re-interpreted the original texts to be more inclusive. In this thesis, I will explore these questions to understand how fans appropriate the Harry Potter story to rhetorically invent representation.

For my analysis, I will use Jenkin’s (2013) theory of textual poaching. Jenkin’s ideas of how fans appropriate the original fantext is useful in understanding the ways fans create their own culture with its own interpretations, identity characteristics and meaning-

making purposes. I argue that such poaching is a form of rhetorical invention, wherein fan communities use their own creative practices to shape the rhetorical valence of the Harry Potter universe. Each fandom is distinct in how they utilize their fantext to develop the fan community. Understanding how fans work within their own unique cultural economy also helps scholars evaluate how fandoms produce and enact the distinct ideology fans create. The process of production within fandom provides the space for fans to rhetorically invent a narrative that reflects what fans want to see. Throughout my thesis, I will use these ideas to support my analysis.

I also argue that this approach to fandom is valuable because of the widespread participation in fandom culture. As individuals immerse themselves in fan communities, to what extent can those communities work as sites of resistance? Hinck (2019) uses fan communities to examine how fan-based citizenship occurs. As fans develop ethical frameworks, fans encourage their communities to engage in citizenship practices to varying degrees of success (Hinck, 2019). Hinck's (2019) research demonstrates how fan communities can create social change through valuable citizenship performances. Therefore, I hope this research demonstrates how fandoms can promote greater equality and inclusion. This analysis will seek to examine how fans specifically address issues of representation.

In my first case study, I will evaluate how fans incorporate LGBTQ themes within fan fiction. Scholars attribute fan fiction as a way for fans to create meaning and explore themes of representation in media (Rose, 2020). As fans project their desire for LGBTQ representation, fanfiction is an ideal platform to examine ways that Harry Potter fans treat LGBTQ representation. In particular, I am interested in the rhetorical resources that fans

use to shape the Harry Potter universe. Invention is the primary rhetorical resource at stake, but the modes of invention that employ pastiche, recreation and wholecloth improvisation. To grasp how these rhetorical resources are deployed, I will seek out collections of fan discourses about Harry Potter that incorporate LGBTQ themes.

I will use the Archive of Our Own (AO3) platform to select fan fiction that includes LGBTQ themes. AO3, managed by the non-profit Organization for Transformative Works (OTW), is a well regarded website for posting fanfiction (*About Home | Archive of Our Own*). I chose to use AO3 because of its extensive search features that allow me to narrow down fan fiction stories with these themes. From there, I will select the stories with the most “Kudos” from the most popular slash pairings. The AO3 platform has less restrictions regarding content which allows fans to take more creative license with their fanfiction stories. From the LGBTQ stories selected, I will analyze how the authors interpreted the main characters’ sexualities and how these sexualities were portrayed. The comments on the fanfiction will also provide information on the fandom responses to LGBTQ representation within fanfiction.

For my second case, I will look at how fan communities discuss topics of race. In particular, I will examine how fans engage in racebending, or changing characters' race, within the Harry Potter universe. In this case study, I will examine how fans on the Tumblr platform used fan art and fan discussion threads to race-bend Hermione as a Black character. Specifically, I will seek examples of this racebending practice before *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* was announced. The cast announcement of the *Cursed Child* in 2015 caused a stir among fans as the actress selected to play Hermione, Noma Dumezweni, is Black (“Harry Potter and the Cursed Child Announces Lead Cast,”

2015). After years of imagining Hermione as a Black character, many fans took this announcement of confirmation of a Black Hermione as canon to the original story. While racebending Hermione was already a popular mode of invention prior to the *Cursed Child* announcement, the authorization from producers for a canon Black Hermione has further entrenched racebending in the fandom. The official acceptance of Hermione's race spurred the fan community to continue including and promoting diverse representations within the fandom. Interrogating how fans rhetorically imagined new racial identities for the characters in the story prior to, as well as in reaction to, *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* provide an insight into how fans utilize their fantext to rhetorically create a world they wish to see.

For my third case, I will look at how Harry Potter fans treat gender. The stories are centered around a young boy, but Hermione is a central character in fan discussions and fan fiction. Many times, Hermione becomes the central figure of fan production instead of Harry or Ron. Ginny Weasley is also a significant character among the fan community. Her role in the books and movies is often diminished, but fans have explored the potential she has for a much larger and more impactful role. Owen et al's (2007) analysis of transgressive women in media representations argues that while depictions of transgressive women have aspects that are resistive to male hegemonic order, these depictions often reinstate and re-emphasize this hegemony. Rowling's depictions of Hermione and Ginny are impactful but fails to satisfy the potential for these characters to be truly transgressive women. Fans remedy this failure by rhetorically creating more robust female characters. I will examine fan art, fan discussion threads, and fan fiction to

demonstrate how fans develop feminist and transgressive representations of women in the Harry Potter universe.

This research provides an opportunity to evaluate how fan communities can function as resistant to hegemonic narratives. Fans can imagine and invent social change within their communities that they then apply to the offline social worlds. The discussion and enactment of diversity within fandom can even have real world effects and encourage greater inclusion. Although this research seeks to gain insight on fan communities, it is limited by the examination of a single fan community. The applicability of this research could be hindered by its concentration on the Harry Potter fandom, which is only one among many, and mainly consists of fans from the millennial and gen z generations. The Harry Potter fandom is also unique in that it has existed mainly through online communities since it began with sites such as mugglenet.com which has existed since 1999 (“History,” n.d.). The Harry Potter universe also continues to expand through additional movies and paratextual materials contributing to the longevity of the fan community. Furthermore, as the stories were a significant part of many fans' childhoods, there is sentimental value to the fandom that makes it unique to other media fan communities. All these aspects make the Harry Potter fandom distinct from other fandoms, but Harry Potter’s prevalence within fan communities also means that fan practices transcend other fandoms that fans may be a part of.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LGBTQ Representation in Fandom



- Anderson, S. (2021). *Sarah's Scribbles*.

Andersen (2021), in her popular "Sarah's Scribbles" comics, captures how fans explore subtextual clues in figure 1, where the comic's main character questions if the hero and villain are in love. The comic highlights that fans often seek LGBTQ+ representation, and when popular media fails to provide that inclusion, fans develop it in community. Within the Harry Potter fandom, Harry and Draco Malfoy are one of the most popular pairings, or ships, and are often referred to as Drarry. Drarry's popularity within the Harry Potter fan community is just one example of the normalization and acceptance of LGBTQ+ experience. Anderson's comic commentary is backed up by scholarly research that expresses the connection between fandoms and queernormativity. In the article "Queernormativity: Norms, values, and practices in social justice fandom,"

Fielding (2020) argues “fans have cultivated a space where queerness is the unmarked category: all characters are presumed queer.” While Fielding is specifically referring to social justice fandoms, his conclusions are applicable to popular media fan communities, which often have ties to social justice fandoms. Fans have developed a culture within fandoms that normalizes queer experiences. Popular media fans learn to identify subtextual queer clues, which they explore and develop in community.

In this chapter, I will explore how Harry Potter fans rhetorically invent LGBTQ+ representation within the Harry Potter universe through fan practices. I will begin by exploring the canon text and where author, J. K. Rowling, fails to provide adequate LGBTQ+ representation for a community of diverse fans, despite several instances of queerbaiting within Rowling’s original texts. Then, I will provide an overview of fanfiction, particularly slash fanfiction, and tropes often used, that are useful to understand the context of fanfiction stories. Finally, I will provide a textual analysis of the fanfic “Then Comes a Mist and a Weeping Rain,” by faithwood, a short story about Draco Malfoy as he struggles with redemption and his romantic feelings for Harry Potter. I selected this short story because it was the story with the most Kudos, or likes, within the most popular Harry Potter pairing on AO3. Faithwood’s fanfic met the parameters of a popular and well circulated fanfic, but it is also a compelling story that beautifully layers the magic of Harry Potter with a budding romance between Harry and Draco. Ultimately, through this paper I will demonstrate how fans constantly negotiate their position in fandom and argue that fans poach aspects of fan texts and the fan community to rhetorically invent LGBTQ+ representation within their fan activities.

### *J.K. Rowling & Queerbaiting*

How fans treat LGBTQ+ representation within the Harry Potter universe is particularly important in light of recent comments by the author, J. K. Rowling, regarding transgender individuals that has received significant backlash from fans (“JK Rowling,” 2020). Despite receiving heavy criticism for her transphobic comments, Rowling doubled down instead of listening to her fans and other experts. Since then, the Harry Potter fandom has struggled to negotiate their relationship with the author. For many fans, this meant letting go of Harry Potter, getting rid of their Harry Potter tattoos and significant ties to the fandom. For others, there was a commitment to separate the art from the author, borrowing from Barthes’ idea of the “death of the author.” These fans have committed to no longer supporting Rowling and any of her projects (Sharma, 2020). Instead, many fans have taken to creating fan works that support LGBTQ+ representation.

However, Rowling is firmly enmeshed in the Harry Potter fan community. Since the initial publication of the Harry Potter books, Rowling has conveyed additional paratextual information to her fans. Rowling even developed an entire website, Pottermore, to function as an interactive encyclopedia of additional information about the Harry Potter series and the Wizarding World as a whole (Sony, n.d.). The announcement of Pottermore in 2011 was met with much excitement from the fan community and anticipation for all the new, tiny, unique details to learn. Similarly, Rowling has also developed a tradition of apologizing for the deaths of her characters on May 2nd each year, the anniversary date of the Battle of Hogwarts depicted in *Deathly Hallows*. Until



recently, Rowling was considered the center of all canon information in the Harry Potter universe, although this has been more frequently contested in recent years<sup>1</sup>.

At the center of criticism of Rowling is her history of queerbaiting in the Harry Potter books themselves, as well as after the final publication of the series. Waggoner (2018) describes queerbaiting as the promise of positive LGBTQ+ representation to increase ratings without the delivery of those promises, while Duggan (2019) describes the term broadly as simply the inclusion of subtextual LGBTQ relationships. In 2008, just after *Deathly Hallows* was released (in July 2007), Rowling announced that Dumbledore was gay (Smith, 2007). Despite the praise she received at the time for including an LGBTQ character in the story, Rowling has also been criticized for not canonically depicting Dumbledore's sexuality. Rowling, and other Harry Potter producers, have had many chances to do this through the original Harry Potter movies produced after Rowling's announcement, the Pottermore website, and during the first two *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* movies released in 2016 and 2018. The absence of Dumbledore's sexuality in *Fantastic Beasts* was particularly disappointing since Rowling wrote the scripts for both movies. The story heavily features Dumbledore as a younger man and his conflicts with Geralt Grindelwald, the character Rowling claimed Dumbledore was in love with, in his youth.

Dumbledore as a gay character is the most prominent example, but Rowling's books contain several subtextual references to LGBTQ+ characters. Remus Lupin was a werewolf introduced in *Prisoner of Azkaban*, whose condition was implied to be a direct

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<sup>1</sup> See Romano's "Harry Potter and the Author Who Failed Us" and Miranda's "How and Why J.K. Rowling's 'Nagini' Character Reveal is Touching on Racist Tropes About Asian Women" for more information on Rowling's previous controversies.

reference to HIV (Stolworthy, 2016), who was interpreted early on by fans as a gay character in love with his best friend, Sirius Black. Nymphadora Tonks was described in the books as born with the ability to shapeshift and went by her gender-neutral last name. Tonks could transform her appearance and gender at will, and many fans interpreted her character as genderfluid, at the very least. But Sirius Black dies in *Order of the Phoenix*, and Lupin and Tonks marry each other and have a child before also dying in *Deathly Hallows*. Each of these characters were depicted subtextually as queer (Romano, 2016), yet the narrative reinforced heteronormative romance and, for the most part, killed off those characters. The deaths of each of these subtextually LGBTQ+ characters feeds into the “bury your gays” tropes, which Waggoner (2018) bluntly argues, is used to maintain a “heteronormative hegemony for the sake of not offending advertisers.” While Rowling may not have had advertisers to appease, there was certainly opportunity for financial gain, at the time, in appealing to wider audiences by not including diverse representations. That choice has not served Rowling well among her, now adult, fans who foster a culture embracing diversity of sexuality (Fielding, 2020).

Rowling failed her LGBTQ+ fans again in 2016 with the release of the play, *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*. With the release of *Cursed Child*, there was a clear subtextual queer implication between Albus Severus (Harry’s child) and Scorpius (Draco’s child) (Romano, 2016). The two characters are best friends, depicted as outsiders, and codependent on each other. Duggan (2019) emphasizes how the ellipses and lacunae throughout the play “suggest an unspeakable element to their relationship” and other characters frequently joke about the relationship between Albus and Scorpius. Brummitt and Sellars (2019) emphasize the language used in the play that implies a

romantic relationship between the characters. Severus Snape compares his relationship with Lily Potter to Scorpius' friendship to Albus, but Snape loved Lily in the original books and this comparison implies a similar romantic love for Scorpius and Albus. Similarly, when addressing each other at the end of the play, Scorpius simply asks “Friends?” to which Albus replies “Always.” Considering the word “always” has heavy connotations within the original story and fandom regarding Snape’s expression of romantic love for Lily, this functions as another distinct moment where Scorpius’ and Albus’ friendship is conveyed as something more (Brummitt & Sellars, 2019). Yet, by the conclusion of the *Cursed Child*, the two characters appear to be firmly emphasized as cisgender, heterosexual characters.

In these ways and in others, Rowling seems to regularly traffic in queer tropes, but only as a bait and switch. That outcome seems even more damning when one considers Rowling’s status as a publicly transphobic author. Sociological research on the Harry Potter fandom indicates that fans of the novels are often far more inclusive and seek LGBTQ+ representations (Fielding, 2020). That research is supported by the myriad fanfictions that reshape the Harry Potter universe in terms of both representation and inclusion. As a result, engaging with Harry Potter fanfiction demonstrates the ways rhetorical invention is used to supply storytelling that fans seek. Indeed, fanfiction has become a robust site of rhetorical invention for the Harry Potter universe and studying the inventional resources of these stories’ sheds light on the ways fans use rhetorical tactics in their practices.

In selecting a fanfiction for study, I chose to use the Archive of Our Own (AO3) platform to select a fanfic that includes LGBTQ+ themes. AO3, managed by the non-

profit Organization for Transformative Works (OTW), is a well regarded website for posting fanfiction (*About Home | Archive of Our Own*). Fielding (2020) argues the AO3 platform is itself “emblematic of social justice fan spaces,” due to the site’s mission to “preserve our fannish economy, values, and creative expression by protecting and nurturing our fellow fans, our work, our commentary, our history, and our identity” (*About Home | Archive of Our Own*). Additionally, I chose to use AO3 because of its extensive search features that allow me to narrow down fanfiction stories with LGBTQ+ themes. The AO3 platform has less restrictions regarding content which allows fans to take more creative license with their fanfiction stories and contributes to the site’s popularity. Using the search features on the website, I selected the most popular slash pairing, or same-sex relationship, within the Harry Potter fandom. In this case, the most popular slash pairing centered around Harry Potter and Draco Malfoy, also known as Drarry. AO3 has over 45K Drarry fanfic stories, and, similarly, fanfiction.net has over 64K Drarry stories. Although another popular fanfiction platform, limitations within fanfiction.net’s search functions excluded the site from consideration in identifying an appropriate story. Within the Drarry pairing on AO3, I selected the story with the most “Kudos,” or likes.

I focused on stories with the most “Kudos,” over fanfics with the most hits or comments, because this demonstrated--to some extent--a degree of quality within the story that appealed to a broader portion of the fan community. Fans reading fanfiction are often concerned with quality or stories that demonstrate cultural or literary capital (Fathallah, 2017). The quality within fanfic stories demonstrates a general concern for grammar, style, and canon knowledge. A fanfic with the most “Kudos” would receive

general approval from the fandom and, presumably, adhere to the level of quality sought by fans. Receiving the most “Kudos” on a fanfic also emphasizes the widespread circulation of the story within the fandom. In this case, the fanfic I will analyze, “Then Comes a Mist and a Weeping Rain” by faithwood, is referenced and recommended across other fandom websites, including Tumblr, LiveJournal, goodreads, and fanfictionrecommendations.com. To provide context in my analysis of “Then Comes a Mist and a Weeping Rain,” I will begin with an overview of fanfiction as an area of scholarly study.

### *Fanfiction*

Specifically, I will evaluate how fans rhetorically incorporate LGBTQ+ themes within fanfiction. Scholars attribute fanfiction as a way for fans to create meaning and explore themes of representation in media (Rose, 2020). As fans project their desire for LGBTQ+ representation, fanfiction is an ideal platform to examine ways that Harry Potter fans treat LGBTQ+ representation. Fathallah (2017) argues that fanfiction “begins to create new knowledge, utilize the gaps and possibilities of canon and reality to reveal basic assumptions and the possibilities they exclude.” Fanfiction can, effectively, change the narrative and perception of pop culture texts and through that affect cultural conditions. While transformative fanfic is paradoxical in that its form both legitimates and is critical of canon, it does provide an avenue for fans to “affirm and accept othered aspects of their identities” (Fathallah, 2017). Furthermore, fanfiction is a significant part of the fan community where fans “create in a complex intersection where meaning production is highly dependent on shared interpretations and interpretive communities”

(Busse and Gray, 2011). Fanfiction is just one way that fans create a shared knowledge of LGBTQ+ experience and representation.

Callis' (2016) study of slash fanfics in the Star Trek fandom emphasizes the significance of fanfics in reflecting cultural expectations of heteronormativity. Slash fanfiction is generally defined as “a genre of fan-written stories that involves a sexual and/or romantic relationship between two (or more) characters of the same sex” (Callis, 2016). Slash fanfiction reflects cultural norms and expectations, but also identifies points of tension and shifts in understanding sexual identity and relationships. Fans learn about gender and sexuality within fandom, and queer experiences are normalized creating safe spaces within fan communities (Fielding, 2020). Floegel (2020) extends this argument to promote the idea that the normalization of queer experience within slash fanfiction is taken into other communities that fans are a part of in a “world-queering” practice. The acceptance of identity and greater understanding that is developed becomes mainstream within the larger culture outside of solely the original fan community. Thus, fanfics are an ideal cultural reflection of LGBTQ+ narratives and desires within fandom.

### *Tropes in Fanfic*

With this context in mind, fanfiction works as a site for fans to negotiate LGBTQ+ identities and experiences they are denied through canon and paratextual works. Fanfiction is the world's fastest-growing form of writing (Fathallah, 2017) making fanfics an important influence on pop culture as an artifact of contemporary discourse. I chose to look at the fanfic “Then Comes a Mist and a Weeping Rain” by faithwood by using one of the most popular fanfiction websites (Archive of Our Own), filtering for the most popular pairing (Drarry), and sorting for the stories with the most

“Kudos.” This fanfic was at the top of the list making it one of the most well liked stories on the site and implying it has been well circulated among the fandom, particularly the Drarry shippers.

One of the rhetorical resources used in fanfiction is the redeployment of tropes and tags. Hahner (2017) defines tropes as a “logic of representation” emphasizing how tropes are “useful tools to both categorize and explicate the relationships between rhetorical style and persuasion.” Tropes and tags categorize fanfiction and set the parameters for the narrative structure of fanfiction. These tropes become a rhetorical tactic to reshape stories and to rely on cultural wisdom central to fan communities. Busse (2017) argues that narrative tropes in fanfiction create a “power of repetition” and an “ability to structure interpretation” within fandom. Shared interpretations and expectations for representation in fanfiction are rhetorically constructed through the use of tropes and tags. As a rhetorical enterprise, these tropes demonstrate the tension points and modes of representation fans seek to generate.

The tropes and tags common within fanfiction are important to contextualize the story within fandom. Tropes are an important part of the intertextuality of fandom that is shaped by community participants (Busse, 2017). Hampton (2015) argues that the repeated use of tropes in slash fanfics functions as queer performance that reactivates and works on things that have been discussed before. The fanfic starts out with very little information, but depicts Draco Malfoy struggling with a cloud he has conjured and cannot get rid of. Early on in the story, readers are meant to understand some basic premises of the background, that are informed by the fandom and traditional Harry Potter fanfic tropes.

The first prominent trope includes the eighth year post-war at Hogwarts. This trope entails themes of inter-house unity where, usually, all the eighth years live together and struggle to get along. In the Harry Potter books, the characters are sorted into one of four houses, Gryffindor, Ravenclaw, Hufflepuff, and Slytherin. There is continuous conflict between Gryffindor and Slytherin characters throughout the original books. Most of the villains in the books come from Slytherin house and the characters in Slytherin are often painted in broad strokes as bad and natural enemies to the “good” characters from Gryffindor. Most fanfiction centered on the eighth year trope focuses on this conflict between Hogwarts houses and navigates themes of inter-house unity. Other common themes within the eighth year fanfic stories include the awakening of one’s sexuality and party games (*Eighth Year - Fanlore*).

These stories are also usually centered around the redemption of the Slytherins, particularly Draco Malfoy, who was a Death Eater and the school rival to Harry Potter throughout the series. These stories imply depth to the Slytherin characters that was not present in the original story. Instead of painting all Slytherins as malicious enemies, these fanfic stories emphasize how the Slytherins in the original story were just children, brainwashed by a pureblood ideology, and pushed to fight for something that they did not necessarily choose for themselves. The fan communities desire to create depth and dimension in the story permeates this very specific trope, and the typical struggle in these fanfiction stories for characters to get over their prejudices. This trope often extends to the development of LGBTQ characters that are explored in a post-war Hogwarts school environment. According to fanlore.org, an archive centered on fandom, there are over four thousand works categorized as “eighth year” stories on the popular fanfiction



website AO3, three quarters of which are centered around the Draco Malfoy and Harry Potter (Drarry) pairing.

Another important trope common within the Harry Potter fandom and central to this fanfic is the Epilogue? What Epilogue?, or EWE tag. Most fanfiction that explores pairings that are not canonical utilize the EWE tag, especially the Draco and Harry (Drarry) and Draco and Hermione (Dramione) pairings. These fanfics all ignore the epilogue of the seventh Harry Potter book. Other fanfics also utilize the EWE trope because of their dislike of the original epilogue and the unsatisfying happily ever after ending that ignores the struggles of the characters post-war (*Epilogue? What Epilogue? - Fanlore*). The EWE trope allows many of the fanfiction writers and readers to explore stories that deal with the trauma after the Battle of Hogwarts in the final book as well as evaluate how the characters grow after the tumultuous childhood depicted in the books.

These common fanfiction tropes set the rhetorical parameters fans will engage with through fanfics. As fan authors rhetorically construct a world they wish to see within the Harry Potter universe, tropes and tags create shared meanings and expectations for readers. The popularity of these tropes in particular demonstrate the fan readers desire to see these tropes enacted in fanfiction. The popularity of “Then Comes a Mist and a Weeping Rain” also demonstrates how fans desire to see these tropes rhetorically constructed in new ways that also create space for greater inclusion and representation of LGBTQ+ characters.

### *Then Comes a Mist and a Weeping Rain*

“Then Comes a Mist and a Weeping Rain” by faithwood relies heavily on the fandom knowledge and expectations that come with these tropes as well as the

comprehensive understanding of the original books and characters. In addition to the three main characters, the story relies on the knowledge of various minor characters, including Gregory Goyle, Millicent Bulstrode, and Ernie Macmillan. Goyle and Bulstrode are both Slytherins and were sometimes depicted as antagonists in the books. Ernie Macmillan was a Hufflepuff character that was often described as pompous and arrogant. Although Bulstrode and Macmillan did not have large roles in the original books, Goyle was often depicted as one of Malfoy's henchmen friends who, along with Vincent Crabbe, attacked Harry, Ron, and Hermione during the final battle in *Deathly Hallows*. During the attack, Crabbe died while Malfoy and Goyle were saved by the three main characters from a magically cursed fire. This scene from the seventh Harry Potter book is particularly relevant to this fanfic, and often discussed in other fanfic, as fans navigate Draco and Goyle's trauma after watching their friend die as well as their redemption for their part on the wrong side of the war. Draco Malfoy's struggle for redemption and his management of the post-war trauma are important themes throughout this fanfic as Draco wrestles with accepting himself and by extension his sexuality.

There are three main metaphors, or symbols, within this fanfic that are significant in exploring LGBTQ+ themes. Those are the conjured cloud, the patronus, and the white peacock. The metaphor of the cloud is quite obvious early on in the fanfic as the story starts with Draco angry while with Madam Pomfrey trying to get rid of the cloud. As he becomes more frustrated, the cloud reacts by gathering lightning and rumbling thunder. In moments throughout the story where Draco thinks about his role in the war and the regret he feels, the cloud "doubled in size and darkened; it was almost black, except for the occasional flash of light within... The raindrops were thick and heavy, falling in

rivulets” (faithwood, 2011). The cloud is closely tied to Draco’s emotions and acts as an indicator throughout the story of how Draco is feeling.

Draco’s first interaction with Harry Potter emphasizes the role of the cloud. When Harry pokes fun at Draco about his cloud, Draco’s grabs Harry to have the cloud cover over him too. Harry tastes the raindrops and Draco despairs because “the raindrops tasted salty. Less like rain, more like *tears*” (faithwood, 2011). Later on in the story, Draco’s cloud grows lighter and calms when he thinks of Harry. When Harry kisses Malfoy for the first time, the cloud turns white and lifts high into the sky. By the end, the cloud disappears when Draco tells Harry how he feels about him and Harry feels the same. Osborn’s (2018) scholarship on archetypal metaphors are a useful tool to evaluate Draco’s cloud. Archetypes of light relate to the struggle for survival and development, while darkness suggests ignorance, fear and feelings of graveness. Water is also a useful metaphor to “express and dramatize the archetypal journey motif” (Osborn, 2018). In reading of Draco’s struggle with his conjured cloud, readers are meant to associate the dark, thunderous cloud as Draco’s journey to move forward from his past and accept himself. Osborn (2018) emphasizes how “such metaphors express value judgements and may thus be expected to elicit significant value responses from an audience.” Readers will empathize with Draco’s struggle with his cloud and his feelings, and with that empathy readers are encouraged to accept and look forward to Draco’s relationship with Harry.

Another symbol with great significance in this fanfic is the patronus, an important spell in the Harry Potter books. In the original story, Harry learns to cast the patronus in order to fend off Dementors in the *Prisoner of Azkaban*. Rowling created the Dementors

as a representation of depression (Metcalf, 2017), and they are magical creatures that consume all happiness and leave their victims with their worst memories and despair. The patronus is a spell of pure light that can only be produced by the happiest of memories and takes the shape of an animal that is representative of the character.

Throughout the fanfic, the patronus hangs around the background of the story. As Draco struggles with his cloud and his place in the story, he sees the wisps of a patronus as he wakes up over several nights. A common idea within the Harry Potter fandom is that Death Eaters, or the followers of Voldemort, could not cast the patronus because they could not produce the truly happy memories needed to create a spell of pure light. Often in post-war stories that focus on Draco's redemption, his learning of the patronus charm demonstrates how Draco has moved on from his past as a Death Eater to be a good person who can have happiness and produce light that drives out the dark. The idea of the patronus spell borrows from archetypal metaphors for light and darkness, but also functions as a culturetype, a "culture-specific symbols that resonate cultural values and represent myths and folk narratives," (Osborn, 2018) within the Harry Potter universe. As with tropes, this culturetype utilizes narrative symbols to rhetorically construct meaning. In this case, the use of the patronus emphasizes the redemption of Draco Malfoy and ensures that his LGBTQ+ identity is not shaped by his past mistakes.

In this fanfic, as Draco sees the wisps of the patronus in the early mornings, he comes to believe that they are sent from Harry to comfort him and help keep the cloud from drowning him at night. Draco comes to believe they're sent from Harry particularly after he catches a glimpse of the patronus in the shape of a stag, which is Harry's patronus (Rowling, 1999). In a moment where Draco and Harry get closer and Draco

thanks Harry for the patronus for giving him comfort and relief from the cloud, Harry, very confused, admits he has not sent one. Draco realizes this must mean that he is able to produce one, another sign Draco has moved past his history of being a Death Eater and from the darkness associated. When Draco intentionally tries to cast the spell, his patronus is revealed as a stag. This is important because the original stories place great significance on what each person's patronus becomes. Draco's patronus as stag rhetorically invents his great, pure love and affection for Harry Potter.

The patronus is the rhetorical representation of that person, their happiest memories, and, at times, who they love. In the *Deathly Hallows* (2007), Snape's patronus was a doe because of his love of Lily Potter, whose patronus was also a doe. Similarly in *Half-Blood Prince* (2005), Tonks' patronus changed to represent a werewolf after she fell in love with Remus Lupin. Thus, the significance of Draco's patronus as a stag within the fandom demonstrates Draco's pure, good, love for Harry Potter. Using symbols and icons recognizable from the Harry Potter universe to rhetorically convey themes of acceptance and unity is central to the LGBTQ experience. Just as readers empathize with Draco and recognize that he deserves acceptance for his actions in the original story, readers take those themes of acceptance and apply them to the LGBTQ experience to encourage Draco to accept his feelings for Harry in the story.

Finally, the white peacock comes to symbolize the Malfoy family within the fandom. In *Deathly Hallows* (2007), there is a scene where white peacocks are described as walking along the Malfoy estate and the fandom has taken that to represent the family as a whole. The white peacock symbolism is an excellent example of the intertextuality of fandom and the importance of shared knowledge of fan texts in community (Busse,

2017; Hampton, 2015). In this fanfic, Draco conjures a white peacock while his magic is malfunctioning as a side effect of the cloud. The animal sticks around for a few days and is adopted by fellow eighth year Hufflepuff, Ernie Macmillan who names it Grumpy. The peacock named Grumpy becomes a running joke in the story and when the peacock eventually disappears, it acts as the final symbolic push for Draco to relate to his fellow year mates and accept this new path in his life. When the animal disappears, Draco creates a commemorative pin that says House of Grumpy. It represents the unified house of the eighth years and appears to confirm Malfoy's redemption from past mistakes and acceptance into the community of "good" characters, allowing Draco to feel worthy to join the group and be open in his sexuality. The metaphor of the peacock serves to rhetorically depict a unified identity for the eighth years and reaffirms the acceptance of Draco's character (Osborn, 2018). Not only does the House of Grumpy symbolize Draco's own redemption and acceptance of himself, but the unity of the eighth years demonstrates how Draco's fellow classmates accept him, his sexuality, and his relationship with Harry Potter.

Ultimately, the symbolic tropes in faithwood's "Then Comes a Mist and a Weeping Rain" demonstrates the quality of popular fanfiction and how fanfics are a useful tool for exploring themes of acceptance and inclusivity. They help readers understand Draco's conflict with himself and Harry in navigating their feelings and the start of a romantic relationship. The fantastical metaphors of a magical cloud, the patronus spell, and the white peacock serve to rhetorically depict LGBTQ+ inclusion within the fandom and make this inclusion a widely accepted reality for readers. Significantly, faithwood's story feels no need to provide explanation regarding the

characters' sexuality or introduce a plot line where the characters' sexuality is rejected or questioned. "Then Comes a Mist and a Weeping Rain" is simply a story of two people realizing they have feelings for each other and action on those feelings without unnecessary heteronormative explanations for the characters sexuality or how their realization of that sexuality came about.

However, the fanfic is most important because of the contextual and intertextual elements that allow fans in a unique community to use familiar tropes, themes, and symbols to rhetorically invent the representation that the community is repeatedly denied by the official canon. This chapter analyzed how a popular fanfiction within the Harry Potter universe utilized common tropes to rhetorically invent LGBTQ+ representation. Creating shared expectations and meaning in fandom through tropes that are made popular in fanfiction normalizes LGBTQ+ experiences and narratives.

Rowling continuously tries to appeal to diversity yet refuses to confirm LGBTQ+ diversity in canon and creates increasingly controversial statements. Rowling's most recent anti-trans public controversy has alienated most of her fans and is not helped by her history of minimizing the experiences of diverse characters within Harry Potter (Romano, 2020). The popularity of this LGBTQ+ story in particular and the sophisticated themes it explores demonstrates how fans seek, embrace, and rhetorically invent stories of representation to supplant what official producers of canon deny. The common tropes and narrative symbols within Harry Potter fanfiction rhetorically reinvent stories that resonate with fans and rhetorically create greater representation.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Racebending Hermione Granger

Hermione Granger is the best character J.K. Rowling has ever written  
No listen, shawty is the bravest chick, the baddest witch,  
and activist who made the wellbeing of house elves her priority,  
in spite of her social issues as a muggleborn minority,  
Hermione Granger,  
you should have been a Black woman

- Kian & Youngblood, 2019

In the poem “Hermione Should’ve Been Black,” Aris Kian and Kendryk Youngblood convey how Hermione’s character reflects the experiences of Black women and how much more nuance her character would have had as a Black woman in the Harry Potter story. Kian and Youngblood (2019) draw on aspects of Hermione’s character to flesh out how she is better encapsulated as a strong Black woman, citing her activism for house elves rights, her position in the story as a “muggleborn minority,” her primary description of large, curly hair, and her unending intellect that often saves Harry and Ron. The poem calls out Hermione’s character as being “whitewashed for silver screens” and missing out on the “Black girl magic” representation. Kian and Youngblood’s (2019) poem is a poignant and captivating example of how fans rhetorically invent representation by intertextually depicting what fans already know about their favorite characters in new, diverse, and inclusive ways.

Hinck (2019) describes how “people who create, control and profit from popular culture... are often straight, White men, resulting in disparate representation of POC, women, and LGBTQ people.” The white, cisgendered heterosexual producers of culture



shape media for a target audience, leading to predominantly white fan communities and defining who can be a fan (Hinck, 2019). As such, cultural production as a top-down process controls representative practices.

Given these aspects of production, representation of diverse characters is often marginalized in popular media and parallels the marginalization of BIPOC individuals in society (Thomas, 2019). Similarly, it is important to note how fandom reflects the lack of diversity within mainstream media. Stanfill (2011) describes how fandom is often understood as a “failed nonheteronormative whiteness” and this produces a “racialized construct” within fandom where nonwhite fans are marginalized. Fans of color become invisible in defaulting media fandom as predominantly white. However, fans themselves take steps to enhance the visibility of fans of color through platforms like Tumblr and rhetorically invent further representation through visual fan practices, such as racebending (Stanfill, 2018).

In this chapter, I will analyze how fan communities discuss topics of race. In particular, I will explore how fans engage in racebending, or changing characters' race, within the Harry Potter universe. Fans utilize the Tumblr platform as a day-to-day site of fandom activity where fan art, other visual mediums, and fan discussion threads racebend Hermione as a Black character. I will briefly describe the practice of racebending before and after the announcement of *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* was announced. The cast announcement of the *Cursed Child* in 2015 caused a stir among fans as the actress selected to play Hermione, Noma Dumezweni, is Black (“Harry Potter and the Cursed Child Announces Lead Cast,” 2015). After years of imagining Hermione as a Black character, many fans took this announcement as confirmation that a Black Hermione was

canon to the original story. While racebending Hermione was already a mode of fan invention prior to the *Cursed Child* announcement, the authorization from producers for a canon Black Hermione has further entrenched racebending in the fandom. The official acceptance of Hermione's race spurred the fan community to continue including and promoting diverse representations within the fandom. Interrogating how fans rhetorically imagined new racial identities for the characters in the story prior to, as well as in reaction to, *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* provides insight into how fans utilize their fanfiction to rhetorically create a world they wish to see.

In the Harry Potter universe, there are only eight racially diverse characters, and all of them are minor characters with no long-term significant roles in the story. These characters include Dean Thomas, Angelina Johnson, Lee Jordan, Cho Chang, Blaise Zabini, Kingsley Shacklebolt, Padma and Pavarti Patil. The implications of their race and their cultural background is never addressed or acknowledged throughout the series. The lack of inclusion of diverse characters is even more disappointing when considering that there are seven main characters that J.K. Rowling has emphasized as significant to the progression of the story (Weekes, 2018). With seven character journeys driving the story of Harry Potter, why are none of them characters of color?

As Weekes (2018) points out, the lack of diverse characters is also particularly problematic when considering the allegory that Rowling attempts to convey through the books, regarding the discrimination and prejudice against muggle-born characters by the pureblood supremacist wizards. If the main conflict of the story is centered around fighting racism and discrimination, why are none of the main characters people of color who could further attest to the themes of the story? Furthermore, the representation of the

diverse minor characters in the stories is, at times, stereotypical and trite. While readers never learn much about these minor characters of color, what they do learn is somewhat problematic. In particular, the depiction of Cho Chang is used as a romantic foil to Ginny Weasley, Harry Potter's eventual love interest. Lee (2015) points out how Rowling utilizes the stereotypes of Asian women as weak and submissive to contrast with Ginny's stronger personality. The Patil twins are also used as tools in the story to convey Harry and Ron's disappointment with the Yule Ball. Both Harry and Ron take Pavarti and Padma Patil as last resorts and then proceed to ignore them the entire evening. Their characters are treated merely as props in the story. Lee (2015) succinctly summarizes the problem with such disappointing representation:

thinking about representation and whose stories are privileged is not only about who is invisible from the story of the limited roles people are allowed to play. It is also about considering that even when in prominent positions within stories, aspects of characters' identities aren't developed in ways that illustrate the depth and complexity of our lived realities (125).

These criticisms of stereotyping in Harry Potter can be evaluated through each of the eight characters of color, but they are not the only problematic racial depictions in the story.

Despite the heavy themes of social justice and fighting discrimination in the Harry Potter canon narrative, Rowling depicts many creatures in her novels through racist stereotypes, including house elves and goblins. Scholars have frequently critiqued Rowling's portrayal of house elves in particular because of their enslavement to wealthy, pureblood families. The enslaved house elves are often shown in ways similar to old Hollywood depictions of Black stereotypes, while goblins are depicted as greedy, evil beings that run the banks using racist stereotypes of Jewish moneylenders (Horne, 2010;

Schott, 2020). Schott (2020), while acknowledging the damaging racist stereotypes used for these fictional creatures, argues that Rowling is intending to create moral ambiguity for readers to work through citing Hermione's attempt to abolish house elf slavery through the Society for the Promotion of Elfish Welfare or S.P.E.W. However, Hermione's work with S.P.E.W and her attempts to free the elves of Hogwarts are ridiculed and ignored by Harry and friends. Rowling's inability to address and resolve the racist depiction of fictional creatures in the Harry Potter books underscores the fact that representation matters and how those representations are privileged are important, even if trying to introduce moral ambiguity to young readers.

### *Tumblr*

As fans have come to re-read and understand the lack of representation and outright racist stereotypes in Harry Potter, fans have turned to their community to further discussions on race and take steps to rhetorically create inclusion in their favorite stories. Tumblr is the center of fan activity and it is important to consider the role of Tumblr as a platform for fandom communities in facilitating these discussions. Tumblr became the primary site of fandom activity around 2012 after LiveJournal was purchased and reconfigured by a Russian corporation in 2008 (Morimoto, 2018). As fandoms moved away from LiveJournal, Tumblr grew in popularity for day-to-day fan activity while Archive of Our Own replaced LiveJournal as the central site for fanfiction (Morimoto, 2018). Bourdaa (2018) explains how Tumblr has become a popular fan site largely because of the site's visual emphasis and how Tumblr allows fans to transform media, promoting creativity through its reblogging function.

The reblogging function on Tumblr has created a culture of sharing and reblogging on Tumblr. The platform, in general, “encourages the proliferation of information, memes, gossip, analysis, and whatever else fans are wont to create and disseminate” (Chew, 2018). The significance of reblogging on Tumblr emphasizes the widespread circulation of fan-created information. Furthermore, most users also tag their posts, which encourages the archiving of the mostly visual media. User tags also function as Tumblr’s main organizational tool, which can present a challenge in searching for specific content without knowledge of fannish practices (Kohnen, 2018). However, the use of tags does make it easier for participants to join or follow communities of interest based on specific media or characters. Fans often gather around popular tags in a unique way on Tumblr. Since fans are able to include spaces within their tags, users often comment and contribute within the tags in a uniquely fannish practice as well as simply following popular tags (Chew, 2018; Kohnen, 2018).

In many ways, Tumblr has become a counterpublic enclave for Harry Potter fans, who use it for counter purposes to the exclusionary aspects of the story. Chew (2018) argues that the sharing of content through reblogging has created a counterpublic space on Tumblr, which Chew defines as “spaces for retreating from mainstream society but also sites of preparation for interaction and agitation toward the general public.” Chew’s (2018) specifically describes how fans organize and mobilize for fan activism on Tumblr as their counterpublic site and enact that activism on more public sites, such as Twitter. Since Tumblr is not a mainstream site, it serves well as a counterpublic space for fan communities to enjoy and engage with each other on a private and quotidian basis. This idea of Tumblr as a private fan space is furthered by the fact that most fans have public

profiles that are not connected to their real names and lives, and this anonymity within Tumblr further allows fans to engage in fan community privately.

Tumblr is primarily a visual platform. Scholars have credited the visual aspects of Tumblr for lowering linguistic and textual barriers allowing for cross cultural communication. Heavily visual platforms offer a creative space for popular culture, and for intertextually destabilizing the meaning of images (Morimoto, 2018; Kohnen, 2018; Hautsch, 2018). Tumblr's lower barriers for entry promotes creativity and intertextuality and has allowed the platform to encourage identity exploration. Moreover, the creative aspects of the platform have invited an exploration of "diversity in media representation and the intersections of fandom and social justice" (Kohnen, 2018). Because Tumblr relies heavily on visual media, it is an ideal space to consider how fans are rhetorically shaping their community through images.

To understand the rhetorical argument images convey, we need to consider the medium and "conditions of production and reception" (Hariman, 2015). GIFs, or animated images, are one example of visual media that has gained popularity through Tumblr. GIFs on Tumblr take moments from popular shows or films and convey layered meanings to fan communities. Hautsch (2018) describes how fans use GIFs rhetorically playing "with the intertextuality and decontextualization of source material." GIFs and GIF sets present arguments on Tumblr by visually displaying the source text in strategic ways. Some fans use GIFs to emphasize a certain perspective in the source text or as a reaction to an argument or interpretation. GIFs function to convey meaning and fans' personal thoughts and emotions. Hautsch (2018) argues that fans manipulate GIFs and images on Tumblr "in response to the kairos of a particular rhetorical situation," and the

repeated use of recontextualized GIFs “introduces instability and multiplicity into their meaning.” Fans use GIFs in a variety of rhetorical ways, allowing for multiple interpretations in their circulation of Tumblr’s networked platform.

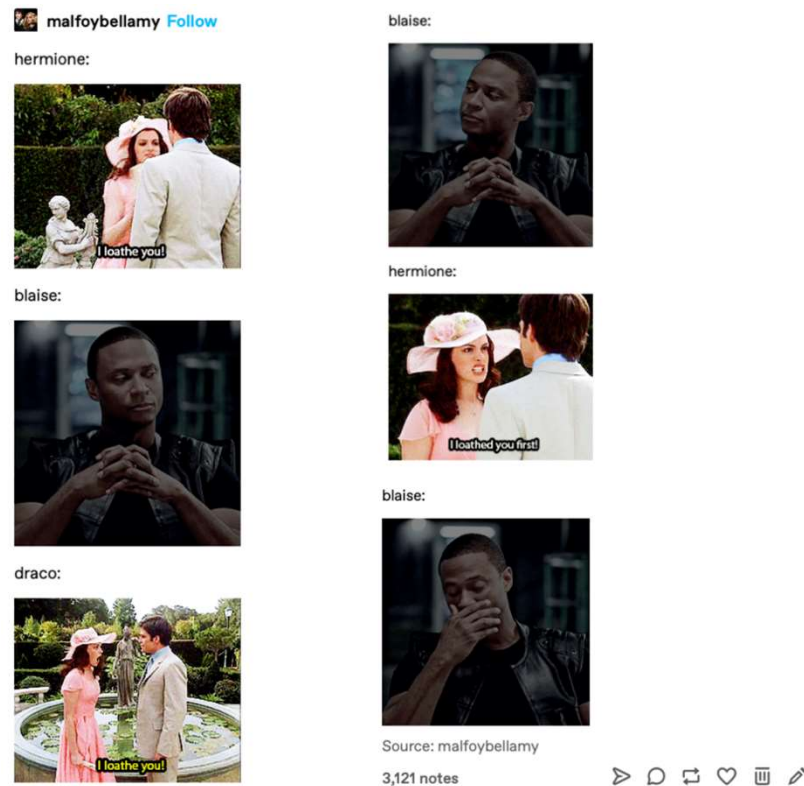


Figure 3.1, malfoybellamy

Figure 3.1 provides an excellent example of how fans use GIFs to create rhetorical arguments. User malfoybellamy posted GIFs from media completely unrelated to Harry Potter to promote the Draco and Hermione relationship. Fans who support the non-canon relationship between Draco and Hermione typically portray the relationship as enemies to lovers, and malfoybellamy uses GIFs from *The Princess Diaries 2: Royal Engagement*, where main character Mia falls in love with her enemy and rival to the throne of Genovia. This GIF set requires the textual knowledge of *The Princess Diaries*

to understand the context of the conversation between Hermione and Draco as well as fandom knowledge of Draco Malfoy and his friendship with fellow Slytherin, Blaise Zabini to understand Blaise's amusement at their mutual denial of an attraction. Fans can interpret this GIF set in a variety of ways, but interpretation requires intertextual knowledge of Harry Potter, the fan community, the Dramione ship community, and pop culture media.

As with these GIFs, fans use all kinds of visual media and fan art to rhetorically convey their arguments on fandom. Thomas (2013) describes "fandoms employment of the image as text, specifically as intertextual imagetexts." While figure 3.1 provides an example of the intertextuality of GIFs on Tumblr, Thomas' (2013) furthers this argument emphasizing the rhetorical work of images that fans create. Especially fan art that works intertextually to create various layers of meaning, and continuously fashions multiple meanings as fans interact with original posts of images and add commentary.

Because fanart is created in a community with certain functional and aesthetic expectations, fanartists function as "culture-creators" within fandom (Manifold, 2009). We can extend this argument of fanartists as culture-creators towards racebending and the growing acceptance and prevalence of diversifying characters. As fans' aesthetics leans towards rhetorically creating greater racial representation through art, fans influence our larger culture to meet these new fan expectations. Arguably, the casting of Noma Dumezweni as a Black Hermione in the *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* play could have been influenced by previous fan practices of racebending Hermione. Regardless, fans create an argument when they engage in fanart and promote certain visual arguments in fandom. Hahner's (2013) argument for framing memes as visual argument is useful to



understand how images “allow viewers to use larger cultural norms and the immediate context for the formation, interpretation, and/or evaluation of an argument.” In the case of fandom, this happens within the fannish practices and expectations within the Tumblr platform. Images, memes, GIFs, and fanart aid the acceleration of rhetorically invented fan arguments and are indicative of cultural trends within fandom.

### *Racebending*

Racebending is one such example of a cultural practice in fandom where fans rhetorically invent representation through the visual argument of GIFs and fanart. The concept and practice of racebending grew in popularity after the fan backlash to the white actors cast for the *Avatar: The Last Airbender* movie adaptation in 2010. Fans created Racebending.com, a play on the practice of ‘bending’ the elements in the *Avatar: The Last Airbender* series, with the purpose of protesting the whitewashing of characters in Hollywood and to promote diverse casting (Lopez, 2012). Lopez (2012) argues that fans engage in “enunciative productivity, or fan talk, and textual productivity, or fan art” to further the arguments of the Racebending.com community.

Eventually, the practice of racebending became independent of the Racebending.com movement and fans on Tumblr appropriated the term to imagine characters of color into traditionally white characters/narratives (Gilliland, 2016). Gilliland (2016) acknowledges the problems with a racebending tradition that does not consider the systemic racism that would shape a character of color and cautions against a racebending practice that envisions a “color-blind” future. As fans on Tumblr continue to engage in the racebending practice they have begun to hold each other accountable and establish cultural backgrounds within their racebent narrative that “engages in the culture

of minorities being represented instead of just appropriating their faces” (Gilliland, 2016). Significantly, Gilliland (2016) compares the racebending fan practice to Afrofuturism, or ethno-futurism, as a “21st-century, cyber-inspired descendent of these other efforts.” In *The Dark Fantastic*, Thomas (2019) describes racebending as restorying actions that “disrupts the predominant metanarratives and epistemologies that lock people into a single story.” Ultimately, the significance of racebending lies in the possibilities to reimagine what is possible in a canon text.

The Tumblr profile racebendingharrypotter has been active and posting racebent Harry Potter images since 2013, well before *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* was announced. This shows how racebending was utilized when it first became a prominent rhetorical practice in fandom after the creation of Racebending.com and the backlash to whitewashed stories like *The Last Airbender*. Of course, early depictions of racebending Hermione met some resistance. It was a new fanart practice and fans were unsure how to take this change since Emma Watson’s depiction of Hermione in the movies was the basis for most conceptions of Hermione’s race.



Figure 3.2, burdge

Although racebending is a popular and integral aspect of fandom, Figure 3.2 demonstrates an early practice of racebending as well as the initial pushback from other fans. The fanart in figure 3.2 was originally posted in 2014, and depicts the main characters of Harry, Ron, Hermione, Luna, and Ginny in the '90s clothing of time period the books take place. In the image, Hermione is clearly depicted as a Black woman while Harry is a lighter skinned person of color. The first comment by soubidou questions why Hermione is Black and claims they are “troubled here.” Other users push back on soubidou’s comment first attributing the ambiguity of the books’ description of Hermione as a reason for artists to depict a Black Hermione. The last commenter, sourcedumal,

heavily criticized soubidou's comment by sarcastically writing "now you know you can't have Black people in headcanons unless the book explicitly says she was a colored negro afro american chocolate ebony girl." Sourcedumal's criticism ridicules the idea that fictional characters can only be interpreted as the default white character and that Black characters can only exist if specifically identified as such.



Figure 3.3. J.K. Rowling tweet

After the *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* announced that a Black actress, Noma Dumezweni, was going to play Hermione, Rowling quickly tweeted her support (see figure 3.3) and claimed that the canon of the books never specified race ("Harry Potter and the Cursed Child Announces Lead Cast," 2015). This justification for Hermione to be played by a Black actress was celebrated by fans with many seeing it as confirmation of their previous engagement with racebending Hermione within fandom (shainadoesart, 2016; misskittycoventry, 2016). The backlash that came about from the *Cursed Child* announcement was shut down by Rowling herself with her approval of the casting, and other fans rallied to support the casting by pulling on previous fan

discussions regarding the ambiguity of Hermione's race in the books (morallyunequivocal, 2014; voldemortgavemethetalk, 2015).

While the majority of the Harry Potter fandom supported the casting of Dumezweni, it is important to also consider how Rowling does, in fact, depict Hermione as white in the books, and claiming race was never specified is problematic. Several fans pointed this out in the days and months following the announcement. On Tumblr, misssparklesposts (2015) points out that Hermione in the books is absolutely white and would have been clearly depicted otherwise if she was not. Cambionofthesouthpole (2016) criticizes Rowling's actions of claiming Hermione's race was never specified in the books, and compares this new racial ambiguity to when Rowling claimed Dumbledore was gay after the publication of the final book without including it in the books. Rowling's inclusion of BIPOC characters is only as an afterthought to the story, just as Dumbledore's sexuality was an afterthought. Traditional fantasy stories in Western culture, from authors such as Tolkein and C.S. Lewis, historically assumes white audiences and the default understanding of characters as white (Thomas, 2019). The lack of inclusion of racially diverse characters in the canon Harry Potter story, and other popular media, has real world consequences that continue both to marginalize people of color or even imagine such folks in fantastic spaces.



Figure 3.4, peaceofseoul

Despite Rowling's failure to include diversity in canon, the author's approval of the Black Hermione casting in *Cursed Child* encouraged fans to continue and expand on racebending practices within fandom. Figure 3.4 provides an excellent example of the popularity and continued practice of rhetorically inventing a Black Hermione. The fanart in figure 3.4, created by peaceofseoul, depicts Hermione as Black with traditional markers that establish the character as Hermione. The drawing portrays Hermione with large, bushy, curly hair in her Hogwarts uniform with a S.P.E.W button representing Hermione's role as an activist for house elf rights. The background includes large windows, bookshelves, and Hermione is carrying books emphasizing her characterization of always retreating to the library. Peaceofseoul comments on the fanart with a Hermione

quote from the books, “When in doubt, go to the library!” The creator firmly establishes the character as Hermione through these intertextual markers from the books and fan conceptions of Hermione’s character. Furthermore, the inclusion of the S.P.E.W button draws on fan discussions that relate Hermione’s advocacy against slavery to her characterization as a Black woman (morallyunequivocal, 2014; voldemortgavemethetalk, 2015).

Peaceofseoul originally posted the Hermione fanart in 2018, demonstrating the continued longevity of the racebending practice after the *Cursed Child* casting announcement. Figure 3.4 is also one of more popular and widely circulated fanart depictions of Hermione, with over 180,000 notes, which includes reblogging, likes, and comments, with a majority of comments praising the work and the depiction of Hermione. When searching for posts of Hermione on Tumblr, there are as many depictions of Hermione as Black as there are depictions of a white Hermione. Depictions of Black Hermione on Tumblr are so commonplace, there are no longer comments from fans arguing against her portrayal as Black. Harry Potter fans rhetorically invented a Black Hermione, continue to portray her diversity, and have solidified this diverse narrative in fandom.

Hermione as Black is the more prominent example of the rhetorical practice of racebending within the Harry Potter fandom. However, fans have expanded the characters they racebend including Harry Potter himself, citing that the emphasis in the books of his similarity to his father must mean Harry is a person of color like his father, James. Most fans portray Harry as a desi, or south Asian, character and argue that his characterization as desi further explains why he was ignored and excluded by the

Dursleys (prongsmydeer, 2015). As fans interact with pop culture media narratives they “craft ideas of self and society” (Manifold, 2009). Fans are, as Thomas (2019) describes it, “restorying” identity to mirror their experiences, and do so by rhetorically inventing that representation. Racebending in fanart is simply one practice that rhetorically portrays racial inclusion in meaningful ways.

These more clandestine racebending fan practices are impacting new popular media. The Broadway play *Hamilton*, created by Lin-Manuel Miranda, is one such example where the founding fathers are cast as people of color in a way that rhetorically “reimagines American history [and] encouraged audiences to reimagine America’s future” (Jenkins, 2020). The very recent release of *Bridgerton* on Netflix is another example of a popular tv show casting actors of color as presumably white characters. Interestingly, *Bridgerton* showrunners will continue to embrace diverse characters in future seasons as they have recently announced the casting of a south Asian actress as the romantic lead in season two (Andreeva, 2021). In creating these fan works that subvert white audiences and white experiences, fans create a new space to imagine the possibilities for greater inclusion in other areas. Seemingly, what began as a fan practice to rhetorically imagine greater diversity is having real world impacts that has the potential to create greater, meaningful representation in our popular media.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### Women in Harry Potter



- Chirravutever, 2015

The fanart post by chirravutever highlights how Harry Potter fans expand fandom understandings of women characters. Fans take aspects of these characters' depictions in the Harry Potter series and portray robust and developed female characters. Chirravutever depicts Hermione Granger in the wizengamot, the wizarding world's equivalent to parliament, with her daughter Rose Weasley, as noted by the red hair. The image draws on news articles discussing other women world leaders taking their children to their workplace, such as Licia Ronzulli taking her daughter to the European Parliament and New Zealand's Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern bringing her daughter to the UN Assembly (Martinson, 2012; Wilkinson, 2018). The fanart depiction of Hermione is

celebrating her likely success at being a part of wizarding government and continuing to make a difference in the wizarding world, as well as her role as a mother and embracing that role by bringing Rose to work. Chirravutever's fanart of Hermione emphasizes the multifaceted aspects of Hermione's character as an activist, a leader, and a mother, and it is a depiction that resonated within the fan community as the post received just under 25,000 notes.

In this chapter, I will examine how Harry Potter fans use inventional capacities, specifically through female characters, to push against the narrowly defined gender roles of Rowling's universe. The stories are centered around a young boy, but Hermione is a central character in fan discussions and fan fiction. Many times, Hermione becomes the central figure of fan production instead of Harry or Ron. Ginny Weasley is also a significant character among the fan community. Her role in the books and especially the movies is often diminished, but fans have explored the potential she has for a much larger and more impactful role. Owen et al's (2007) analysis of transgressive women in media representations argues that while depictions of transgressive women have aspects that are resistive to male hegemonic order, these depictions often reinstate and re-emphasize this hegemony. Rowling's depictions of Hermione and Ginny are impactful but fails to satisfy the potential for these characters to be transgressive women. Fans remedy this failure by rhetorically creating more robust women characters. I will explore fan discussion posts on Tumblr to demonstrate how fans develop feminist and transgressive representations of women in the Harry Potter universe.

In Harry Potter, J.K. Rowling depicts powerful, independent, and intelligent women. Hermione Granger is Harry Potter's best friend and is often referred to as "the

brightest witch of her age” (Rowling, 1999; 2003). While Hermione is the most prominent and visible example, the series is replete with women who stand their ground and hold significance to the story. Molly Weasley is the most obvious motherly figure in the story and in Harry’s life, but her position as a mother does not diminish her strength and ability. Readers see this most clearly in the final battle at Hogwarts when Molly Weasley defeats Bellatrix, a dangerous enemy often considered the right-hand of Voldemort (Rowling, 2007). Even Bellatrix herself, although a violent antagonist throughout the series, is shown as a strong, forceful leader among Voldemort’s followers. With examples of women across the series, occupation and educational roles are not limited by gender (Croft, 2009). In Rowling’s Harry Potter universe, women appear to have as much opportunity and capability as men to achieve success, influence, and leadership.

Although the original books portray strong female characters, scholars have described where the Harry Potter books fall short in its depiction of women and in its limited notions of gender overall. Cordova (2015) describes how the depiction of women in the story is limited by Harry’s narrative perspective in the books. Although Ginny Weasley is a significant character, her only relevance in the later books comes through Harry’s preoccupation with her as his sometime girlfriend and future wife (Cordova, 2015). Readers learn Ginny is a competitive Quidditch player and a leader of Dumbledore’s Army in her sixth year at Hogwarts, but this information is peripheral and quickly moved over in favor of her relationship with Harry. Ultimately, this woman character is only useful in a limited capacity, as a potential love interest.

Hermione is most affected by Harry's perspective in the story. Hermione is a hero as the best friend of Harry Potter and plays the role of "knowledge-bearer" throughout the books (Cordova, 2015). However, Hermione's ability is often "undermined by language that renders her hysterical, or by behavior that renders her servile" (Cordova, 2015). Despite her ability and skill, Hermione is stereotyped as a bossy, shrill, and motherly character. In fact, Fransisca and Mochtar (2017) argue Harry's three main women friends, Hermione, Ginny, and Luna, all take on roles as mothers by protecting, nurturing, and mentoring Harry. Individually, they are all unique, skillful characters, "but all of their skills are focused on Harry's well-being and not on themselves" (Fransisca & Mochtar, 2017). Kellner (2010) argues the reduction of female characters as "sensitive and motherly" only serves to reinforce "male chauvinistic stereotypes" and demonstrates Rowling's ambiguity towards feminism and her female characters. Popular press authors note that there isn't a single lesbian character in the Harry Potter universe and that Rowling has added hasty understandings of gender and sexuality to the narrative, such as Rowling's reluctant discussion of Dumbledore as gay (Fleming, 2020; Coggan, 2019). Many of the women in the books are wonderful characters left unexplored in the Harry Potter books, and fans have taken it upon themselves to rhetorically invent more complex and nuanced understandings of women and gender in Harry Potter.

Previous scholarship has explored how fans engaged in feminist actions, particularly through fanfiction. Hellekson and Busse (2014) describe fanfiction as a "feminist undertaking" that rewrites the original text with "subversive readings" often expanding on the already present subtext. Fanfiction can present a "woman-oriented worldview," critiquing patriarchal structures in the source text and exploring gaps in

canon (Leow, 2011). Fanfiction can also introduce intersectional perspectives that are absent from canon material (Pande & Moitra, 2017). Pande and Moitra (2017) use the example of the *Once Upon a Time* fandom and its treatment of the Evil Queen's Latinidad. In *Once Upon a Time*, showrunners cast Latina actress Lana Parrilla as the Evil Queen, and Parrilla has affirmed the Evil Queen's identity as Latina, yet the show itself never acknowledges or addresses the Evil Queen's Latinidad. In an attempt to address this failure, fans incorporated the Evil Queen's Latina identity in femslash, or female same-sex pairings, fanfiction within the fandom (Pande & Moitra, 2017). Not all fanfiction is counter hegemonic, and Scodari (2003) cautions against this assumption in their article examining how slash or Mary Sue fanfiction may reproduce hegemony depending on the fan authors motivations and context.

Intentionality is central to rhetorically inventing more complex female characters in fandom, and there is a limitation in fanfiction of creating counter-hegemonic women characters as fans are often drawn to common narrative tropes. Sapuridis (2019) analyzes the depiction of Ginny Weasley in *The Source*, a fanfiction by Luckyducky7. In the fanfic, Ginny is characterized as independent and assertive. Ginny is the heroine of the fanfic who beats the bad guys and saves both Draco and Harry. Sapuridis (2019) argues that Ginny's figuration in the source has the potential to be counter-hegemonic in how it does not sexualize Ginny and highlights her as the strong heroine. However, the fanfic relies heavily on gendered fairy tale tropes, even if those tropes are at times reversed, and Sapuridis (2019) questions the need for fanfics to adhere to these "gendered ideologies."

Despite the use of problematic tropes in fanfiction, they are a useful tool fans use to rhetorically work on developing various characters. However, a significant aspect of

fanfiction is the inspiration fans take from various areas of popular media and fan community. For example, *Manacled* by Senlinyu (2018) is a popular and widely recommended Dramione fanfiction story that has received over 708,000 hits, and 19,000 kudos, or likes. *Manacled* is an alternate universe (AU) story depicting a post-war reality if Harry Potter had died and Voldemort had won. Hermione Granger and Ginny Weasley are both major characters who are central to the eventual defeat of Voldemort. Hermione is portrayed as a healer and the mastermind behind the strategy to defeat Voldemort, and Ginny is the character who eventually kills Voldemort. It is a dark and complex story and borrows heavily from Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, but the characterization of Hermione leans on conceptions developed within fandom, particularly the idea of Hermione as a shrewd and calculating character. The fanart tied to *Manacled* on AO3 is by popular fanartist avendell (2020) and depicts Hermione's magical skill detailed in the fanfic, as well as Hermione wearing *The Handmaid's Tale* cloak after her capture (see figure 4.1). Avendell also shows the news article announcing Ginny's defeat of Voldemort described at the end of Senlinyu's fanfic. *Manacled* is not only an example of a fanfiction with complex women characters, but also demonstrates the way fandom as a community is interconnected and relies on the community of fans for inspiration and development of fan works.



Figure 4.1, avendell

Everyday fan activity is intertwined in fan works produced, and this intertextuality is central to fandom. Kelly (2019) describes the connection between fanfiction and sources of inspiration as a feminist citational model. Kelly (2019) argues “the patriarchal citational model works to perpetuate the idea that certain ideas are owned, and feminist citation works against this model... [Kelly] sees fan fiction as feminist citation in action: a lineage of desires that require something already said.” Part of the subversive invention of female characters in fanfiction comes from this feminist citational model that utilizes a wealth of inspiration. Senlinyu’s *Manacled* is a great example of how fans weave together various sources to create fan works. However, because fan authors create complex women characters that are often derived from the fan community’s development of these characters, the rhetorical invention of transgressive characters in community is more significant than individual fanfics.

### *Meta-Texts*

Meta-texts and headcanon posts on Tumblr are central to the fandom's rhetorical invention of transgressive women characters. Jenkins (2013) defines a meta-text as "constructed by the fan community through its progressively more detailed analysis" of previous source text content. All fans participate in sense-making when engaging with source texts, and meta-texts are a form of sense-making within fandom. However, the rhetorical significance of meta-texts comes from the degree to which these meta-texts are solidified to a canon understanding of the source text. Jenkins (2013) explains how *Star Trek* fans treat meta-texts:

Within fandom, it assumes an institutional status; elaborations become part of the program tradition, gain broad circulation and assume the status of accepted 'facts' seen as binding not only on fans but on the program as well. Many fan discussions develop and elaborate these meta-textual constructs, consolidating the information the series explicitly provided and offering speculations and extrapolations to better explain the motivation and context of narrative events (101).

Meta-texts are an important part of rhetorical fan activity and help establish a shared knowledge of the source text within fandom.

The intertextuality of Tumblr is essential to understanding the layers of meaning and significance of fan analysis of the source texts. Hautsch (2018) emphasizes how discourse on Tumblr always contains multiple layers of meaning, particularly "inter- and meta-textual layers." Meta-texts are part of Hellekson's (2009) culture of giving on Tumblr, where fans treat meta posts as information that invites users to continually build on the components. Meta-texts "influence the understanding and reception" of the source text (Cox, 2018). Meta-texts encompass many kinds of fan posts, including fanon and headcanons. Seymour (2018) defines fanon as "any element of the story which fans have agreed upon within the community, and nenilein (2015) on Tumblr describes headcanons



as information fans interpret “that goes along with canon without contradicting it.” Fanon and headcanons are not the only kinds of meta-texts but will be the kinds of fan meta-texts I explore in this chapter. Nevertheless, these meta-texts that fans rhetorically invent hold almost the same significance as the source text, and, at times, are considered more significant than canon or paratextual information that does not conform to established fandom meta-textual information.



Figure 4.2, hufflepuff-headcanons

*Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* is an excellent example of how canon, or canon-adjacent, material that does not conform to fandom’s meta-textual expectations is rejected. Although Rowling considers *Cursed Child* canon material, the play itself was authored by John Tiffany and Jack Thorne, and many fans felt the play came across as bad fanfiction (Shepherd, 2016). *Cursed Child* brought back time-turners to serve the time-traveling plot, despite the fact that Rowling wrote all time-turners were destroyed in *Order of the Phoenix* (2003). The play also introduced Delphini, the daughter of Voldemort and Bellatrix, as the villain of the story (Shepherd, 2016), an extremely improbable plot point that frustrated many fans. So much so that the Harry Potter fandom preferred to ignore *Cursed Child* as canon material. Figure 4.2 demonstrates hufflepuff-

headcanons' (2018) meta-textual interpretation that that *Cursed Child* is not canon and instead the Harry Potter fandom has embraced *A Very Potter Musical* (AVPM) as an acceptable fan-produced alternative.

The intertextuality of hufflepuff-headcanons' post also highlights the significance of this meta-text. At no point, did hufflepuff-headcanons mention AVPM, but the fan-produced play is so popular within fandom and the one phrase of "hufflepuffs being particularly good finders" is so widely accepted in fandom, that there is no question of what hufflepuff-headcanons is referring to. In fact, AVPM, produced by college students at the University of Michigan in 2009 who later created Starkid productions, has been viewed on YouTube over 17.5 million times (Team StarKid, 2009; *StarKid Productions*). In figure 4.2, blaukrautsuppe comments on the Harry Potter fandoms' divorcing of Rowling, and, though the specific date of the comment is unknown, it only emphasizes how canon or authorized information that contradicts previously established meta-textual information is often rejected within fandom in favor of the rhetorically invented fandom interpretations.



Figure 4.3, ministryofmagiclondon

The Harry Potter fandom's treatment of Ginny Weasley is arguably the best example of how the fans have rhetorically invented a far deeper and complex woman character than is originally depicted. Harry Potter fans have frequently rejected the movie's portrayal of Ginny and taken small scenes within the books to rhetorically develop a transgressive character. Figure 4.3 demonstrates the meta-textual point of tension surrounding Ginny Weasley's character as user capitole adds that "book ginny is 100 times better than movie ginny" to the list of things the Harry Potter fandom universally agrees on. Posts by holdthemegaphone (2015) and kyrstin (2014) both highlight lines from the Harry Potter books that provide greater insight on Ginny as a character. Kyrstin's (2014) post shows a series of eight quotes from *Order of the Phoenix* (2003) of Ginny's relationships with her brothers, Fred and George. Specifically, these quotes emphasize Ginny's participation in Fred and George's pranks and a strong, defiant characteristic similar to her twin brothers. Holdthemegaphone's (2015) post attributes Ginny's athletic skill in Quidditch to Ginny's history of breaking into the broom shed from the age of six to take her brother's brooms and practice flying.

Although Harry Potter fans acknowledge that the books provide a better portrayal of Ginny as a strong, tough female character, fans still criticize how infrequently she appears and how underdeveloped her character is. Tumblr user accio (2021) expresses their frustration at how underdeveloped Ginny's character is, especially as a significant female character in the story. Accio's (2021) meta-text argues that Ginny is a character who has undergone trauma that parallels Harry's experiences, yet the books never really touch on Ginny's trauma unlike Neville, who's traumatic experiences after his parents are tortured is explored and developed. Whiffingbooks (2020) conveys similar

disappointment at the lack of attention given to Ginny in the books citing Ginny's trauma as a significant point of tension that is hardly acknowledged. The Harry Potter fandoms preoccupation with Ginny and her trauma are the central aspect of her character that fans have rhetorically developed.



**karasgis**

Ginny Weasley & Tom Riddle



**nargles4life**

I thought it was really cool and kinda cute until I realized it was Ginny and Tom, then it became horrific. I love it.



**quarter-quirrell**

This is BY FAR the best fan art I have ever seen. You don't realise what it is until you properly look at it.

132,912 notes Feb 26th, 2021



Figure 4.4, nargles4life

In *Chamber of Secrets* (1998), Ginny begins her first year at Hogwarts, but becomes possessed by a piece of Voldemort's soul trapped in a diary and nearly dies

from the experience. Figure 4.4 demonstrates fanart from 2012 showing Tom Riddle, a young Voldemort, made of the ink from the possessed diary haunting over a sleeping eleven-year-old Ginny. The commentary on the post praises both the beautiful fanart and the horrifying illustration of trauma. Understanding the fanart requires fandom knowledge of Ginny's storyline in the books as well as fandom's exploration of the impact of trauma in Ginny's characterization. The post has received over 130,000 notes indicating the significance of Ginny's traumatic experiences to the fandom's meta-textual rhetorical invention of her complex character.

Fandom's interest in Ginny's trauma is furthered through a scene in *Order of the Phoenix* (2003) where Harry blows up at his friends claiming they do not understand his experiences with Voldemort. Ginny mentions that she is the only other person he knows who has been possessed by Voldemort, and after Harry apologizes for forgetting, Ginny simply responds "lucky you" (Rowling, 2003). This is the only mention of Ginny's trauma in the entire series. Stuckwith-harry (2020) discusses the tragedy of Ginny's "lucky you" response, analyzing the trauma of having the villain possess her as well as the trauma of not having that experience acknowledged or even remembered by those around her. Whiffingbooks (2020) expands on the significance of Ginny's character by analyzing how Ginny's journey from "victim to survivor," "damsel in distress to her own knight in shining armour" makes her a more compelling character. Ginny is strong, assertive, independent, and a fighter. All these characteristics are related in the original books, but in failing to convey Ginny's trauma, Rowling denied an important complexity to her character. Instead, fans have rhetorically constructed this complexity into Ginny's character to convey her as a capable character that has grown through her experiences.

These efforts render fandom as the location where fans can create characters that transgress the original bounds of the text and rhetorically invent new characters and new understandings of gender. That transgressive effort is based on the collective work of the fans involved in the rhetorical making. There are a wealth of meta-textual posts on Tumblr that explore Ginny's character and many borrow from each other. Fans continue to discuss Ginny's portrayal in the books, her identity as a cool, independent, athlete as well as the many ways her trauma likely shaped the development of her character. All these meta-texts take various threads of canon material from the book to analyze and rhetorically construct a characterization of Ginny that is not seen in the books or movie. The intertextuality of Tumblr also means that meta-texts on Ginny blend together and rhetorically creates a Ginny accepted by fandom that is more valuable and significant than the books so that other depictions of Ginny outside of this meta-text are less likely to be accepted by Harry Potter fans. In these instances, it is the communal nature of invention and its choric rhetorical force that generates a new way of making the possibilities of the fandom transgress the original text (Rand, 2014).

In this chapter, I have discussed the ways fans transgress the original gender roles and women characters within the Harry Potter universe. I have explored the ways fans use Tumblr as a collective site of rhetorical invention, where fans build a new canon through meta-textual posts and intertextual collaboration. The character of Ginny Weasley underscores how fans can generate an entirely new understanding of characters from the original canon. Although this chapter has focused on Ginny Weasley as the primary point of tension surrounding her characterization, fans have similarly rhetorically constructed a new understanding of other canon characters. Hermione Granger is often

explored as a far more ruthless character, willing to do what is necessary in her pursuit of justice. Luna Lovegood is depicted in the original canon as an oddball, and fans have reframed her character to emphasize her emotional intelligence. It is through the communal act of posting and engaging on Tumblr that new possibilities regarding gender roles are invented in the Harry Potter fandom.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Conclusion

In this thesis, I have explored how fans utilized textual resources to rhetorically invent a more inclusive understanding of the Harry Potter universe. Fans use fandom to create a community that reflects what they want to see, and what is often denied in the original source text. Jenkins (2013) concept of fans as “textual poachers” has shaped fan scholarship and centrally guided this research. Fandom provides a space for these “textual poachers” to rhetorically invent greater representation and inclusivity. The phenomenon and popularity of Harry Potter provides a wealth of fan produced material to demonstrate how fans engage in this rhetorical invention.

I centered this research on three main areas of rhetorically invented inclusion within the Harry Potter fandom: LGBTQ+, racial, and gender representation. The second chapter explored how narrative tropes, metaphors, and symbols within fanfiction rhetorically conveyed and normalized LGBTQ+ experiences. Using the popular fan slash pairing of Draco and Harry in “Then Comes a Mist and a Weeping Rain” to depict queer experiences in an authentic and normalized manner that led to the fanfics popularity within fandom. Chapter three addressed the fan practice of racebending as a rhetorical tool to include greater racial diversity with the Harry Potter universe. Hermione is the most popular racebent character within the fandom and fans did not just portray Hermione as Black, but also rhetorically contextualized her Black identity with her characterization of advocating for justice. Finally, chapter four emphasized fans'



rhetorical invention of more complex female characters through the creation and circulation of meta-texts on Tumblr. The characterization of Ginny Weasley as a strong character who overcomes trauma and grows from that experience is the most prominent example since the underdevelopment of Ginny's character in the books and movies is frequently a point of tension in fandom. These case studies highlight the different ways that fans use rhetorical invention to shape a narrative universe that reflects their own representational wishes.



Figure 5.1, hpandthegenderbendingblog

There are many more ways that fans are inventing meaningful representations of diversity. Fanfiction, practices like racebending, and meta-textual discussions become sites of this rhetorical invention, but they are not the only tools through which fans practice greater inclusion. Although outside the scope of this thesis, other places for more research within the Harry Potter fandom includes fan practices like genderbending and

alternate universes (AUs). Similar to racebending, genderbending alters the gender of various characters, the most popular genderbent character among fans is Harry Potter himself (Seymour, 2018). Genderbending does not simply confine characters to girl or boy, but often depicts a spectrum of gender identities and experiences. Figure 5.1 depicts Harry Potter as a transgender girl and a person of color, and is another example of how fans rhetorically invent new modes of understanding characters and storylines in Harry Potter. AU's within fandom take shape in meta-textual posts on Tumblr as well as in fanfiction, and rhetorically create new storylines within the Harry Potter universe. As briefly touched on in chapter four, *Manacled* by Senluyu (2018) considers a Harry Potter storyline where Voldemort wins. *Manacled's* themes consider gender, trauma, and redemption in a way not explored within canon, and provides a wealth of material demonstrating how fans rhetorically invent diverse representation within fandom.

As another example, fans on Tumblr often provide transcripts of videos or textual descriptions of images. This is a newer fan practice, but another instance of fans engaging in inclusionary practices. Although fandom is in no way perfect or entirely counter-hegemonic, these case studies and the willingness of media fandom to continuously examine their discourse and improve as needed demonstrates the significance of these communities as a site for further research. Particularly as media fandom becomes more mainstream, these conversations and instances of fan rhetorical invention will have an impact on our larger culture.

Already, conversations that existed in early fandom surrounding representation and its lack thereof are becoming more mainstream. The recent release of *Bridgerton* on Netflix is the most recent example of fan invention permeating the mainstream media

community. *Bridgerton*, a regency era period drama, cast Black actors for roles that were depicted as white characters in the books (Statt, 2021). The practice of substituting white characters with characters of color could easily be influenced by the fan practice of racebending and the growing demand from audiences to see more diverse representation on screen (Andrews, 2019; Kohnen, 2018). However, it is important to note, that while fans have made a point to develop racebending in a way that acknowledges the racial and ethnic significance of these racebent characters, *Bridgerton* has not done the same. Fans use racebending to further a characters story as described through Black Hermione and tying that in to her role as an activist against house elf slavery. Whereas *Bridgerton* cast Black actors for previously white characters without providing any explanation or acknowledging the racial impacts of these characters as Black thereby creating an almost “color-blind” story (Wolf 2021). Without properly contextualizing Black experiences, racebending is not necessarily progressive if all it does is reinstate a colorblind racial ideology.

If fan practices to rhetorically invent representation can permeate to mainstream media, we should potentially celebrate and encourage this. The possibility for greater widespread change through the adoption of fan practices demonstrates the timeliness of further fan studies. While I have tried to focus on the ways that fandom can work in positive, transformative ways that can impact our society, we do need to acknowledge that there are aspects of fandom and fan studies generally that are still problematic. Fan communities continue to prioritize conceptions of whiteness and fail to consider fans of color or international fans (Stanfill, 2011; 2018). In the Harry Potter fandom, fans have typically paid little attention to the characters of color that are in the books. When Rachel

Rostad, an Asian American poet, criticized and challenged the stereotypical representation of Cho Chang in Harry Potter, Rostad received significant backlash from the fan community (Lee, 2020). Despite the backlash Rostad's poem received, Rostad continued to engage with critics to argue how Cho Chang's singular representation of East Asian's perpetuates discrimination (Lee, 2020). Only in the last few years, as criticism against Rowling has mounted and her portrayal of Asians in *Fantastic Beasts* has received significant resistance, have fans begun to discuss the problems with the depictions of diverse characters within the canon (arson-yeehaw, 2020). There is hope that fans will move away from centering whiteness as media fandoms on Tumblr are concerned with educating themselves and working to improve their fan practices.

Nevertheless, popular media continues to fail in providing adequate representation. Problematic depictions of race in the *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* movie franchise presents opportunities for further research within the Harry Potter fandom. Rowling has been heavily criticized for screenwriting in the *Fantastic Beasts* movies. Both for the narrative inconsistencies from the original canon information and, most significantly, for her treatment of marginalized populations in the story. In anticipation of the release of the first *Fantastic Beasts* movie, Rowling published a four-part series of magic in North America on Pottermore and received significant criticism for appropriating the skinwalker Navajo legend and utilizing stereotypical depictions of Native peoples (Flood 2016). This was not the end of Rowling's racist tropes in *Fantastic Beasts*.

Although fans were initially looking forward to the casting of an Asian woman in the second installment of the series *Crimes of Grindelwald*, Rowling and producers cast

an Asian woman for the character of Nagini, who suffers from a blood curse that will eventually permanently transform her into a snake. The implication of this storyline is that Nagini becomes Voldemort's cherished companion, aiding in the murder of Voldemort's opponents, and a horcrux, a vessel for Voldemort's soul. Miranda (2018) describes just how troublesome this storyline is with its utilization of extremely racist tropes in depicting an Asian woman as a snake and eventual pet and servant to an evil wizard. The layers of racism and misogyny in the depiction of Nagini in *Fantastic Beasts* cannot be understated, and fans have vehemently opposed and criticized Rowling's racist representations.

The multitude of issues surrounding the *Fantastic Beasts* franchise is compounded by the continued casting of Johnny Depp after accusations of domestic abuse. In 2016, Amber Heard filed for divorce against Depp and accused him of domestic abuse. Despite fans calling for Depp to be fired and being at the height of the #metoo movement, Depp was not fired from his role in *Fantastic Beasts* and Rowling as well as David Yates, the director, went so far as to defend Depp's casting (Dockterman 2020). Heard's claims were dismissed by the film's producers, and later Depp went on to accuse Heard of committing domestic violence against him. Fans went from vehemently opposing Depp for the allegations against him to supporting him as a victim of abuse himself. Eventually, when Depp lost his libel case in 2020, he was asked to resign from the *Fantastic Beasts* franchise (Vary 2020). Fans continue to negotiate their relationship to Johnny Depp, Amber Heard, and the *Fantastic Beasts* movies as a whole. With all the problems apparent in the movies and ongoing anti-trans commentary from Rowling, fans have called for the boycott of *Fantastic Beasts* and Rowling herself. The wealth of fan

discussions and reactions to *Fantastic Beasts* and its many issues presents several opportunities for further research in how fans act as “textual poachers” and rhetorically address issues of representation.

Finally, this research focused its analysis of fan activity within the Tumblr platform. Tumblr has been a primary site of fandom since 2012, and is the central location for day to day fandom activity. However, there has been a growing trend of Harry Potter fan activity on Tik Tok. Tik Tok as a social media platform grew in popularity in 2020 mainly due to the COVID-19 pandemic, so it is still a relatively new platform and mostly popular with younger people. It is a heavily used platform and a great site for analysis of fan activity. Harry Potter fans on Tik Tok are carving a space for fan discussions and are using a wide variety of rhetorical inventions. From creating mini trailers for their favorite fanfictions, to depicting the daily, normal lives of their favorite characters, or calling out issues of representation in the books, fans on Tik Tok are using this very new platform to engage in fan activity in a very new and interesting way. I believe Tik Tok could easily become a new site of daily fan activity alongside Tumblr, perhaps even eventually migrating the community away from Tumblr entirely. This is a very real possibility as the average age of users on Tumblr increases and younger fans start up their segments of fandom in newer, more mainstream platforms.

This thesis shows the different ways that fans use community to invent new rhetorical representations within their object of fandom. These case studies have examined how Harry Potter fans negotiate issues of LGBTQ+ experiences, racial representations, and gender depictions. By highlighting how Harry Potter fans can develop new characters and push canonical literature and other programming into

specific directions, this thesis has added to the literature on the study of communication. Using Jenkins' (2013) concept of fans as "textual poachers," this thesis has further explored how fandom's function within a subcultural public with their own unique rhetorical practices. This thesis has discussed the rhetorical practices within fan studies in analyzing how fans negotiate the canon text and issues of representation. Fandom has the opportunity to impact cultural conceptions of representation and diversity, and further research could continue to explore how these fan practices impact our mainstream media consumption.

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