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Magically empathetic: an investigation of theory of mind and empathy in the Harry Potter series

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ABSTRACT

Magically Empathetic: An Investigation of Empathy and Theory of Mind through the
Character of Harry Potter

By Lindsey Layman

Research suggests that reading fiction can increase empathy, and a number of studies

have found the Harry Potter series to promote pro-social values. One prosocial value that

has not been explored directly in relation to the series, however, is empathy. Defined as

"the experience of understanding another person's condition from their perspective,"

empathy is the motivation behind many prosocial behaviors and values, making it an

important focus of investigation. In this study, I conduct a textual analysis of the Harry

Potter series using the perspective of theory of mind and simulation theory as a guide.

After analyzing a range of situations in which Harry and his friends respond

empathetically to acts of discrimination, I argue that empathy in the series is

communicated to readers primarily through Harry, whose inner thoughts, perspectives,

actions, words, and "theory of mind" dominate the story even when he is not directly

involved in specific demonstrations of empathy.

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INTRODUCTION

The Harry Potter series, written by J.K. Rowling, became a global phenomenon

after the first book was published in 1998. The popularity of the books forced *The New*

York Times to create a separate best-seller list for children's books leading up to the

release of the fourth installment of the series (Smith, 2000). J.K. Rowling became the

first billion-dollar author following the release of the series, which was published in 55

languages and sold over 400 million copies worldwide (Guinness World Records, 2004).

The film franchise based on the books earned about $10 billion from 2001 to 2010,

excluding merchandise sales (Hughes, 2013). Harry's magical world came to life not only

in films, but also in Universal theme parks, with locations in Orlando, Hollywood, and

Japan. The series has also inspired college courses in universities around the world,

including "Christian Theology and Harry Potter" at Yale University, "Harry Potter and

the Age of Illusion" at Durham University, and "The Ethics of Harry Potter" at

Bridgewater State College.

The series follows Harry and his friends as they fight against the evil wizard,

Voldemort, who seeks both immortality and the enslavement of all non-magical beings. It

may seem laughable that a children's series could have any cultural effect on the world at

large. However, numerous studies suggest that the series has had a range of prosocial

effects on readers, including greater acceptance of outgroups, greater support for

diversity and equality, higher political tolerance, and greater opposition to the use of

violence and torture (See, e.g., Gierzynski, 2013; and Vezzali et al., 2014).

One prosocial value that has not been explored directly in relation to the series,

however, is empathy. Defined as "the experience of understanding another person's

condition from their perspective," it is thought to underlie prosocial behaviors and values, such as greater support for diversity and equality (Psychology Today, 2016). As Keen (2006) writes, "*Empathy*, a vicarious, spontaneous sharing of affect, can be provoked by witnessing another's emotional state, by hearing about another's condition, or even by reading" (p. 208). This suggests that empathy is the motivation behind many prosocial behaviors and values, making it an important focus of investigation.

In this study, I wish to examine the role of empathy in the Harry Potter series from the perspective of a single character: Harry himself. As Harry is the main protagonist and the only character whose inner thoughts are made accessible to readers, his perspective dominates the story, and readers experience the series through him. Because of this, it is likely that readers will develop a stronger relationship with Harry than any of the other characters. It has been found that "media characters can serve as role models and the relationship with them can help teenagers in constructing their own identity and learn more about social roles and role-compatible behavior" (Schmid & Klimmt, p. 254). Readers are likely to experience Harry's attitudes and behaviors firsthand because in a sense, they are "in his head." His feelings are the most prevalent and his empathetic values the most strongly communicated. This is what makes examining Harry, specifically, so important.

Based on the findings of past research, my assumption is that the series increases empathy in readers by allowing them to gain an understanding of the world around them and the injustices they see through Harry's perspective. The decisions Harry makes in the series are not always easy, much as in reality, but the series' namesake character's ability to distinguish right from wrong is nearly unfailing. As people in a real-world society

riddled with a lack of tolerance and discrimination read about Harry's struggles, they may also learn how to deal with these matters in their own lives. J.K. Rowling assures her readers that "we do not need magic to transform our world. We carry all the power we need inside ourselves already" (Harvard University Commencement Speech, 4 June 2008). Magic isn't what helps Harry save the Wizarding world—it's empathy.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The link between reading fiction and increased empathy has been a popular subject matter in academic studies. A commonly suggested foundation for this relationship is theory of mind, which refers to "the cognitive capacity to attribute mental states to self and others" (Goldman, p. 2). Theory of mind is the ability to understand what other people are thinking and why. According to Goldman, "People engaged in social life have many thoughts and beliefs about others' (and their own) mental states, even when they don't verbalize them" (p. 2). Cognitive science is still trying to understand how humans are capable of executing theory of mind and have proposed multiple theories. This study will rely on the *simulation theory* approach to theory of mind in order to help explain the mechanism or process through which fiction helps readers develop theory of mind.

Simulation theory, also referred to as empathy theory, was developed by Robert Gordon in 1986. Gordon proposed that "we can predict others' behavior by answering the question, 'What would I do in that person's situation?'" (Goldman, p. 10). By imagining themselves in the shoes of another, readers are able to better understand that person's

perspective and motives. Goldman uses the example of chess players to better explain simulation theory:

> Chess players playing against a human opponent report that they
>
> visualize the board from the other side, taking the opposing pieces for
>
> their own and vice versa. They pretend that their reasons for action
>
> have shifted accordingly. Thus transported in imagination, they make
>
> up their mind what to do and project this decision onto the opponent
>
> (Goldman, p. 10).

As most fiction is a description of a situation, simulation allows the reader to understand the fictional worlds created by the author and the scenarios that surround them. Empathy is also involved in simulation, as descriptions of emotions are how characters are understood and developed (de Vignemont & Singer, 2006). It has been found that "reading the simulations of a story involves the same brain structures as those used for comparable actions and perceptions in real life,"(Dijikic et al., p. 33) and that "fictional stories are simulations designed to run not on computers but on minds" (p. 31).

In 2006, Mar, et al. conducted a study, based on simulation, in which they found that empathy and theory of mind were increased in those who read fiction. They also found that individuals who mostly read nonfiction tended to be less empathetic and have less capacity for theory of mind. In their discussion, the researchers pointed out that when learning to fly a plane, people use a flight simulator to improve their flying skills. They compared this to people engaging in simulations of fiction, which enable them to become better in the subject matter of the story, including empathy and understanding others.

Another study conducted by Johnson (2012) had participants read a short story that was written to promote empathy and prosocial behaviors. Questionnaires completed after the participants read the short story showed connection to the characters and empathy. Soon after finishing the short story and the questionnaires, participants witnessed someone drop pens, apparently by accident, and those who were more transported into the short story were shown to be more likely to assist the person in picking up the pens, indicating an increase in empathy.

This simulation occurs because readers try to place themselves in the shoes of fictional characters to understand what they are thinking and feeling (Dijikic et al., 2013). Any successful fiction will evoke an emotional response from the reader; however, these emotions do not belong simply to the characters in the story, but also to the readers themselves. It is this aspect of fictional literature that is thought to give it the ability to enhance empathy in its audience. Readers often develop a relationship with the protagonists and can even identify with them. This character identification is more often experienced in fiction than in nonfiction and allows the reader to sympathize with the protagonist and other characters (Dijikic et al., 2014).

The foundation behind readers identifying with fictional characters is transportation, which can be defined as "a convergent process, where all mental systems and capacities become focused on events occurring in the narrative" (Bal and Veltkamp, p. 3). Essentially, when readers are transported into a story, they blur the lines between reality and fiction, and "the events in the story are perceived as real within the story context, even when events would not be possible in reality" (Belt and Veltkamp, p. 3).

Transportation is especially important to consider in this study as it elicits emotional involvement in a story, allowing empathetic skills and theory of mind to improve.

A study conducted by Bal and Veltkamp in 2013 investigated the connection between reading fiction and increased empathy over time when a reader is transported into a story. It had been suggested by other research that "people who read a lot of fiction become more empathic, because fiction is a simulation of social experiences, in which people practice and enhance their interpersonal skills" (Bal & Veltkamp, p. 1). The researchers used two studies to explore this hypothesis. In their first study, they had 66 Dutch students either read a Sherlock Holmes story or newspaper reports. The researchers randomly assigned the readings, having 36 read the fictional story and 30 read non fiction. All participants completed an empathy scale before the reading, immediately after the reading, and one week after the reading. They also completed an emotional transport measure immediately following the reading. The first study showed that those who were more emotionally transported into the fictional story had increased empathetic skills over time, while the opposite was true for those who were not emotionally transported into the story. The researchers concluded that "when people read a Sherlock Holmes story and become fully engaged in the story and identify strongly with the main characters, empathy is enhanced over time and empathy decreases for non-transported readers" (Bal & Veltkamp, p. 5).

The researchers replicated their findings in a second study, using a different fictional story. In the second study, 50 participants read a fictional chapter from *Blindness* by Saramago, and 47 others read newspaper reports. In the second study, they found that "low transportation led to lower empathy over time. Inspection of the

interaction effects revealed that especially at low levels of transportation, empathy became lower among fiction readers" (Bal & Veltkamp, p. 8). The researchers noted that transportation fluctuates and is not a stable variable, so "increase of transportation only enhances empathy for fiction readers, and not for non-fiction readers" (Bal & Veltkamp, p. 8).

Applying the findings of these studies to *Harry Potter*, the most popular children's literature series in history, suggests it as a particularly important vehicle for reader transportation and thus empathy. As British children's literature scholar, Peter Hunt, argues, "The authors read by the greatest number of children are those who must be examined most carefully: it is these writers whose attitudes and politics are most likely to be stamped (through subconscious osmosis) into the national consciousness" (Anatol, p. xiv). Throughout the series, Harry displays extraordinary abilities and goes on fantastic adventures; however, the novels boil down to far more than a boy waving around a magic wand. Beach and Willner (2002) set out to see just what is it that draws readers into the series. "What begins as a seemingly simple story of a boy's entry into an unknown world of magic turns into a search for identity, a battle between good and evil, a maze of moral decision-making, and a quest for the meaning of human relationships" (pp. 103- 104). Children relate to Harry's struggles as he stumbles through a world he doesn't understand and tries to become a man. "Rowling opens the door for adolescent readers to share the characters' power while experiencing a connection to literature that has the opportunity to enrich their lives" (p. 104). Rowling also shows a lot of respect towards her mostly young audience. She deals with heavy themes and gives them longer books to read, further motivating children to read and become absorbed in the series. With these adult themes,

"child readers can feel vindicated by observing how much heavy responsibility Harry Potter and his friends—and by extension, they themselves—must and can shoulder" (Anatol, pp. xii- xiii).

Having Harry grow up through the course of the series allows young readers to further identify with him, as he is often dismissed by adults in the narrative even when he is right. Anatol makes an argument about how this relationship is developed, writing that, "Children feel small in size and influence, especially when they are expected to be 'seen and not heard.' As a mere infant, the tiny and apparently helpless Harry Potter reveals that he possesses tremendous power when he deflects the fatal spell of the mighty wizard Voldemort" (Anatol, p. xii). Many adults in the series are often proven wrong, including Harry's greatest mentor, Hogwarts Headmaster Albus Dumbledore, who says, "The best of us sometimes eat our words" (*Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, p. 331) and "Age is foolish and forgetful when it underestimates youth" (*Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*. pp.. 564-565). All of these elements contribute to the relationship young readers develop with Harry and undoubtedly lead to a higher level of emotional transportation, presumably allowing them to be more affected by the stories and the values they instill.

A study published in the *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* tested "whether the novels of Harry Potter can be used as a tool for improving attitudes toward stigmatized groups" (Vezzali et al., p. 105). The research consisted of three studies, the first involving fifth-grade children given a questionnaire about their tolerance towards immigrants, the second involving high school students given a questionnaire about their tolerance towards homosexuals, and the third involving undergraduates given a

questionnaire about their tolerance towards refugees. In each of the tests, the participants were divided into two groups, a control group and an experimental group that read selected passages from the series over the course of six weeks.

The control group read neutral passages from the Harry Potter series such as when Harry purchased his first wand or when he plays Quidditch, a Wizarding sport. Following that, they had a discussion with a researcher about the passage they read. The experimental group read passages "related to issues of prejudice and their consequences" (Vezzali et al., p. 108), such as when Draco Malfoy, a negative character in the series, insults one of Harry's best friends, Hermione Granger, by calling her a "filthy little Mudblood" because her parents are non magical. The experimental group then discussed the consequences of the prejudicial acts and the suffering they caused the characters. At the end of the six week time period, all of the participants took the questionnaire again. In all three studies, the experimental groups that read passages dealing with prejudice showed a significant change in their tolerance towards the stigmatized group they were tested on. The control group that read the neutral passages showed no change. The study showed that reading the Harry Potter series improved attitudes towards stigmatized groups.

METHODOLOGY

This paper uses textual analysis to examine how Harry expresses empathy in the face of various instances of injustice throughout the *Harry Potter* series, and considers how characters' expressions of and behaviors related to empathy might affect young audiences through the processes discussed above related to theory of mind. Although I focus more on other characters than Harry, it is important to note that readers experience

the series directly through Harry's eyes. He determines whether actions or words should be considered as negative or positive by the audience. Those whom Harry admires or cares for express overwhelmingly positive empathetic values throughout the series, teaching both Harry and readers right from wrong.

Textual analysis refers to "a broad class of procedures in which the focus is on networks consisting of connected concepts rather than counts of concepts" (Carley, p. 78). According to Alan McKee, textual analysis is "a way for researchers to gather information about how other human beings make sense of the world" and is used to "make an educated guess at some of the most likely interpretations that might be made of that text" (p. 1).

Textual analysis of empathy in the *Harry Potter* series will focus on the following three issues: racism, classism, and discrimination towards other stigmatized groups including homosexuals and those with stigmatized illnesses. Each of these issues is described and its relevance in the series discussed. Quotes and scenarios from the text are used to show how Harry's thoughts are impacted by these issues and how he and those around him react to them. Finally, I discuss how Harry's attitudes and behaviors related to these issues are likely to impact the empathy of readers and how, through the use of allegory and allusion, they may help readers make associations to real world examples of discrimination and inequality.

To begin this research, I conducted a close reading of the series, specifically looking for instances of the three issues outlined above. I considered how Harry himself related to and dealt with the events surrounding each issue. In the majority of the instances mentioned, Harry does not speak on the issue, but a mentor or friend of his

does. Since Harry's perspective is the sole one readers have access to, his thoughts determine if the character's words or actions were positive or negative. Looking at Harry's relationship to each instance of discrimination or injustice that occurs in the narrative is important in order to understand how his responses are framed for the readers.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

From the very beginning of the *Harry Potter* series, prejudice and hatred towards those who are different is seen as the driving force behind a war among wizard kind. In the first chapter of the series, readers learn that a war based on a kind of wizard xenophobia has just ended. The next chapter skips about 10 years, and the audience learns alongside Harry that the war is beginning to rear its ugly head again. The main issue dealt with in the Potter series and the one that motivates both wars is racism. As Harry ages, the issue of racism becomes not only more dire as the war escalates but also becomes more and more apparent to the reader. The innocence of childhood shields Harry slightly in the first books, as Harry learns not only the ways of the Wizarding world, but about the injustices that come from those who hold hateful, antiquated opinions. As Rowling commented, "The Potter books in general are a prolonged argument for tolerance, a prolonged plea for an end to bigotry" (Carnegie Hall lecture, 19 October 2007). She sets up an entirely fictional world riddled with the same issues the real world faces. By writing characters who are easily interpreted as "good" or "bad," books targeting a young audience easily teach them right from wrong as far as these magical issues go. The audience is also able to see the dangers of systemic or institutionalized racism and privilege through "good" characters who sometimes express

subtle "microaggressions", which can be defined as "brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to certain individuals because of their group membership" (Sue, p. xvi), toward outgroups in a society that has made discrimination acceptable. By coding racism as an issue of blood status (as will be explained below), young readers are able to understand the consequences of intolerance.

In "Ideology and Race in American History," Fields states that the first mistake in defining racism is to think of it as "an observable physical fact, a thing, rather than a notion that is profoundly and by its very essence ideological" (Fields, p. 144). The trouble with "race" in a fantasy series that relies on allegory rather than literal depictions is that race becomes a slippery concept. For example, racism in the Harry Potter series is primarily dealt with as an issue of blood composition or blood status (which is discussed more fully below). Moreover, characters can change their appearance at will, whether with a spell or a potion. Within the series, those who hold what we could consider in our society more racist ideologies believe that differences among races are genetic or based on blood composition, much as the Nazi scientists in World War II advertised supposed genetic differences to distinguish the Aryan race from those of Jewish descent or non-Ayrans. However, perhaps because she seeks to highlight the constructed nature of race, Rowling avoids clear-cut parallels between race and racism in Harry's world and the way these concepts are understood and applied in our own society.

Within the *Harry Potter* series, race related to skin color is rarely acknowledged directly. For example, fans often debate Hermione Granger's race. This issue came to a head when Noma Dumezweni, a black woman, was cast in the stage production of *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* as Hermione, who had been played by a white Emma

Watson in the films. Rowling responded to the backlash, saying that Hermione had only been described in the books as having "brown eyes, frizzy hair, and very clever. White skin was never specified" (Twitter, Dec. 21, 2015). Within the series itself, with character names such as Parvarti Patil and Cho Chang, it can be assumed that the Wizarding world is fairly diverse.

As mentioned above, racism in the *Harry Potter* series is primarily dealt with as an issue of blood composition or blood status. The varying levels of blood status include pure-bloods, half-bloods, Muggle-borns, and Muggles. These terms have been defined in a glossary for convenience (See Appendix A) and will be discussed at length below. As the series opens, there seems to be a clearly defined line between good and evil; and this line is drawn on race-based principles. As the characters age and the story progresses, the themes of inequality and prejudice increase in intensity. Much as in reality, the line between what is right and wrong is sometimes blurred as the main protagonists try to stay the course in their fight against an evil that seeks to "purify" the magical world. Because this is a fantasy series, this study deals with both humans and non-humans. For the sake of this study, the term "race" will refer to the social concept of a group of characters, including non-humans.. In Rowling's world, humans may be superior socially, but they are often bested by their non-human counterparts. During my readings, I considered all characters as equal sentient beings. I deliberately ignored species distinctions to only focus on the injustices facing those who are wizards' equals in all areas but social status.

In the Wizarding world, some of the older Wizarding families are often described as "pure-bloods,"meaning the family is devoid of anyone without magical powers. Some, but not all, pure-bloods believe their blood status makes them better than those with

mixed blood and that their purity of blood makes them more powerful. This is proven false throughout the series. Draco Malfoy and Neville Longbottom, both pure-bloods, are seen exhibiting very different levels of magical abilities. Draco performs at a proficient level and is even seen excelling in some areas. However, his father berates him for being beaten by Hermione Granger, a girl of "lesser" blood status, telling his son that he should "be ashamed that a girl of no wizard family beat you in every exam" (*Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, p. 52). Neville is at the bottom of his class and often receives help from the same student who bested Draco, despite her "lesser" blood status. Vincent Crabbe and Gregory Goyle, two of Draco's pure-blood friends, are also seen as incompetent. There is even evidence of inbreeding among pure-blood families in order to assure that their bloodline remains unsullied. Despite this, the stereotype that pure-bloods are more powerful and worthy of magic is still held by a large portion of the Wizarding community.

The prejudiced families regard other pure-blood families as "blood traitors" if they believe those of "lesser" blood status to be equal to them. An example of this point of contention is illustrated through the Malfoy and Weasley families. The Malfoys, who are considered negative characters within the series, align themselves with the story's main antagonist, Lord Voldemort, ultimately leading to their fall from grace in the public eye. They openly express their prejudice towards those of lesser blood status and believe only those of "pure-blood" should be allowed to practice magic. On the other hand, the Weasley family, though equal to the Malfoys in blood status, do not share their beliefs. The family of Ron Weasley, Harry Potter's best friend, care nothing about blood status and do not equate it to worth. Arthur Weasley, the patriarch of the family, holds a

position in the Wizarding government as the "Head of the Misuse of Muggle Artifacts

Office" and is terribly interested in all things "muggle" or what wizards call "nonmagic

folk" (*Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, p. 40). Because of this hobby, which is

considered quirky by most and unsavory by some, Arthur's job is ultimately deemed

unimportant by society at large.

"Half-bloods" are a little more complicated and would seem to be the most

common among wizards. More or less, any witch or wizard who is not completely pure-

blood, meaning some of their family members do not possess magical abilities, is

considered to be a half-blood. Though they are of a lesser blood status than the pure-

bloods, some half-bloods share the same prejudice against Muggles and Muggle-borns.

This animosity is best displayed through the series' main antagonist, Lord Voldemort.

Voldemort, born Tom Marvolo Riddle Jr., was the son of a witch and a Muggle father. It

can be speculated that the underlying cause of Voldemort's hatred towards Muggles

stems from his father abandoning his still-pregnant mother. As many half-bloods do,

Voldemort denies his blood status, leading most to believe that he is a pure-blood.

Ultimately, he becomes enraged whenever he is associated with his Muggle father, even

changing his name so that no connection is left between them.

Dumbledore is another half-blood who is often mistaken for a pure-blood. Though

he never denies his blood status, Dumbledore is generally secretive about his family

history. It seems the norm that most half-bloods do not advertise their blood status so

that they may avoid harassment. Harry Potter is the exception to this. Harry proudly

claims his half-blood parentage, never afraid to admit that he is the son of a pure-blood

father from an ancient wizard family and a mother of Muggle descent. Granted his celebrity precedes him in most circles, making his openness less of a risk.

Additionally, there are Muggles and Muggle-borns. Muggles do not possess any magical abilities and are for the most part completely unaware that wizards even exist. Initially, Muggles and wizards were separated as a matter of safety. In Rowling's series, the history of the Wizarding world runs deep and throughout the series, both readers and characters discover more about the history of wizards through classes at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. It is through Professor Binns, who is actually a ghost, that the characters learn that wizards felt the need to be protected from Muggles after they began persecuting those who displayed magical abilities in the seventeenth century, no doubt a nod to the witch trials of the 1600s. From this fear rose the International Statute of Wizarding Secrecy of 1689 to keep wizards hidden. As years passed and the separation between magical and non-magical people grew, rumors about Muggles also grew. For example, Neville Longbottom explains to Harry that after Hogwarts had been taken over by supporters of Voldemort that the curriculum became much more discriminatory towards Muggles. He describes a lesson in Muggle Studies in which students were forced to listen to a professor as she explained "how Muggles are like animals, stupid and dirty, and how they drove wizards into hiding by being vicious towards them, and how the natural order is being reestablished" (*Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows,* p. 574). Through scare tactics such as these, Muggles came to be thought of as "different" and were considered as "other" by wizards who knew little to nothing about them. This demonstrates to readers how it is easier to fear that which we do not relate to or understand. Those who are considered "different" can easily be classified as "dangerous."

With this label of "dangerous" comes hate, and with hate comes torment. In a scene in the fourth installment of the series, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, a group of Voldemort's followers, called Death Eaters, are seen humiliating a Muggle family by suspending them in the air. A woman, called Mrs. Roberts, is flipped upside down by one of the tormentors, and "her nightdress fell down to reveal voluminous drawers and she struggles to cover herself up as the crowd below her screeched and hooted with glee" (*Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, p. 120). Ron Weasley remarks that the act is "really sick" as he helplessly watches the group continue their torment of a small Muggle child, causing him to "spin like a top, sixty feet above the ground, his head flopping limply from side to side" (*Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, p. 120).

Granted, this general distrust is also seen from Muggles who are aware of wizards in the series. For example, the Dursley family, the most prominent Muggles in the series and for all intents and purposes, Harry's foster family, are seen as intolerant towards wizards and magic. Despite knowing about Harry's parents' magical abilities and the circumstances of their deaths, the Dursleys refuse to tell their nephew that he is a wizard. It is only after Hagrid, a kind half-giant and great friend of Harry's, comes to get the boy when he is 11 that Harry learns who he really is. Once Harry becomes involved in the Wizarding world, the Dursleys make it clear that magic is "as welcome in their house as dry rot" (*Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, p. 19). They make it abundantly clear that they think very lowly of "*their kind*" (*Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, p. 42) in reference to wizards, and Harry is always aware that the Dursleys believe that "having a wizard in the family [is] a matter of deepest shame" (*Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, p. 5). They often refer to wizards as "freaks" and treat the word "magic" as

profanity in their home, going so far as to lock up Harry's schoolbooks so that he is unable to study over the summers.

Muggle-borns are the children of two non-magic parents and are the most harshly discriminated against in the series by characters with magical powers. Hermione Granger, Harry Potter's other best friend, is the daughter of two Muggle dentists and is not known to have any magical relatives. Despite her low-blood status, Hermione is often described as "the cleverest witch of her age" (*Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, p. 357) and is usually the quickest student of her year to master a spell or potion. She is often seen helping Ron, a pure-blood, and Harry, a half-blood, with their homework, despite being of "inferior" blood status to both of them. Lily Evans, another Muggle-born in the series and Harry's mother, also excels at magic, despite her Muggle lineage. She is described by one of her old professors as "one of the brightest I ever taught" (*Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince,* p. 70).

Some of the more prejudiced pure-bloods and half-bloods use the racial slur "Mudbloods" to refer to Muggle-borns, though it is not a term that is generally used in polite society and is considered taboo. Draco Malfoy hurls the insult at Hermione in their second year of school, shocking everyone around them. After attempting to hex Draco in defense of Hermione, Ron explains the word as "about the most insulting thing he could think of" and a "disgusting thing to call someone. Dirty blood, see" (*Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, p. 115-116). This term can easily be seen as a metaphor for the racial slur that is used in reference to African Americans in U.S. society and may be thought of, in this sense, allegorical. Draco's prejudice continues throughout the series, with his use of the word "Mudblood" becoming more flippant as he and his family

further align themselves with Voldemort. He casually uses the racial slur, once again in reference to Hermione Granger, when he is about to kill Dumbledore in *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*. Draco tells his headmaster he got ideas for how to slip things into the castle without authority figures finding out by eavesdropping on "the Mudblood Granger" (*Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince,* p. 589). Dumbledore insists that Malfoy not use that "offensive word" in front of him. Malfoy laughs at this, asking "You care about me saying 'Mudblood' when I'm about to kill you?" Dumbledore resolutely replies, "Yes, I do" (*Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince,* p. 589).

Although Hermione is extremely offended upon learning what the slur means, she later reappropriates the term, saying she is "Mudblood, and proud of it" (*Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, p. 489). Another instance of a Muggle-born reclaiming the term is seen through Lily Evans, Harry's mother. Harry witnesses his mother through a memory, confronting her prejudiced best friend, Severus Snape, after he attempts to apologize for calling her a Mudblood. "But you call everyone of my birth Mudblood, Severus. Why should I be any different?" (*Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, p. 676*)*

In these instances, readers are exposed to the basic concepts of racism through blood status. Those who are prone to prejudice towards Muggle-borns and half-bloods, such as the Malfoy family, are always seen as negative characters. Draco is clearly meant to be disliked by the readers from Harry's first encounter with him. He insults Hagrid, who Harry has befriended, calling him a "sort of savage," and causing Harry to feel that he was "liking the boy less and less every second" (*Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, p. 62). At only 11 years old, Draco is already shown as adopting his family's bigotry when he informs Harry that he doesn't believe "they should let the other sort in"

(*Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, p. 62) in reference to Muggle-borns being accepted to Hogwarts. His disdain for blood traitors is made clear in their second meeting when he advises Harry not to befriend a Weasley, a family who is known for associating with Muggle-borns. *"*You'll soon find out some Wizarding families are much better than others, Potter. You don't want to go making friends with the wrong sort. I can help you there" (*Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, p. 86).

It is interesting to note that many have considered the *Harry Potter* series to be an allegorical story for World War II, with Voldemort as the Adolf Hitler figure (Whited, 2006). Much as Hitler denied his own suspected Jewish ancestry, Voldemort denies his Muggle parentage. It can be surmised that Voldemort's hatred for Muggles is a form or self-loathing. After his father's betrayal of his mother, which led to her death and ultimately left him an orphan, Voldemort grows to hate Muggles as they serve as a representation of his father. This hatred extends to the portion of himself that is Muggle. Both Hitler and Voldemort incited violence against racialized groups of which they were a part, in order to "purify" their society. In *The Politics of Harry Potter*, the author writes that, "Hitler established the link between himself and the leading group [...] and created [...] firm mutual interrelationships between those above and below—a plan that guaranteed action as well as continuous control of the followers" (Barratt, p. 19).

Voldemort also uses this tactic, referring to his followers as "friends" to ensure their loyalty to him and his control of them. To extend the comparison, both held the line that they were acting in the best interest of society. By exaggerating stereotypes already held by most, they were able to create a deeper divide and gave their followers, who felt that they had been wronged or were owed something, someone to blame. After the first

Wizarding war, the pure-bloods lost social status and were looking for someone to blame for their fall from grace. Voldemort gave them a target by pointing them towards the Muggles and the Muggle-borns. Hitler "saw that a middle class badly in need of inspiration was very pleased to have somewhere to point the finger [...] They could not directly target the victorious Allies or the global economy, but they *could* target the Jewish shopkeeper on the corner" (Barratt, p. 63). When Voldemort gains control of the government, he institutes a Muggle-Born Registration Community and begins to take away wands from Muggle-borns and half-bloods. This classification of "other" is extremely similar to the yellow stars Jews were forced to wear under Hitler's regime. At the conclusion of the series, Rowling even admitted that "Voldemort is of course a sort of Hitler" (Upton, 2007).

Racism is also dealt with through Harry's encounters with interspecies prejudice and acceptance. An example of this is seen in the house elves. Despite possessing magical abilities that, at times, can surpass those of wizards, house elves are more often than not bound to a Wizarding family in a form of magical enslavement. House elves are bound to serve their Wizarding families until the families either set them free by presenting them with clothes or the house elves die. Readers are first introduced to house elves in *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* through Dobby, a house elf owned by the Malfoy family. Again, we see very negative characters treating a vulnerable character as less than human. On the other hand, we have Harry treating Dobby as his equal. Upon meeting, Harry asks Dobby to sit down, and the house elf becomes visibly upset. Harry apologizes, fearing he has offended Dobby somehow, but Dobby insists he has not taken offense to Harry's politeness. "Dobby has *never* been asked to sit down by a wizard—

like an *equal*," Dobby tells Harry (*Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, p. 13).

Harry replies that Dobby "can't have met many decent wizards" (*Harry Potter and the*

Chamber of Secrets, p. 14). Later on in the series, after Harry has tricked the Malfoys into

freeing Dobby, the audience sees the house elf working in the Hogwarts' kitchens for a

fair wage provided by Dumbledore. He often helps Harry and his friends when they need

information or aid because of the kindness they always show Dobby. Hermione,

accustomed to prejudice herself, even founds an organization called the Society for the

Promotion of Elfish Welfare after she sees how terribly the house elves are treated.

Later, in another form of species prejudice, Hagrid is discriminated against for his

status as a half-giant. The greatest injustice Hagrid faces occurs before Harry's story

really begins. Throughout the books, Hagrid is seen to have a love for magical creatures

that most would deem dangerous. In *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, it is

revealed that one of Hagrid's "pets" was accused of killing a student which led to

Hagrid's expulsion from Hogwarts. Despite evidence that points to none other than

Voldemort, then known as Tom Riddle, the Wizarding law enforcement is quick to point

the finger at Hagrid, the "half-breed." Years later, Hagrid still faces the unfair assumption

that he is dangerous. Upon learning that Hagrid is a half-breed, Malfoy taunts Harry and

his friends, saying that parents will "be worried [Hagird]'ll eat their kids," (*Harry Potter*

and the Goblet of Fire, p. 440*).* Hagrid is often considered an oaf and believed to be

unintelligent. However, he proves that he is just as capable of magic as a wizard. Despite

the public scorn directed at him, Hagrid is given a position as the Care of Magical

Creatures professor by Dumbledore. Though he faces this prejudice, Hagrid seems

largely unbothered by it. Upon trying to relate to Olympe Maxime, a half-giantess, she

becomes offended, claiming that she is merely has "big bones" (*Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, p. 429). When discussing the matter with Harry, Ron, and Hermione, Hagrid proclaims, "I am what I am, an' I'm not ashamed. 'Never be ashamed,' my ol' dad used ter say, 'there's some who'll hold it against you, but they're not worth botherin' with.' An' he was right" (*Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, p. 456). Hermione expounds on the issue, arguing that some giants may be unkind, but "they can't *all* be horrible… It's the same sort of prejudice that people have towards werewolves… It's just bigotry, isn't it?" (*Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, p. 434)

As mentioned previously, the series does something unique in that positive characters do not always do the "right" thing. Even those who are perceived as more liberal characters sometimes commit microaggressions towards Muggles and Muggle-borns. To some degree, it can be assumed, through Harry's encounter with Horace Slughorn, that the patronization of Muggle-borns has more or less been normalized in the Wizarding world. Professor Slughorn, the same teacher who praised Lily Evans for her magical abilities, reveals upon realizing she was a Muggle-born, that he "couldn't believe it when [he] found out. Thought she must have been pure-blood, she was so good" (*Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince,* p. 70). When Harry protests that his best friend is a Muggle-born, referring to Hermione, and that she is the best in their year, Slughorn insists that he is not prejudiced and blames his blunder on being surprised to see Harry. Hagrid, despite his kindness and victimization, is also guilty of microaggressions. In reference to the Dursleys, he uses the term Muggle as an almost deprecating term, telling Harry, "it's your bad luck you grew up in a family o' the biggest Muggles I ever laid eyes on" (*Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, p. 53).

Some characters, though not blatantly discriminatory, show a preference towards pure-bloods. This is seen in the Minister of Magic, Cornelius Fudge. Fudge is mostly depicted as a foolish man and a puppet for pure-blood families who contribute money to the government in order to have more clout. Dumbledore accuses him of being "blinded by the love of the office [he] hold[s]," when he urges Fudge to reach out to the giant community and "extend them the hand of friendship" to form an alliance against Voldemort (*Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, p. 708). In the face of a brewing war that promises mass casualties, Dumbledore urges Fudge to forget his prejudices built over centuries of mistrust. Dumbledore, who normally has a calm demeanor, yells at Fudge in a rare loss of control, telling him," You place too much importance, and you always have done, on the so-called purity of blood! You fail to recognize that it matters not what someone is born, but what they grow to be!" (*Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, p. 708) Unfortunately, Dumbledore's advice falls on deaf ears, and Fudge uses his influence over the press to tarnish Dumbledore's reputation, making him appear dangerous. The public, in turn, grows to fear Dumbledore's liberal ideas and those who agree with him. With the press' condemnation of Dumbledore, the beliefs of the more radical pure-bloods are legitimized.

A more dire example of a good character participating in systematic racism is seen through Sirius Black's mistreatment of the house elf, Kreacher. Sirius, introduced to the audience in *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, is seen as a positive character and is one of Harry's greatest mentors and protectors. Ironically, it is Sirius who advises Harry that a person's true nature will be revealed when you "take a good look at how he treats his inferiors, not his equals" (*Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, p. 525). In *Harry*

Potter and the Order of the Phoenix, Harry becomes suspicious that Sirius, his godfather, is in grave danger. Before Harry rushes off to save his godfather, he asks the house elf, Kreacher, if Sirius is at home in order to see if he is actually in peril. Kreacher shares all the ancient prejudiced views that Sirius' estranged family did. The house elf's hateful demeanor reminds Sirius of the family he despised, so he often ignores Kreacher as much as he can and treats him with disrespect when he is forced to acknowledge him. Because of this, the house elf is never truly loyal to Sirius; nor does he care for him, causing him to lie to Harry about his master's whereabouts. This act ultimately leads to Sirius' death. Dumbledore, though not blaming Sirius, tells Harry that "indifference and neglect can often do much more damage than outright dislike" and that "wizards have mistreated and abused our fellows for too long, and we are now reaping our reward" (*Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, p. 834). This is a stark reminder in a society where we see violence due to racial tensions daily in the news. Sirius Black is definitive proof that even those who have the best intentions and do not comply with traditional prejudices can become victims of their own ignorance if they are not careful of their actions towards others.

By displaying such a complex issue as racism in an unambiguous and yet allegorical way, Rowling confronts readers, young and old, with a problem that hits close to home. Through Harry, the audience clearly sees that this prejudice is wrong and that blood status does not make a wizard. By villainizing the characters who hold these ignorant opinions, the series blatantly condemns racism. It is also interesting to note that the families that hold such hate towards those of lesser blood status hold the same distaste for those who sympathize with Muggle-borns. At one point, Ron expresses fear for his

family saying, "My whole family are blood traitors! That's as bad as Muggle-borns to Death Eaters (followers of Voldemort)!" (*Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, p. 242) Fortunately, it is the blood traitors and the Muggle-borns who ultimately win the Wizarding war that spans throughout the series.

Class in the *Harry Potter* series provides Harry and his friends additional opportunities to demonstrate empathy. Within the Wizarding world, despite having a different currency, money is still very much an issue. The books tend to oppose elitists such as the Malfoys. Not only do they have their pure-blood status, but they are also very wealthy and boast about their money. The Malfoys use their money in order to gain favor with the Wizarding government and hold influence over them as they are known to fund their favored political candidates' campaigns. It is even alluded to that their influence with the government keeps them out of legal trouble when the Ministry of Magic begins conducting household raids to search for "Dark," or illegally enchanted, objects. Shortly before the Malfoy house is searched, Draco's father, Lucius, is seen selling a number of objects to Borgin and Burkes, a shop known for dealing with Dark artefacts. It can be assumed that Lucius was tipped off by someone inside the Ministry in order to avoid being put on trial. In their second year, Draco proudly shows off the expensive racing broomsticks his father purchased for his Quidditch team, a Wizarding sport. He cruelly points out that the newer model "sweeps the board" with the Weasley twins' much cheaper brooms (*Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, p. 111). To the great annoyance of Ron, Draco often gloats that his father is "always associated with the top people at the Ministry" (*Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, p. 169).

Despite their status as pure-bloods, the Weasley family is extremely poor and often struggles to make ends meet. Arthur Weasley, the patriarch, holds a low position within the Ministry, while Molly, the mother, works at home. Even though they support seven children on one salary, the Weasleys' home, referred to as the Burrow, is always open to those who need a place to stay. Upon Harry's first visit to the Burrow, Ron's first instinct is to apologize for it, but Harry quickly assures him that he thinks "it's *wonderful*" (*Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, p. 32). As Ron ages, his family's financial woes seem to weigh more heavily on him. In *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, he is seen getting very upset when he learns the pocketful of leprechaun gold he gave to Harry had vanished. At Harry's encouragement to forget about it, Ron bitterly replies that it "Must be nice [...] to have so much money you don't notice if a pocketful of Galleons (Wizarding currency) goes missing" (*Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire,* p. 545).

Ultimately the story deals with classism much as it does with racism: Characters who equate someone's worth in money are seen as overwhelmingly negative. Despite Ron being a positive character, his fixation of his financial burdens are often a point of contention between him and Harry. Harry himself remains in a strange neutral zone financially. While living with the Dursleys, Harry had no money of his own and was only given his cousin's hand-me-down clothes and enough food to keep him from starving. Even his bedroom was located in a closet under the Dursley's staircase until they received anonymous messages that indicated that they should treat him better. It isn't until Harry learns of his magical abilities that he has anything to call his own. Upon entering Gringott's, the Wizarding bank, he discovers he has inherited a sizeable fortune

from his parents. Even upon learning this, he still manages his money carefully and doesn't spend it frivolously. Money becomes a non-issue to him, and he is seen being generous with his funds, giving his thousand Galleon prize won from a magical competition to the Weasley twins to invest in their joke shop. Harry tells them he does not need it, but "I could do with a few laughs. We could all do with a few laughs. I've got a feeling that we're going to need them more than usual before long," in reference to the rapidly approaching war (*Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, p. 733). In one instance of Ron distressing over owning everything secondhand, Harry privately thinks that "he would willingly have split all the money in his Gringotts vault with the Weasleys" (*Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, p. 157). He never treats his generosity as an act of pity towards the family, but sees it more as an expression of gratitude as the Weasleys provide him with a sense of family he never got to enjoy as a young child.

Harry gives the readers yet another chance to improve their theory of mind when he encounters victims who suffer from post traumatic stress disorder due to horrific war crimes committed during the first Wizarding war. Alice and Frank Longbottom, despite their pure-blood status, fought against Voldemort and his followers during the first war, causing them to be marked as blood traitors. It is revealed in *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* that a Death Eater named Bellatrix Lestrange tortured the Longbottoms into insanity for information. Ultimately, they are placed in St. Mungo's, the Wizarding hospital. Harry, who had found out about the fate of Neville's parents but never spoken to him about it, came face to face with the pair in the fifth installment of the series when he is visiting St. Mungo's. Harry is accompanied by Ron and Hermione who are both shocked when they see Neville there. Upon his friends learning about them, the normally

docile Neville asserts that he is "not ashamed" (*Harry Potter and the Order of the Pheonix*, p. 514) and "looked around at the others, his expression defiant, as though daring them to laugh," p. 515). Neville's worry is unfounded as Harry finds the situation sad, but still recognizes that Neville's parents are heroes and feels their condition in no way impedes upon that.

Empathy in relation to the issue of homosexuality is also communicated intertextually in the books. Although it is never explicitly stated in the text, J.K. Rowling revealed after finishing the series that Dumbledore was gay. He is never seen as the stereotype of gay and is regarded as a very powerful wizard and the "greatest headmaster Hogwarts has ever had" (*Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, p. 17). Many have criticized Rowling's choice to not directly address the topic within the text, but she has argued that the point was to depict Dumbledore as not defined by his sexuality, but by his choices. When one Twitter user argued that he/she couldn't see Dumbledore as gay, Rowling shot back, "Maybe because gay people just look like… people?" (Twitter, Mar. 24, 2015). Perhaps Dumbledore's own persecution is what caused him to become a champion for the rights of the oppressed. After hearing that Remus Lupin, a werewolf, and Nymphadora Tonks were to be wed, a union that would be considered nontraditional among wizards, Minerva McGonagall states that "Dumbledore would have been happier than anybody to think that there was a little more love in the world" (*Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, p. 624).

Empathy in the series is also demonstrated allegorically in relation to stigmatized illness. Werewolves, more often than not, are depicted as shunned from society in the series and are generally regarded with fear and disgust by wizards. An example of a

werewolf is Remus Lupin, one of Harry's professors and the father of Harry's godchild, who is introduced in *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* as the new Defense Against the Dark Arts professor. Harry immediately bonds with Lupin upon learning that he was best friends with his father at school. In the climax of the book, it is revealed that Lupin is a werewolf. Lupin, once loved by all his students, immediately resigns his position once the nature of his "condition" is exposed, saying parents "will not want a werewolf teaching their children" (*Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, p. 423). Throughout the series, it is alluded to that Lupin is unable to find work because of his condition; his clothes are described as "extremely shabby" (p. 74); and his appearance as haggard. It is evident that Lupin is ashamed of his condition, having internalized the stereotypes held by society at large, when he regretfully reveals that he is to have a child. Harry, who believes Lupin to be a good man, regardless of his lycanthropy, does not understand how Lupin could feel this way. Harry challenges Lupin, demanding that he explain his grief. Lupin asserts that Harry has only ever seen him "under Dumbledore's protection at Hogwarts. You don't know how most of the Wizarding world sees creatures like me! When they know of my affliction they can barely talk to me" (*Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, p. 213). Speaking of his unborn child, Lupin worries that, "It will be like me, I am convinced of it—how can I forgive myself, when I knowingly risked passing on my own condition to an innocent child? And if, by some miracle, it is not like me, then it will be better off, a hundred times so, without a father of whom it must always be so ashamed" (*Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, p. 213). Later, citing Lupin as one of her favorite characters in the series, Rowling explained that his condition "was a metaphor for those illnesses that carry a stigma, like HIV and AIDS. All kinds of

superstitions seem to surround blood-borne conditions, probably due to taboos surrounding blood itself" (Rowling, 2014).

The series gives readers a chance to increase their empathetic skills in a variety of ways. Aside from overt expressions of sympathy for and openness to characters who suffer discrimination, Harry and his friends embody an emotion at the center of empathy: love. In the series, a prophecy is made before Harry Potter is ever born. It says that the one who will be able to defeat Voldemort "will have power the Dark Lord knows not" (p. 841). Harry takes this to mean spellwork or weaponry and argues that he has no such power, but Dumbledore asserts that Harry is mistaken. It is later discovered that the power described in the prophecy is not magic that comes from a wand, but instead a magic that we, in our nonfictional world, possess. Dumbledore calls this power "a force that is at once more wonderful and more terrible than death, than human intelligence, than forces of nature" (p. 843). In the end, it was not magic or power of the mind that saves Harry from countless dark wizards who seek to destroy him—it was his heart. The series repeats over and over that it is love that saves Harry because it is something that Voldemort neither possesses nor understands. Though he was raised by an emotionally abusive aunt and uncle after his parents' deaths at the hands of Voldemort, Harry does not turn bitter towards the world. This is seen during his first encounter with Ron Weasley in which Harry "who had never had anything to share before, or indeed, anyone to share it with," (*Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, p. 80) insists upon giving some of his sweets to his new-found friend. Even in their final duel, Voldemort taunts Harry, asking him if he believes love will save him: "Dumbledore's favorite solution, *love*, which he claimed conquered death, though love did not stop him from falling from the

tower and breaking like an old waxwork? *Love*, which did not prevent me stamping out your Mudblood mother like a cockroach, Potter" (*Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, p. 739). In the face of taunts and even death, Harry still urges Voldemort to "Be a man … try … Try for some remorse…." (*Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, p. 739). Of course, Voldemort, the literary personification of evil and intolerance, can find no love in his heart, and it is ultimately his undoing. Though the Wizarding world is not cured of all of its injustices by the end of the series, there is a sense of hope that the wounds caused by bigotry and hate will be healed in time and with work. The readers' relationship with Harry, which strengthens as they continually see him through his adventures and battles, is what most strongly communicates empathy, because in a world where it is much easier to be consumed by darkness, Harry Potter chooses love, and that is the most important lesson a person can be taught.

CONCLUSION

Readers are able to understand Harry's thoughts and feelings because the series is told in third-person limited point of view. That is, Harry is the only character in the series whose inner thoughts are accessible to readers. Because of this, characters and their actions are seen through Harry, who functions as the filter or interpreter through which readers understand not only the magical world, but by extension their own interpersonal relations and society. As the readers are in Harry's head, the series encourages simulation because readers don't have to imagine Harry's thoughts—they are quite literally played out for them in their own imaginations. This, in turn, allows for transportation to occur as Rowling creates an entire magical universe that the audience gets to learn about alongside

Harry. They experience events with him and through him, meaning his emotions and attitude towards things can affect the audience's interpretation of the story.

Harry, who is a mere 11 years old as the series begins, develops his opinions and stances on the world as the series progresses. Because of his young age, he often learns lessons from the likes of Dumbledore and Hagrid. Harry's interpretation of events directs readers' understanding of them. He determines the tone of situations and how characters are meant to be viewed. His relationships with characters, whether negative or positive, are what allow readers to discern right from wrong in the story. As it is almost always Harry's enemies who participate in blatant discrimination, these non-empathetic acts are experienced as negative by readers. Harry's mentors, friends, and father-figures are the ones who choose to actively fight against the prejudice and discrimination that he considers ridiculous. His positive relationship with the most empathetic characters in the series allows the audience to see these characters as positive and paves the way for their actions and beliefs to be seen as correct. Readers also see what effect Harry's mentors have on him as he grows. It is interesting to note that in countless duels in which his enemies are casting spells that are meant to kill him, Harry's only aim is to disarm his opponents or temporarily stun them. Even in the final battle with Voldemort at the climax of the series, Harry refuses to use what is considered to be an "Unforgivable Curse" to win the battle. It is Voldemort's own curse rebounding that actually kills him.

The novels give readers a chance to enhance their empathetic skills because, in exercising theory of mind, they experience empathy through Harry. They also get to witness Harry improving his own theory of mind as he attempts to understand the motives of Voldemort and his followers, despite disagreeing with them on all grounds.

This directly relates to simulation theory as the whole series is a simulation. The readers have access to all of Harry's thoughts, making it easy for them to imagine themselves in his place. All of this, combined with Harry's empathetic attitude towards those who are discriminated against, makes it possible for the series to increase empathy in the reader.

It is interesting to consider research that has been done using MRI technology to monitor the brain while reading. It has been found that there is "substantial overlap between areas of the brain concerned with theory-of-mind and areas concerned with understanding stories" (Mar, p. 9). This would seem to indicate that those who better understand stories and feel more transported with them have a better capacity for theory of mind. MRI technology has also shown that reading is a literal mental simulation for a person. Researchers Speer, Reynolds, Swallow, and Zacks (2009) conducted fMRI scans, which measure brain activity, on participants reading a short story. Speer, et al. found that when the protagonist of the story pull on a cord to turn on a light, the area of the brain involved in the action of grasping. They also found that when they read about the protagonist entering a room, areas of the brain involved in analyzing a situation were activated. This research showed that reading activated structures in the brain that are comparable to those that would be needed to carry out the action being read in reality. In my opinion, this is what differs reading from watching films as far as the development of empathy and theory of mind is concerned. When reading, the brain is forced to "go through the motions" as if it is really experiencing the events that are being read. Rather than having the simulation created for it on the screen as would be the case in a film, the brain creates its own simulation, allowing those areas of the brain to be exercised and allowing the reader to gain a simulated experience.

Narrative fiction is especially effective for increasing empathetic values because it is enjoyable. That is to say that it "it takes individuals away from their mundane reality and into a story world" (Green, p. 311) which is is basically transportation. When lost in a story, a reader may be able to "release from the stress of personal concerns, problems, and contexts that elicit social anxiety" (p. 317). Narrative worlds are especially appealing to children as they are easily drawn into them. It has been postulated that stories are the most natural mode of thought (Schank & Abelson, 1995) and that transportation "draws upon, and perhaps helps develop, individuals' natural tendency toward empathy and perspective-taking" (Greene, p. 317). Enjoyment also arises from the feeling of expanding oneself and gaining new knowledge. "By leading individuals to appreciate truths about themselves and their world, transportation can bring about transformations that endure in some way once individuals return from the narrative world to their everyday reality" (pp. 317-318).

An important element to consider when investigating the role of simulation and transportation in the strengthening of empathetic skills is unawareness on the part of readers that their perspectives are being altered. This is mostly due to the narrative structure of fiction. In 2002, Slater proposed that narratives "may be one of the only strategies available for influencing the beliefs of those who are predisposed to disagree with the position espoused in the persuasive message" (p. 175). Individuals who are resistant to opinions that differ from their own often expect books to entertain them, not influence them. Yet, as Dal Cin et. al. state, "Narratives touch our emotions, impact what we believe, teach us new behaviors, and shape our cultural identities" (p. 176). Moreover, narratives might "overcome resistance by reducing the amount and effectiveness of

counterarguing or logical consideration of the message" (p. 177). Rowling accomplishes this in her series by using fantasy and allegory to teach lessons on the use of empathy to fight bigotry and prejudice, effectively avoiding any preconceived notions or defenses that might deter readers from developing empathy had real-life outgroups been used. By putting readers in an unfamiliar universe, she leaves them totally reliant on her storytelling and Harry's interpretation of the world. Considering Slater's research that fiction can reach those who may have been resistant to a message if it was not cloaked as a fictional story, it can be assumed that younger children who have not yet developed these resistances are more susceptible to the effects of reading fiction.

In addition to overcoming resistance because they slip beneath reader awareness, narratives may also "overcome resistance by increasing identification with characters" (Dal Cin, et al., p. 177). Cohen (2001) defines identification as "a process that consists of increasing loss of self-awareness and its temporary replacement with heightened emotional and cognitive connections with a character" (p. 251).

As a result of readers' identification with Harry, his central role in readers' theory of mind, and Rowling's vague yet allegorical approach to descriptions of specific outgroups, even normally resistant readers are more likely to accept and internalize the series' anti-racist and anti-discriminatory ideologies. identification.. Moreover, Rowling tackles the highly fraught issue of racism by "present[ing] an argument that is fairly extreme without making listeners aware of its extremity. Using rhetorical means of persuasion, this may be accomplished by presenting a message that claims to support a generally acceptable position, but that actually supports a more extreme and possibly objectionable position" (Dal Cin et al., p. 179). By having a child clearly distinguish

between right and wrong in regards to discrimination in a fantasy series, the audience unknowingly aligns their opinions with Harry's not only because they have been transported into the story and identify with him, but because morally no alternative opinion can even be considered. When reflecting on this stance in regards to the real world, the issues are simplified to a child's reasoning. Rowling's lessons on empathy in the series are not limited to overt discrimination or racism; she also uses Harry to illustrate the harm caused by microaggressions. This is best illustrated by Slughorn--one of the series' positive characters--who is shown as surprised about Harry's mother being a Muggle-born. Harry's instant offense at Slughorn's prejudice clearly shows that even though the incident was a thoughtless accident, it is still deemed unacceptable. Sirius Black's indifference towards Kreacher also emphasizes that deliberate action must be taken to help those who are discriminated against. Despite Harry's incredibly close relationship with Sirius, he still expresses distaste for his treatment of Kreacher. Sirius, a man who claims that someone's true self can be revealed in how they treat those who are inferior, finds his ultimate downfall by going against his own words.

One study found that readers do not even necessarily have to identify with Harry to change their attitudes; they only have to strongly not identify with Voldemort. The authors of the study conclude that, "people form attitudes not only by conforming to positive relevant others, but also by distancing themselves from negative relevant others" (Vezzali et al., p. 115). This could explain why adults, who may find it difficult to identify with a younger character, are still affected by the series.

This study, which focuses on Harry Potter and theory of mind to help explain how the series might actively promote empathy in readers, is intended to provide a bridge

between research on the presence of prosocial values in children's literature and their potential effects on readers. It is through theory of mind, simulation theory, and transportation that empathetic values are increased by reading fiction. Within transportation, identification with empathetic characters, such as Harry Potter, can also be important. What appears to be most important is that readers do not form a connection with morally bad characters, such as Voldemort. It is through Harry's positive thoughts and feelings towards those that display positive values and strong empathetic skill that the audience is able to increase their own empathy and theory of mind.

Future studies in this area might expand this study's findings by measuring empathy in children and adults who read the series. Empathy scales could be administered before and after participants read the books, for example, to test how their levels of empathy may be changing. Tests to determine emotional transport measure could also be administered to see if age affects one's transportation level and how much transportation level affects empathy.

This study is limited in that it omitted some of the groups and acts of discrimination from analysis that make up Rowling's magical world. A more in-depth textual analysis could also be conducted on discrimination against the various species in Harry Potter. This study focused mainly on house elves, but did not look into goblins, centaurs, merpeople, etc. All play a role in Wizarding society, and within the series, are treated with disrespect and considered as "lesser" than wizards. Squibs, which are considered to be a non-magic beings born to at least one magical parent, are often thought to represent people with disabilities. An analysis could be conducted to investigate their place in society and how prejudice against them affects them.

Overall, this study, which combines theory of mind and simulation theory with an analysis of empathy in the Harry Potter series, strongly suggests that the series has a positive influence on readers' empathetic skills. The application of theory of mind to the analysis illustrates how that influence is directly related to Harry himself, whose youth at the beginning of the series, mix of vulnerability and power, and overall attractiveness as a protagonist combined with his ever-present kindness and acceptance towards those who are "different" represents a powerful vehicle for modeling or "teaching" readers empathy. It is only through his perseverance and the perseverance of other good wizards that bigotry and intolerance, which threaten to overcome wizardkind, are defeated. As for the real world, I believe it is Dumbledore who best explains what we must do to assure that our own society is protected from these same injustices: "It [is] important [...] to fight, and fight again, and keep fighting, for only then could evil be kept at bay, though never quite eradicated" (*Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, pp. 644-645).

APPENDIX A. MAGICAL TERMINOLOGY

Blood traitor: A derogatory term used to refer to a witch or wizard who sympathizes or associates with Muggle-borns and Muggles

Death Eater: A follower of Voldemort who hold to his idea of radical pure-blood supremacy

Half-blood: Usually refers to a witch or wizard born to one magical parent and one non magical parent; can also refer to a witch or wizard with some non magical relatives

House elf: A magical creatures bound to serve her or his wizarding family until the family either sets him or her free by presenting them with clothes or the house elf dies

Mudblood: A racial slur used to refer to a Muggle-born

Muggle-born: A witch or wizard with two non magical parents

Muggle: A person without magical abilities

Pure-blood: A witch or wizard of pure magical heritage

Quidditch: A wizarding sport played on broomsticks

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