

# Social issues in J. K. Rowling's Harry Potters series

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**SVEUČILIŠTE U ZAGREBU  
UČITELJSKI FAKULTET  
ODSJEK ZA UČITELJSKE STUDIJE**

**KRISTINA ZIRDUM  
DIPLOMSKI RAD**

**SOCIAL ISSUES IN J.K. ROWLING'S  
*HARRY POTTER* SERIES**

**Zagreb, srpanj 2019.**

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UČITELJSKI FAKULTET  
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# Contents

Abstract.....	1
<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1. Discrimination in the <i>Harry Potter</i> series .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Racism .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The importance of blood purity throughout the books .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>“Magic is Might”: Comparisons to anti-Semitism .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Sorting stereotypes.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>The treatment of house-elves and goblins.....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Discrimination against werewolves .....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>2. Gender stereotypes.....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>3. Politics – Wizarding world vs. our (real) world .....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Politics of the wizarding world as a social issue .....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>References.....</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Izjava o samostalnoj izradi rada.....</b>	<b>32</b>

## **Abstract**

This thesis explores social issues in J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series by analysing different stereotypes and types of prejudice present in these books. The focus is on different forms of discrimination depicted and exposed throughout the series, including racism, seen through the importance of blood purity, which is compared to anti-Semitism; stereotypes about the Hogwarts houses; the treatment of house elves and goblins; the discrimination of werewolves; and gender stereotypes. The final chapter discusses the politics of the wizarding world as a social issue. As portrayed in the series, the different social issues analysed in this thesis make Rowling's readers look beyond the magic described in the books and think about the same issues that appear in our world. The thesis concludes that Rowling's series addresses many social issues, especially those related to blood purity and discrimination of those considered less worthy in the wizarding world. The series also touches upon gender stereotypes and political issues in a less direct way since they are portrayed more subtly.

**Keywords:** J.K. Rowling; Harry Potter; social issues; racism; blood purity; discrimination of house elves and goblins; gender stereotypes; anti-Semitism; politics as a social issue

## **Sažetak**

Ovaj diplomski rad istražuje društvene probleme koji se javljaju u serijalu „Harry Potter“ autorice J. K. Rowling analizirajući različite stereotipe i predrasude spomenute u knjigama. Rad osobito istražuje različite oblike diskriminacije, uključujući rasizam, prikazan kroz isticanje čistokrvnosti koja se uspoređuje s antisemitizmom, stereotipe vezane uz pojedine „domove“ u školi Hogwarts, tretman kućnih vilenjaka i goblina, diskriminaciju vukodlaka i rodne stereotipe. Posljednje poglavlje bavi se politikom čarobnjačkoga svijeta, koja također predstavlja društveni problem. Različiti društveni problemi koji se javljaju u romanima o Harryju Potteru i analiziraju u ovom diplomskom radu potiču čitatelja da gleda mimo same čarolije koju knjige prikazuju te razmisli o istim problemima koji se javljaju u stvarnom svijetu. Zaključak je diplomskoga rada da serijal J. K. Rowling govori o raznim društvenim problemima, posebno onima koji su vezani uz čistokrvnost i diskriminaciju onih koji se u čarobnjačkom svijetu smatraju manje vrijednima. Serijal se također dotiče rodni stereotipa i političkih problema, ali na suptilniji način jer se oni ne prikazuju tako očito kao istaknuti.

***Ključne riječi:*** J. K. Rowling; Harry Potter; socijalni problem; rasizam; čistokrvnost; diskriminacija kućnih vilenjaka i goblina; rodni stereotipi; anti-semitizam; politika kao društveni problem

## INTRODUCTION

Books are windows into the world. Books shape their readers, influencing their views. Reading a book about a certain topic can help readers learn, which promotes critical thinking and reflection. Books intended for young readers that focus on social problems in an indirect way are especially useful to child readers because they help them recognise important issues and injustice in the real world.

J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* (1997–2007) is a series of fantasy books for young readers that follow the adventures of a young boy named Harry Potter, who finds out he is a wizard. He starts attending the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, where he meets his two best friends, Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger. They all attend Hogwarts, a school for witchcraft and wizardry. During his schooling he experiences many adventures, most of which include fighting Voldemort, an evil wizard who killed his parents and threatens to conquer the world. The series consists of seven novels: *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (1997), *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (1998), *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (1999), *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (2000), *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (2003), *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* (2005), and *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (2007). Since the publication of the first book, the character of Harry Potter has gained immense popularity and success all over the world. More than 500 million copies of the books have been sold worldwide and all of them have been adapted into popular movies. The *Harry Potter* series has become an entire empire, with different shows, amusement parks, merchandise and spin-off movies (the *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* series, 2016 –) emerging from it. Even though the last book in the series was published in 2007, Rowling has continued to update her readers on a digital platform called Pottermore to this day. Intended for a dual readership – children and young adults – the series is a perfect example of literature that subtly talks about different social and other issues, disguised as magic, adventures, and an entire wizarding world created by J.K. Rowling. Even though those issues were probably not the main issue the author was trying to turn the readers' attention to, they have been identified and discussed by many researchers such as Bethany Barratt

(2012), Julia Eccleshare (2002), Elizabeth Heilman and Trevor Donaldson (2009), Maria Nikolajeva (2009), and Yair Koren-Maimon (n.d.).

This thesis examines the social issues addressed in the seven Harry Potter books. Specifically, it analyses representations of discrimination, racism among wizards, gender stereotypes, and other social issues which are explicitly or implicitly present throughout the series. Analysing social issues in books helps readers notice and find solutions for them in real life. The *Harry Potter* series, in particular, deserves special attention because of its popularity and cultural impact, and the fact that it continues to attract and influence readers more than 20 years after the publication of the last book.

The first part of the thesis focuses on racism, consistently opposed by the protagonist and his friends – the most prevalent issue in the *Harry Potter* series – seen through the importance of blood purity in the wizarding world rather than of skin colour. It explains how the definition of racism can be applied to the wizarding world and divisions that exist among wizards. The following section expands the idea of racism by building on Koren-Maimon's (n.d.) observations on the parallels between the divisions among wizards and anti-Semitism during World War II. The thesis then discusses the stereotypes in the depictions of Hogwarts students based on the houses they are divided in. The following sections explore the various types of discrimination against different creatures that exist in the wizarding world, such as centaurs, half-giants, house-elves and goblins, and the inequality they face on a daily basis, again opposed by Harry Potter and his supporters. The second chapter is dedicated to the issue of gender stereotypes. Scholars who have analysed the *Harry Potter* series have different opinions about gender stereotypes in the books: some claim that the male and female characters are equally represented (Eccleshare, 2002), while others, such as Heilman & Donaldson (2009), believe that female characters are put into a secondary position. The final chapter, which compares politics in the wizarding and real world, discusses how politics can be seen as a social issue in the series by providing examples of wizard politicians using their position to manipulate or hide information from the general wizarding community.



## 1. Discrimination in the *Harry Potter* series

The books in the *Harry Potter* series show a fully developed wizarding world which exists just beside ours. But if we take away its magical part, that world appears quite similar to ours. It is not perfect and there are many problems happening in it. One of them is the discrimination which some of the wizards experience daily. The term discrimination refers to the unequal treatment of an individual or group based on their characteristics that distinguish them from others, such as age, ethnicity, gender, national origin, race or sexual orientation (What is discrimination?, 2019). The wizarding world of *Harry Potter* faces problems with racism, money, segregation of wizards, job discrimination based on medical conditions, gender inequality, etc. These types of discrimination and the parallels which we can draw between this fictional and the real world will be explained in this and the following chapters.

### **Racism**

Defined as the belief that one race is superior over another, which causes prejudice or hatred towards people (Healey, 2014, p. 11), racism is one of the prevalent issues in Rowling's books. Since we are analysing a specific work of fiction, race is discussed in terms of human and non-human beings, such as house elves, goblins, centaurs and giants, as well as blood purity among wizards, and not in terms of skin colour. In the *Harry Potter* series, racism can be seen in the division into Muggles (non-magical persons), Muggle-borns (witches/wizards with magical abilities with Muggle parents), half-bloods (witches/wizards who are not pure-blooded or Muggle-born), purebloods (those with a complete magical ancestry), and Squibs (non-magical children with magical parents), promoted by evil forces.

In the series, purebloods are considered by some of them as the superior type of wizards, especially by Voldemort (the main antagonist) and his followers. Voldemort is

keen on purifying the wizarding world of everyone who is not a “true” wizard or witch and tries to do so by assembling a group called the *Death Eaters*. Each member of the group is branded with The Dark Mark (Rowling, 2000, p. 127). Koren-Maimon (n.d.) draws parallels between Voldemort’s anti-Muggle agenda and the anti-Semitic ideology of Nazism because in both cases, there is hatred directed against those who are not members of the “master race”. In the *Harry Potter* series, this attitude is adopted by a large majority of wizards, and refers to anyone who is not pure-blooded, while during the Second World War, from the point of view of Nazism, it mainly referred to the Jewish community. Also, Koren-Maimon (n.d., p. 182) states that in both cases those considered inferior are described in negative terms and as a threat to the perfection of the “master race” (see below).

The majority of the wizarding world do not take such an extreme position and mostly do not have a problem with other “types” of wizards, which can be seen in the formation of the Order of the Phoenix, a group which is a polar opposite to the Death Eaters. Their goal is to protect the wizarding world from Voldemort and his followers (Rowling, 2003, p. 65), and that also means from their prejudices and racism. Even though some purebloods in the series consider themselves superior to others, being pure-blooded does not mean that you are automatically a better wizard. For example, Harry’s classmate Neville Longbottom is a pureblood wizard who is not that good at performing magic. On the other hand, Harry’s friend Hermione Granger is the best student in their generation and also a Muggle-born. This shows that there is no logical reasoning behind thinking that being pureblood is superior, which is the same with racism in our world: there is no logical reasoning behind it, but it still appears. Concerning Muggles, some members of the wizarding world look down on them due to their lack of magical blood and presumed inability to perform magic. Wizards who defend Muggles are considered by them to be blood traitors.

## **The importance of blood purity throughout the books**

The first mention of any type of discrimination in the books is found already at the beginning of the series. During Harry's childhood he is mistreated by his aunt and uncle who take him in after the death of his parents, and until he finds out that he is a wizard it is unclear why. When he finds out that he has magical abilities (just like his parents), his aunt and uncle reveal that they do not treat Harry like their son Dudley because of Aunt Petunia's hatred towards the wizarding world, which she finds "strange" and "abnormal" (Rowling, 1997, p. 44). In fact, they are afraid of Harry's power. This tells us that wizards are not the only ones who discriminate in the series; some Muggles, who are aware of the existence of the wizarding world, are against all wizards. In the world of Harry Potter, this has been happening since the 17<sup>th</sup> century when Muggles started prosecuting those they considered to be witches and wizards. The Ministry of Magic introduced a law which separated wizards and witches from Muggles, and thus initiated the dislike of Muggles in some wizards. As stated in *The Tales of Beedle the Bard*, a book of wizard fairy tales and stories: "By the seventeenth century, any witch or wizard who chose to fraternise with Muggles became suspect, even an outcast in his or her own community" (Rowling, 2008, p. 15). It is interesting that even those who are looked down upon in the magical world for being of mixed race, such as Hagrid, the half-giant who works at Hogwarts, have patronizing opinions about Muggles. When fighting with Harry's uncle about Harry going to Hogwarts, he says: "I'd like ter see a great Muggle like you stop him" (Rowling, 1997, p. 43), meaning that Muggles have no chance against wizards, even if the wizards in question are not educated in the use of magic. On the other hand, Hagrid befriends all kinds of creatures who do not belong to the "race" of wizards, and he does not see any kind of obstacle when he joins Harry's friends and supports them, be they wizards or muggles.

While Harry is being introduced to the wizarding world in the first book, Hagrid tries to explain to him who Voldemort is: "this wizard, about twenty years ago now, started lookin' fer followers. Got 'em, too [...] Dark days, Harry. Didn't know who ter trust, didn't dare get friendly with strange wizards or witches" (Rowling, 1997, p. 45). Later in the book, Harry meets Draco Malfoy, his age-mate, who immediately asks him about his

ancestors and the type of a wizard he is, expressing his preference for “the old wizarding families” and dislike towards anyone who is not pureblood: “They’re just not the same, they’ve never been brought up to know our ways” (ibid., p. 61). Here the division between wizards based on the status of their blood is exposed for the first time. Malfoy is a member of a pureblood family which values its pureblood status. He represents wizards who are prejudiced against Muggles and he is accordingly presented as a disagreeable person throughout. Later it becomes known that Draco’s father Lucius is a member of the Death Eaters (Rowling, 2000, p. 564).

As Harry boards the train to Hogwarts, he meets Ron Weasley, who becomes his best friend. Ron is also pureblood, but because his father is fond of Muggles, his family is considered blood traitors by racists and a disgrace to the name of wizards (Rowling, 1998, p. 51). Also, his family is quite poor, which Ron is teased for. Upon arriving to Hogwarts, Draco makes it known he does not think highly of Ron and his family, urging Harry to pick new friends of a higher social ranking (Rowling, 1997, p. 81):

My father told me all the Weasleys have red hair, freckles and more children than they can afford [...]. 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.

A clear division is established among the four Hogwarts houses – Gryffindor, Slytherin, Ravenclaw and Hufflepuf. Pupils sorted into Slytherin are mostly purebloods who value their status and look down on other wizards. Many dark wizards, including Voldemort, were in Slytherin during their time at Hogwarts (Rowling, 1997, p. 62).

The differentiation between wizards based on the “purity” of their blood is an important issue in the second book in the series, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*. In the book, Draco Malfoy calls Hermione “a filthy little mudblood” (Rowling, 1998, p. 86), which is an insulting name for someone whose parents are Muggles. Hagrid explains to Harry that some wizards think they are better than anyone else based purely on the fact that they are pureblood (ibid., p. 88). Muggle-borns are often stigmatized due to their ancestry. For example, in *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, professor Slughorn tells Harry he was surprised to learn his mother was Muggle-born, given her exceptional

talent for magic (Rowling, 2005, p. 71). This shows that wizards often do not anticipate those born to Muggle parents to have a lot of talent for performing magic.

Later in *The Chamber of Secrets*, Harry, Ron and Hermione stumble upon a sign that says “The Chamber of Secrets has been opened. Enemies of the heir, beware” (Rowling, 1998, p. 106). Professor Binns, who teaches magical history in that book, reveals to the students that Salazar Slytherin, one of the founders of Hogwarts and the Slytherin house, made a secret chamber inside the school after an argument with the other founders. He believed that Hogwarts should not accept students of non-magical parentage (ibid., p. 114). The enemies of the heir are everyone with non-magical parentage at Hogwarts, or everyone who is not pureblood. During the school year, a few Muggle-born students are attacked, confirming the theory that whoever opened the Chamber is against Muggle-borns. Neville Longbottom, a pureblood wizard, expresses fear that he will also be targeted because he is “basically a Squib” (ibid., p. 139). Unable to perform magic despite having magical parentage, Squibs are also frequently looked down upon in the magical community. They are usually sent to Muggle schools or hidden away because of shame (Rowling, 2007, p. 155). Neville’s character shows that there is a lot of stigma in the wizarding community surrounding non-magical people.

There are books in the series in which we cannot explicitly identify racism (e.g. *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*); however, as the characters grow older and the story develops, racism against wizards and Muggles gradually becomes a more prominent issue. The first incident in which a larger number of wizards get hurt appears in the fourth book of the series, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*. During the Quidditch world cup, Death Eaters attack the site, and the Dark Mark gets fired into the air. The Death Eaters wear black capes with black hoods, which are similar to the outfits worn by the Ku Klux Klan (Eccleshire, 2002, p. 80), an organisation in the South of the USA that targeted African-Americans by using violence in order to restore white supremacy after the Civil War. They could be recognised by the white robes and hoods they wore during their attacks (“Ku Klux Klan”, 2009). In the book, a family of Muggles gets attacked, raised into the air and humiliated by the Death Eaters (Rowling, 2000, p. 108). Ron’s father says that that is the Death Eaters’ and Voldemort’s idea of fun: “Half the Muggle killings back

when You-Know-Who was in power were done for fun. I suppose they had a few drinks tonight and couldn't resist reminding us all that lots of them are still at large" (ibid., p. 128).

The issue of racism is perhaps the most obvious in *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, which portrays discrimination among wizards and among other creatures. When introduced to the headquarters of the Order of the Phoenix, Harry learns that the family of his godfather Sirius Black was pureblood and valued its "purity" above anything else. The entire house is laden with symbols which portray that: from the portrait of Sirius's mother who spews insults such as "Stains of dishonour, filthy half-breeds, blood traitors, children of filth" (Rowling, 2003, p. 96), to the family tree from which members who had any kind of connection with Muggles have been deleted (Rowling, 1998, p. 103). Sirius also reveals to Harry that he had a cousin who tried to induce a bill to make Muggle-hunting legal (ibid., p. 105). This shows how insignificant wizards considered Muggles throughout history. There are of course wizards who fight against inequality, such as Albus Dumbledore, the Hogwarts headmaster, who, during his fight with Fudge, the Minister of Magic, says: "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!" (Rowling, 2000, p. 614).

*The Order of the Phoenix* also introduces a symbol of hierarchy in the wizarding world in the form of a fountain located at the Ministry of Magic. The fountain of Magical Brethern (see *Figure 1*) portrays centaurs, goblins and house-elves as subservient to wizards. This shows that many wizards consider themselves better than other creatures, even though they might possess more magical powers than actual wizards. When the fountain is destroyed, Dumbledore says: "The fountain we destroyed tonight told a lie. We wizards have mistreated and abused our fellows for too long, and we are now reaping our reward" (Rowling, 2003, p. 735). Dumbledore speaks from experience, because he had a sister who was hidden and kept secret from the rest of the wizarding world so carefully that everyone thought she was a Squib, something everyone thought shameful. She could show her magical abilities, but was not able to control them (Rowling, 2007, p. 565). Even though Dumbledore fights for equality, he did not always promote it: in his

youth he joined a wizard whose wish was to promote the dominance of wizards over Muggles for the greater good (ibid., p. 566).



*Figure 1.* The Fountain of Magical Brethren  
Retrieved from "Fountain of Magical Brethren", (n.d.) at  
["https://harrypotter.fandom.com/wiki/Fountain\\_of\\_Magical\\_Brethren](https://harrypotter.fandom.com/wiki/Fountain_of_Magical_Brethren)

### **“Magic is Might”: Comparisons to anti-Semitism**

In the last book in the series, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, the discrimination against Muggle-born wizards by the dominating purebloods in charge of Hogwarts and the world of wizards in general becomes more severe. Muggles are expected to provide proof of how they obtained their magical powers, because the purebloods believe that Muggles have tricked the real wizards into giving them powers and wands (Rowling, 2007, p. 260). A “Muggle-Born Registry” is created to root out disturbers of magical power (ibid., p. 250). This is very similar to the ethnic cleansing that was going on during World War II, when Jews were banned from most public places in Germany, shot or confined to ghettos where they were starved and forced into slave labour (Friedman, 1989, p. 692). They had to wear a badge in the form of a yellow star representing the Star of David, which served as a means of humiliation and segregation. The Star also made it easier to identify Jews for deportation to concentration camps (ibid., p. 692). All their businesses were boycotted, many decrees were issued by local authorities and signs were put to forbid Jews from entering certain places (Noakes, 1989, p. 475).

There is a clear connection between the treatment of Jews during the WWII and the treatment of Muggles. The statue “Magic is Might” (see *Figure 2*) within the Ministry is mentioned in the last book. The statue shows a handsome witch and wizard sitting on hundreds of naked Muggle bodies, demonstrating that even the Ministry of Magic supports the agenda that purebloods are the superior beings (Rowling, 2007, p. 242). As the second wizarding war intensifies and Voldemort gains power, pamphlets describing Mudbloods as a danger to the pureblood society are distributed (Rowling, 2007, p. 249), which is also similar to Germany’s propaganda against Jews and other marginalized social groups (Noakes, 1989, p. 475). While listening to an illegal radio-station, Harry, Ron and Hermione stumble upon the following message by Kingsley, an auror (a police officer in the wizarding world), which brings a bit of hope that not everything is lost and that there are people still fighting against Voldemort and his followers: “We’re all human, aren’t we? Every human life is worth the same, and worth saving” (Rowling, 2007, p. 440).



*Figure 2.* “Magic is Might” statue

Reprinted from "Magic is Might", (n.d.) Retrieved from [https://harrypotter.fandom.com/wiki/Magic\\_is\\_Might\\_statue](https://harrypotter.fandom.com/wiki/Magic_is_Might_statue)



## Sorting stereotypes

As previously mentioned, distinct divisions also exist between the four Hogwarts houses. The students get sorted into their houses (Gryffindor, Slytherin, Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff) upon their arrival to Hogwarts, based on a decision made by the Sorting Hat<sup>1</sup>. Their houses become their homes for the entirety of their stay at Hogwarts. The students collect points for their houses, and compete against other houses for the House Cup and the Quidditch Cup (Rowling, 1997, p. 85). Since there is a lot of competition among the houses, stereotypes<sup>2</sup> about and prejudice<sup>3</sup> against individual houses are common. Members of the same family, such as the Weasleys, tend to get sorted into the same house, which makes young students anxious about the possibility of being sorted somewhere else (ibid., p. 80):

‘What house are your brothers in?’ asked Harry. ‘Gryffindor,’ said Ron. Gloom seemed to be settling on him again. ‘Mum and Dad were in it, too. I don’t know what they’ll say if I’m not. I don’t suppose Ravenclaw would be too bad, but imagine if they put me in Slytherin.’

Of course, there are exceptions to the rule. For example, Sirius Black was sorted into Gryffindor even though his entire family was in Slytherin (Rowling, 2007, p. 672). In the series, Slytherin is considered to be the “bad” house because Voldemort was sorted there during his stay at Hogwarts (Rowling, 1997, p. 80). Even Harry, who knows nothing about the houses before finding out he is a wizard, does not want to be in Slytherin: “Perhaps it was Harry’s imagination, after all he’d heard about Slytherin, but he thought they looked an unpleasant lot” (ibid., p. 89).

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<sup>1</sup>The pupils put on the Sorting Hat during the Sorting Ceremony. It determines to which house the pupils belong based on the characteristics they possess. Gryffindors value bravery and chivalry, Hufflepuffs loyalty and patience, Ravenclaws wit and learning and Slytherins resourcefulness, ambition and cunningness (Rowling, 1997, p. 88).

<sup>2</sup>The positive or negative beliefs that we hold about the characteristics of a social group (Jhangiani & Tarry, 2014, p. 546).

<sup>3</sup>An unjustifiable negative attitude toward an outgroup or toward the members of that outgroup (Jhangiani & Tarry, 2014, p. 546).

Harry, Ron and Hermione all get sorted into Gryffindor. On the other hand, Draco Malfoy and his friends, Crabbe and Goyle, get into Slytherin (Rowling, 1997, p. 90). It is clear to the reader that there will be a rift among them for the remainder of the series because of the rivalry that exists between those two houses. In all the books in the series, Gryffindor and Slytherin are the two ‘main’ houses, while Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff do not get nearly as much attention. Despite this, it is common knowledge that Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff are mostly on the side of Gryffindor and do not like the Slytherin house. At the end of the first book, everyone cheers when Gryffindor wins the House Cup instead of Slytherin, “for even Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff were celebrating the downfall of Slytherin” (ibid., p. 222).

It is clear from the moment readers find out about the existence of the houses at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry that certain stereotypes are attached to each house. When placed into a house, students are not considered as individuals anymore, but just as people defined by their house. This is an example of a process called social categorization, which happens when we think of someone according to their social group membership (Jhangiani & Tarry, 2014, p. 550). The negative side of this, which creates stereotypes among the Hogwarts houses, is that categorizing people into groups leads to the perception of outgroup homogeneity. This means that we view members of groups other than our own as more similar to each other than they actually are, due to the fact that we do not have much contact with them. This prevents us from learning about members of outgroups as individuals (ibid., p. 554). By categorizing people into groups, we also tend to judge members of different groups as more different than ourselves than they actually are (ibid., p. 553). Thinking this way makes it easy to apply stereotypes to members of different groups without considering their individuality. This is seen in Hogwarts houses: the stereotypical characteristics attached to each house (Gryffindors are brave, Ravenclaws are smart, Hufflepuffs are kind and Slytherins are evil or at least bad) are automatically applied to all members of that house. Even though the Sorting Hat places pupils into houses based on the individual characteristics they possess<sup>4</sup>, it also puts them

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<sup>4</sup>The Sorting Hat expresses stereotypes about the Hogwarts houses in its song: “By Gryffindor, the bravest were / Prized far beyond the rest; / For Ravenclaw, the cleverest / Would always be the best; / For Hufflepuff, hard workers were / Most worthy of admission; / And power-hungry Slytherin / Loved those of great ambition” (Rowling, 2000, p. 115).

in boxes which erase their individuality. With only a few examples (see below), house members show little sign of individuality. Once established, stereotypes about and prejudice against a group of people are difficult to change (ibid., p. 561).

Hufflepuff is probably thought to be the blandest house throughout the series. The Sorting Hat describes it as “just and loyal, / Those patient Hufflepuffs are true / And unafraid of toil” (Rowling, 1997, p. 88). Draco Malfoy even says that he would leave Hogwarts if he got sorted into Hufflepuff (ibid., p. 60). Throughout the series, nothing particularly exceptional happens to the Hufflepuffs, and their only member who stands out in the series is Cedric Diggory, who becomes the Hogwarts representative in the Triwizard Tournament, a magical competition among three wizarding schools (Rowling, 2000 p. 176). Since this is the only time when the Hufflepuff house is the centre of attention, they become resentful towards Gryffindor when Harry is selected as the second representative for Hogwarts (ibid., p. 191):

It was plain that the Hufflepuffs felt that Harry had stolen their champion’s glory; a feeling exacerbated, perhaps, by the fact that Hufflepuff house very rarely got any glory, and that Cedric was one of the few who had ever given them any, having beaten Gryffindor once at Quidditch.

The Ravenclaw house does not have any negative stereotypes connected to it. The Sorting Hat describes it as the place where “those of wit and learning, / Will always find their kind” (Rowling, 1997, p. 60). Ravenclaw is known as the house that produces intelligent witches and wizards.

There are a few examples in the books of house members who stand out from the rest of their group and show individual characteristics. For example, the Ravenclaw Luna Lovegood is given the nickname “Loony” (Rowling, 2003, p. 168), probably because of her unusual appearance and behaviour: “she had stuck her wand behind her left ear for safekeeping, she had chosen to wear a necklace of butterbeer caps, she was reading a magazine upside down” (ibid., p. 168). She is quite smart but not a typical Ravenclaw. She proves that she is brave by fighting alongside Harry in many battles that take place during the series. Another example is Peter Pettigrew, a Gryffindor who was best friends

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with Harry's father, Sirius Black and Remus Lupin, but decided to join Voldemort and betray Harry's parents (Rowling, 1997, p. 274). His behaviour is not characteristic of the Gryffindor house; he is a coward, cunning, and described by Sirius as someone who never does anything for anyone unless he can see what is in it for him (ibid., p. 271). Also, the Slytherin house does not always produce evil wizards and witches. Although he starts out evil, Severus Snape ends up helping the Order of the Phoenix and working against Voldemort because he feels responsible for the death of Harry's mother. As Harry reveals to Voldemort (Rowling, 2007, p. 740):

Severus Snape wasn't yours, Snape was Dumbledore's, Dumbledore's from the moment you started hunting down my mother!... He was Dumbledore's spy from the moment you threatened her, and he's been working against you ever since!

While he is not always fair or pleasant, Snape's role as a spy among Voldemort's followers shows he is very brave, which is a trademark of the Gryffindor house.

Stereotypes about the members of the Hogwarts houses are quite common and persistent in the fictional world of Harry Potter. As these previous examples show, house members are rarely presented as individuals and regularly associated with the stereotypical characteristics of their house. There is little socializing among the houses and pupils usually find friends in their own house. Rivalries exist between some house members, especially the Gryffindors and Slytherins. Because of their rootedness in the wizarding communities, it is difficult to overcome the house stereotypes.

### **The treatment of house-elves and goblins**

The downfall of many wizards in Rowling's books can partly be ascribed to their treatment of creatures they do not consider equal to themselves. For example, Sirius treats his house-elf Kreacher as someone undeserving of love or attention, which makes Kreacher cross to Voldemort's side and betray all the secrets of the Order of the Phoenix (Rowling, 2007, p. 733):

I warned Sirius when we adopted twelve Grimmauld Place as our headquarters that Kreacher must be treated with kindness and respect. I also told him that Kreacher could be dangerous to us. I do not think that Sirius took me very seriously, or that he ever saw Kreacher as a being with feelings as acute as a human.

Furthermore, house-elves work as servants without pay in rich pureblood families. One example is Dobby, who works for the Malfoy family until Harry frees him (Rowling, 1998, p. 217). Even Dumbledore employs house-elves in Hogwarts' kitchens without pay or vacation. The only house-elf who gets paid by Dumbledore is Dobby, because he asks for it (Rowling, 2000, p. 161). In general, elves are considered to be servants, and nothing more. When establishing the Society for the Promotion of Elfish Welfare (S.P.E.W.), Hermione receives no support from her best friends. Ron even tries to convince her that house-elves think their position is normal: "Hermione – open your ears. They. Like. It. They like being enslaved!" (ibid., p. 198). But Harry Potter is extremely fair to Dobby.

Along with house-elves, goblins are another species thought by most purebloods to be less valuable than wizards. Even though they are a vital part of the community because they run Gringotts, the bank for wizards, and have outstanding magical abilities, they are considered unequal. It is common for wizards to have negative prejudices against them; for example, Ron is disrespectful when talking about an exam question regarding goblins: "Couldn't remember all the goblin rebels' names, so I invented a few [...] they're all called stuff like Bodrod the Bearded and Urg the Unclean; it wasn't hard" (Rowling, 2000, p. 537). Ron also mocks Hermione's idea of protecting house-elves and goblins by saying that she should come up with an organization called S.P.U.G. – Society for the Protection of Ugly Goblins, to which she replies that goblins can stand up for themselves, which they did throughout history, and therefore do not need protection the way house-elves do (ibid., p. 390). On the other hand, Remus Lupin, a werewolf and a member of the Order of the Phoenix, recognizes that the wizarding community denied freedom to goblins when discussing whether they will side with Voldemort during the second wizarding war (Rowling, 2003, p. 81).

In general, wizards like to be away from the things they do not agree with. They like to be separated from and segregate other species that are not the same as them. This

can be seen from two examples: giants and centaurs. Dumbledore and Harry Potter's group do have a great respect for and confidence in the half-giant Hagrid. However, Hagrid is discriminated by the Hogwarts Professor Dolores Umbridge, who has prejudice against "half-breeds": "It's her thing about half-breeds all over again – she's trying to make out Hagrid's some kind of dim-witted troll, just because he had a giantess for a mother" (Rowling, 2000, p. 397). Hagrid says that wizards do not have a particular issue with other species such as giants, as long as they do not see them: "It's jus' that mos' wizards aren't bothered where they are, s' long as it's a good long way away" (Rowling, 2003, p. 376). This is also true for centaurs, who live in the Black Forest because "the Ministry of Magic permits [them] certain areas of land" (ibid., p. 665), as well as goblins, with whom wizards communicate only during their visits to the wizarding bank, and house-elves, who are servants and therefore interaction with them is not especially needed.

### **Discrimination against werewolves**

Lupin is discriminated against throughout his life for having lycanthropy, i.e. being a werewolf (Rowling, 2003, p. 271). Werewolves are considered dangerous by the wizarding world, which is true only during the full moon; the rest of the month they are just ordinary wizards who should not be mistreated for something they cannot control. In spite of that, Lupin is considered an outcast by the majority of the wizarding community. He is first outed as a werewolf to the entire wizarding community by Severus Snape (Rowling, 1999, p. 309), which later leads to many problems in Lupin's life. Even though he is qualified and very intelligent, there are laws which prevent him from finding work because of his illness (Rowling, 2003, p. 271). Rowling herself stated that Lupin's lycanthropy is "a metaphor for those illnesses that carry a stigma, like HIV and AIDS" (2016, p. 47).

## 2. Gender stereotypes

Gender stereotypes stem from the idea that the roles and characteristics assigned to men and women are determined and limited by their gender. Wrongful gender stereotyping can lead to discrimination (called sexism), limiting the development of an individual's natural talents and abilities, as well as his/her educational and professional experiences and opportunities in general ("Gender stereotypes", n.d.). Gender differences or similarities are not openly discussed in the *Harry Potter* series. Hogwarts is a mixed school where everything seems to be divided equally: male and female students attend the same classes where they are taught by both male and female teachers, wear uniforms, and play Quidditch in mixed teams. For Eccleshare, this is a sign that Hogwarts promotes gender equality, since it employs both great witches and wizards (2002, p. 83). However, some authors offer different opinions on the issue of gender in Hogwarts.

Heilman and Donaldson point out that the male characters in Rowling's books are in a dominant position, while the women are mere secondary characters (2009, p. 139). They claim that the female characters in the series are marginalised, stereotyped and even mocked (ibid., p. 140). Furthermore, there are more male (35) than female (29) characters in the first four books, and their number increases to 201 (as opposed to 115 female characters) by the end of the series (ibid, p. 141). The characters who are frightening, evil, or suspected of being evil, are overwhelmingly male in the first four books and primarily male in the later books (ibid.). Even though this is true for characters such as Voldemort, Draco, Peter Pettigrew, or the Death Eaters, the books also show evil female characters, such as Bellatrix Lestrange, Rita Skeeter and Dolores Umbridge. Dolores Umbridge, who works for the Ministry of Magic, uses physical punishment on students<sup>5</sup> and despises everything related to Muggles. Later in the series, she becomes the head of the Muggle-born Registration Commission (Rowling, 2007, p. 250), in charge of taking away wands

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<sup>5</sup> "Harry placed the point of the quill on the paper and wrote: 'I must not tell lies'. He let out a gasp of pain... The words appeared on the back of Harry's right hand, cut into his skin as though traced there by a scalpel" (Rowling, 2003, p. 240).

from Muggle-born wizards which brings her a great joy: “she was so happy here, in her element, upholding the twisted laws she had helped to write” (ibid., p. 259).

Heilman and Donaldson also state that important good female characters in the first half of the series (books 1-3), such as Hermione Granger, Mrs Weasley and professor McGonagall are seen as helpers (2009, p. 146). Even though Hermione is considered to be the smartest of her peer group, she rarely acts of her own accord (ibid.). The books often reference girls in groups, without really describing them as individuals; they are portrayed as giggly, emotional and gossipy (ibid., p. 150). There are also a lot of references to female characters being worried about their looks, which can be seen in Hermione’s character. She is described as a girl with “a bossy sort of voice, lots of bushy brown hair, and rather large front teeth” (Rowling, 1997, p. 79); she is often mocked by the girls from the Slytherin house, and is only seen as pretty when she changes her appearance (including her teeth) for the dance in *The Goblet of Fire* (Rowling, 2000, p. 360):

She had done something with her hair; it was no longer bushy, but sleek and shiny...she was holding herself differently somehow...she was also smiling – rather nervously, it was true – but the reduction in the size of her front teeth was more noticeable than ever.

The message that female characters have to possess beauty or go through a makeover to be seen and valued can be found in many works of literature, for example, in the popular fairy tale “Cinderella”. Other female characters also worry about their looks: Moaning Myrtle because she is wearing glasses, Eloise Midgen because of her acne, etc. (Heilman & Donaldson, 2009, p. 152).

Rowling often puts female characters in traditional roles of wives and mothers in all the books. The main female characters in these roles are Petunia, Mrs Weasley, Winky (the female house-elf) and Hermione (Gallardo & Smith, 2003, p. 193). Petunia fits the evil stepmother role, because of the bad way she treats Harry in comparison to her own son. Molly Weasley takes care of the household and all her children, which is her main role throughout the series. Winky the house-elf nurtures Barty Crouch Jr. back to life, while Hermione takes care of Ron and Harry throughout the series, saves them from trouble and eventually becomes a mother figure to them during their search for the



horcruxes (Gallardo & Smith, 2003, p. 193). Most women in the series are mothers, such as Molly Weasley and Petunia, who take care of the household or teachers. On the other hand, male characters frequently have glamorous, exciting roles: for instance, Charlie Weasley studies dragons, Bill Weasley goes on secret missions for Gringotts, etc. (ibid.).

Nikolajeva claims that male characters in the *Harry Potter* books are portrayed as superior to female characters. As examples, she mentions the humiliation of Professor Trelawney (e.g. professor Umbridge firing her in front of all of the students in book five), and the treatment of girls in Gryffindor's Quidditch team (Nikolajeva, 2009, p. 228). The girls who play Quidditch are not that memorable in the first half of the series and even the Gryffindor team captain Wood has to be reminded to include them while addressing the team: "Wood cleared his throat for silence. Okay, *men*, he said. *And women*, said Chaser Angelina Johnson. *And women*, Wood agreed" (Rowling, 1997, p. 136, emphasis in the original).

The superiority of male characters can also be seen in the final battle in which Neville kills Voldemort's snake, even though Hermione, Ginny and other female characters are very heroic in all the battles leading up to that moment. That makes him equal to Harry, which creates further speculation about him being the Chosen One. Both Hermione and Ginny end up being married and taking care of their children. Their careers after school are not mentioned in detail, making their role of wives and daughters superior to the careers they possibly have (Nikolajeva, 2009, p. 238).

Despite her positive evaluation of Hogwarts, Eccleshare believes that Rowling does not fully use the potential her female characters have. Even though most of them are intelligent and competent, they do not usually appear in leading roles. On the contrary, "Rowling reverts to the patterns of children's books before the mid-1950s which, with a few exceptions, invariably cast girls as either practical or sensitive" (Eccleshare, 2002, p. 87). The reason for this might be that boys do not usually read novels in which the main characters are girls (ibid., p. 88).

Eccleshare also claims that Hermione is not resourceful, humorous or capable of adapting to situations (Eccleshare, 2002, p. 87), which, in my opinion, is not true. Hermione proves

she is smart and resourceful multiple times throughout the novels. She is the one who solves most of the puzzles the trio faces at the end of *The Philosopher's Stone*. She solves the puzzle which helps Harry get through the black flames before reaching the Mirror of Erised at the end of the book<sup>6</sup>. In the second book, she figures out there is a basilisk in Hogwarts: she finds a paper which says that basilisks are giant snakes, feared by spiders, and realizes that the Hogwarts basilisk is using pipes to get around the school (Rowling, 1998, p. 215). She is the one who often uses reason and common sense before acting. For example, she convinces Harry, who dreams about Sirius being at the Ministry of Magic, to check if his godfather is at home before going to rescue him at the Ministry: “But...Harry, think about this, it’s five o’clock in the afternoon... the Ministry of Magic must be full of workers... how would Voldemort and Sirius have got in without being seen?” (Rowling, 2003, p. 645); “Harry, I’m begging you, please! Please let’s just check that Sirius isn’t at home before we go charging off to London” (ibid., p. 648).

In the second half of the series (books four to seven), the female characters become more developed. They are not just wives and mothers anymore – they participate in the battle against evil. For example, Molly Weasley, who is primarily seen as a housewife, always “clattering around, cooking haphazardly” (Rowling, 1998, p. 31), proves to be skilful during battles. She is a member of the Order of the Phoenix, participates in the first wizarding war and duels Bellatrix Lestrange in the last battle of the series: “Molly’s curse soared beneath Bellatrix’s outstretched arm and hit her squarely in the chest, directly over her heart” (Rowling, 2007, p. 736). Ginny Weasley is another character who goes through a change in the series. In the first part of the series she is very shy and hardly talks around Harry because she is in love with him (Rowling, 1998, p. 35). She later becomes a confident young woman, takes part in a lot of battles and becomes a great Quidditch player. Nymphadora Tonks is also a good example of a female character who is very important to the series. She is an auror (typically a male profession) and a Metamorphmagus, which means she can change her appearance (Rowling, 2003, p. 52). However, even though she is very powerful, she loses some of that power due to relationship issues with Remus Lupin. Professor McGonagall takes on the role of the

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<sup>6</sup> “Hermione read the papers several times. Then she walked up and down the line, muttering to herself and pointing at them. At last, she clapped her hands. 'Got it', she said” (Rowling, 1997, p. 207).

leader during the last battle of Hogwarts, protects Hogwarts, and gives out orders to other professors (Rowling, 2007, p. 600):

“Professor, we’ve got to barricade the school, he’s coming now!” “Very well. He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named is coming”, she told the other teachers. Sprout and Flitwick gasped; Slughorn let out a low groan. “Potter has work to do in the castle on Dumbledore’s orders. We need to put in place every protection of which we are capable while Potter does what he needs to do.” [...] “I suggest we establish basic protection around the place, then gather our students and meet in the Great Hall. Most must be evacuated, though if any of those who are over age wish to stay and fight, I think they ought to be given the chance”.

To sum up, gender differences are not that obvious in the *Harry Potter* books unless we focus on details surrounding female and male characters. Both female and male characters in the series have attributes commonly associated with the other gender. None of the characters are one-dimensional and the fact that there are more male than female characters could just be a coincidence. The books do not lack important, strong characters of both genders, whether they are good or evil.

### 3. Politics – Wizarding world vs. our (real) world

The magical, wizarding world in the *Harry Potter* series is concealed within a realistic world representing our own, real world. It has everything our world has, such as transportation, banks, schools, laws, etc. Everything in the magical world is regulated in the same way as in the non-magical Muggle world, with a few differences. This chapter discusses the differences and similarities between the political arrangements of these two worlds.

The plot of the *Harry Potter* books is set in the United Kingdom, a constitutional and a parliamentary democracy, with Queen Elizabeth II as the head of state and the Parliament as the legislative organ. The Parliament consists of two houses: House of Lords and House of Commons. The House of Commons consists of multiple political parties, the main being the Conservative Party and the Labour Party. The Prime Minister is the one responsible for the policy and government decisions (O'Driscoll, 2003, p. 74).

The Ministry of Magic is mostly mentioned with regards to politics in the wizarding world. It is located in Central London and has seven main departments: Magical Law Enforcement, Magical Accidents and Catastrophes, Magical Transportation, Mysteries, Magical Games and Sports, Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures, and International Magical Cooperation (“The Ministry of Magic”, n.d.). Like Ministers in the Muggle world, the Minister for Magic is democratically elected, but not for a fixed term. However, he is obliged to hold regular elections every seven years at least. The series mentions four Prime Ministers: Cornelius Fudge, Rufus Scrimgeour, Pius Thicknesse and Kingsley Shacklebot (ibid.).

The Muggle part of the United Kingdom has no say in how politics in the wizarding world works. The two political worlds only come in contact in case of dangerous situations or other events in the wizarding world which can affect the Muggle world, for example the Triwizard Tournament, changes of government or the return of Voldemort (Rowling, 2005, p.11). The book series does not mention political parties. In addition to the Prime Minister, the wizards also have Wizengamot, the high court of law, and the parliament, which predates the Ministry of Magic. It is part of the Magical Law

Enforcement Department, but the trials take place in the dungeons of the Ministry of Magic. During the trials, the accused is allowed to present witnesses and have a “lawyer” – someone with legal knowledge who speaks in favour of the accused (“Wizengamot”, n.d.).

The main law in the wizarding world is the International Statute of Secrecy. It prevents Muggles from finding out about the existence of magic by punishing wizards who expose themselves to Muggles and keeping dangerous magic away from inexperienced, underage wizards (“What are the differences between Muggle and wizarding world law?”, n.d.). This can be compared to the real world, in which the age-sensitive laws are quite common. For example, minors cannot buy alcohol or drive a car in most countries.

Laws which pertain to crimes against people are taken seriously in both worlds. In the Muggle world, they include the laws forbidding murder, bodily harm and similar acts of violence. In the wizarding world, physical violence is not that common. However, wizards who harm others by using one of the Unforgivable Curses – Avada, Kedavra, Imeprius, and Cruciatius – are sentenced to spend the rest of their lives in Azkaban prison (Rowling, 2003, p. 192). Being sent to Azkaban is the worst punishment a wizard can get. Wizards who commit major crimes are also sent to the wizarding prison (“Azkaban”, n.d.), which is guarded by Dementors, soul-draining creatures (“Dementors”, n.d.).

There are cases in the wizarding world of money and discretion playing a large part in how a person is punished for the crime s/he committed. For example, Harry is reassured by the Minister of Magic, Cornelius Fudge, that blowing up his aunt is not a reason for sending him to Azkaban (Rowling, 1999, p. 39) because Fudge wants to insure Harry’s safety. However, in another instance of alleged use of under-age magic, Harry gets a letter saying that he has been expelled from Hogwarts (Rowling, 2003, p. 30).

In both the wizarding and Muggle worlds, politics is not always fair. The books contain several instances of corruption influencing the decisions of politicians. For example, in the third book, Buckbeak the hippogriff is sentenced to death for scratching Draco Malfoy, whose father is politically influential and “very well connected” (Rowling,

2003, p. 142)<sup>7</sup>. We learn that Lucius Malfoy makes generous donations to get in “with the right people” who then do him favours by, for instance, delaying “laws he doesn’t want passed” (ibid.). This shows that corruption is as present in the wizarding world as it is in the real world. Major miscarriages of justice also appear when Voldemort frames Morfin Gaunt for the murder of a Muggle family (Rowling, 2005, p. 343) or when Sirius Black is sent to Azkaban for murdering Peter Pettigrew and betraying Harry’s parents to Voldemort, even though there is no evidence to support the accusations (Rowling, 1999, p. 271).

The only newspaper published in the wizarding world is *The Daily Prophet*, not counting the small circulation publications. However, *The Daily Prophet* is not unbiased and sometimes serves as a means for politicians to hush up or influence certain stories (“The Daily Prophet”, n.d.). Its main contributor is Rita Skeeter, a journalist who often exaggerates and even writes lies to promote certain themes (ibid.).

### **Politics of the wizarding world as a social issue**

Politics in the wizarding world can often be seen as unfair. There are many cases of important news getting covered up to maintain a certain image. For example, Cornelius Fudge refuses to accept the fact that Voldemort has returned and does nothing to stop his violent acts because he does not want to destabilise everything the Ministry worked hard for. Dumbledore and Harry, who try to spread the word of Voldemort’s return, are therefore branded as liars in *The Daily Prophet* (Rowling, 2003, p. 89):

“He loves being Minister of Magic, and he’s managed to convince himself that he’s the clever one and Dumbledore’s simply stirring up trouble for the sake of it.”  
“How can he think that?” said Harry angrily. “How can he think Dumbledore would just make it all up — that I’d make it all up?” “Because accepting that Voldemort’s back would mean trouble like the Ministry hasn’t had to cope with

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<sup>7</sup>“You’ll have to put up a good strong defense, Hagrid’, said Hermione, sitting down and laying a hand on Hagrid’s massive forearm. ‘I’m sure you can prove Buckbeak is safe’. ‘Won’t make no difference!’ sobbed Hagrid. ‘Them Disposal devils, they’re all in Lucius Malfoy’s pocket! Scared o’ him!’” (Rowling, 1999, p. 219).

for nearly fourteen years,” said Sirius bitterly. “Fudge just can’t bring himself to face it. It’s so much more comfortable to convince himself Dumbledore’s lying to destabilize him.” [...] “What’s more, the Ministry’s leaning heavily on the *Daily Prophet* not to report any of what they’re calling Dumbledore’s rumormongering, so most of the Wizarding community are completely unaware anything’s happened, and that makes them easy targets for the Death Eaters if they’re using the Imperius Curse”.

In order to prevent Dumbledore and Harry from spreading news about Voldemort’s return in the school, Fudge sends Ministry worker Dolores Umbridge to Hogwarts in the role of a professor (Rowling, 2003, p. 193) and Hogwarts High Inquisitor, someone with the power to inspect the work of other professors (ibid., p. 274).

The fifth book in the series presents the politics of the wizarding world as a social issue for wizards. Events are covered up, news is hidden from the community, newspapers are controlled – all in order to retain a false image (Rowling, 2003, p. 501):

“You mean the *Prophet* won’t print it because Fudge won’t let them”, said Hermione irritably. Rita gave Hermione a long, hard look. Then, leaning forward across the table toward her, she said in a businesslike tone, “All right, Fudge is leaning on the Prophet, but it comes to the same thing. They won’t print a story that shows Harry in a good light. Nobody wants to read it. It’s against the public mood. This last Azkaban breakout has got people quite worried enough. People just don’t want to believe You-Know-Who’s back.” “So the Daily Prophet exists to tell people what they want to hear, does it?” said Hermione scathingly.

It is not until he sees with his own eyes that Voldemort has returned that Fudge believes it (Rowling, 2003, p. 720). Until then, he misuses his position and does not protect the community the way he should.

As mentioned above, the book series mentions four Ministers of Magic. One of them, Pius Thicknesse, spends his entire term in the office under the Imperius curse, which makes him unaware of his actions. He is influenced by Voldemort who turns him into his puppet (Rowling, 2007, p. 208). This is an example of corruption of power: the community is not informed that their Minister is under the Imperius Curse and that they are actually ruled by the wizarding world’s number one enemy – Lord Voldemort.

The politics of the wizarding world can get a bit confusing throughout the series and the decisions the politicians make are not always consistent or just. Interference from different sources turns the Ministry of Magic into an untrustworthy political body and the cover ups harm the community, especially during Voldemort's rise to power. This becomes a social issue, especially in *The Order of the Phoenix*, when Fudge refuses to accept that Voldemort is back, and in *The Deathly Hallows*, when the prosecution of wizards becomes an everyday occurrence (Rowling, 2007, p. 250).

Even though the main plot of the *Harry Potter* books seems to be like a straightforward story about good vs. evil, it is not. The wizarding world, which in the books exists hidden within a realistic world, is very similar to ours. It has its issues and problems which its members have to face on a daily basis.



## CONCLUSION

This thesis has addressed the different social issues present in J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series. They include racism among wizards, which revolves around the issue of blood "purity"; different forms of discrimination against the creatures wizards consider less worthy, such as house-elves and goblins; discrimination against werewolves due to their condition; stereotypes about the Hogwarts houses and their members; gender stereotypes; and issues regarding wizarding politics. These issues are not present in every book in the series. They are less obvious in the first half of the series – especially books one and three – but become more noticeable as the series progresses and the characters get older. That is probably because the series becomes more appealing to young adult readers, which encounter those issues or are more familiar with them than children.

The most prominent and most talked about social issue in the series is racism, seen primarily as discrimination against anyone who is not human or pureblood. The evil wizard Voldemort wants to "purify" the wizarding world because he thinks that true wizards have to be pureblood. This is reminiscent of Nazi views of ethnic and race "purity", which motivated much of their violent actions during World War II. Racism is also seen in the way wizards discriminate against different magical creatures: house-elves, who are servants to the wizards, are treated very badly, sometimes without any regards to their well-being; goblins are looked down upon, and despite being very powerful, are not given the same rights as wizards because they are not human.

Gender stereotyping is another issue wizards' face, even though it is not presented in such an obvious way. Scholars disagree on whether or not sexism and gender stereotyping is really an issue in the *Harry Potter* books. On the one hand, there are lots of examples of female characters being put in a secondary position. On the other hand, the wizarding world is quite evenly split between witches and wizards, and contains many influential witches who defy traditional gender norms, which is the stance I agree with. During the series, readers have the opportunity to encounter influential wizards and witches and the examples through which it could be said that witches are not in the same position as wizards are not obvious. Stereotypes are also associated to the four Hogwarts

houses and their members. The books provide plenty of examples of prejudice against the houses, mainly Slytherin. It is believed that Slytherin is the house which produces evil wizards, which may be true for some house members, but does not mean that every single member of Slytherin is evil. Putting people into stereotyped boxes, erasing their individuality and only seeing them as bearers of the characteristics of their social group is never a good thing. Hogwarts students learn about the house-related stereotypes on their first school day, after the sorting ceremony. The stereotypes follow them throughout their life, because many in the wizarding world behave as if knowing which Hogwarts house someone belongs to tells them all they need to know about that person, which is not true. Fortunately, there are exceptions which show that house membership does not have to limit a person.

Politics and politicians in the wizarding world are quite similar to ours: like humans, wizards experience both the positive (good and just politicians) and negative (corruption within the government, controlling the news) side of politics. Towards the end of the series, Voldemort seizes control over the Ministry of Magic, which makes politics quite dangerous for the entire community. Racism and the persecution of wizards who are not pureblood becomes even more prominent during that time.

The *Harry Potter* series creates a rich and complex wizarding world, which has both good and bad sides. The different social issues it portrays are obviously inspired by issues found in our world and can serve as a learning aid for the readers of the books. They are not the main topic of the series, but can be found as soon as the reader looks behind the magic. By imagining the events happening in the wizarding world and the social issues the wizards have to face, readers – who have probably encountered discrimination and stereotyping in their own lives – can compare those problems with those from their own lives, and following the message created by these stories and the attitudes taken by Harry Potter, his friends, and other socially-aware characters, find solutions to them and become more considerate towards others.

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## **Izjava o samostalnoj izradi rada**

Izjavljujem da sam ja, Kristina Zirdum, studentica integriranoga preddiplomskoga i diplomskoga sveučilišnoga studija primarnoga obrazovanja s engleskim jezikom na Učiteljskom fakultetu u Zagrebu, samostalno napisala ovaj diplomski rad uvažavajući komentare i izmjene mentorica.

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