THE HARRY POTTER PHENOMENON AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR LITERACY EDUCATION

by

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ABSTRACT

According to Nielsen BookScan, an independent book trade monitoring service, 2,652,656 copies of the final book in the Harry Potter series, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (Rowling, 2007), were sold across the United Kingdom within the first 24 hours of sales. The book thus became the fastest selling in history, overtaking the sales record of its predecessor, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* (Rowling, 2005), which sold 2,009,574 copies in the UK in the first 24 hours. With yearly releases beginning in 1997, at one point *Harry Potter* novels occupied the top four spots on *The New York Times Bestseller List*, prompting the addition of a children’s bestseller list so that popular literary fiction intended for adults might be represented. Considering this scenario, questions that have arisen for literary educators are as follows: What forces were at play behind this literary phenomenon, and what are the implications for literacy and literary education?

This thesis examines the success of *Harry Potter* as a literary and commercial phenomenon, considering in particular the literary features of the novels that might have contributed to their success, the marketing of the texts, the rise of the Harry Potter “brand,” the timing of the emergence of the series alongside the rise of social media, and the implications of all of this for the future of literary reading and literary education.
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Table 1. Timeline of *Harry Potter* Books and Film Releases ..............................................45
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DEDICATION

To SSK and my family, for their unfailing support
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Although J. K. Rowling’s Harry Potter series has been criticized as being an amalgam of literary styles that contributes nothing to literature (Heilman, 2002), heteronormative in its depiction of male and female characters (Dresang, 2002; Heilman, 2002), Edwardian in its values system (Steege, 2002), and of no benefit to education (Pharr, 2002), the demand for the books, films, and related products has nevertheless swept the planet seemingly faster than Harry’s Firebolt or Sirius’s flying motorcycle. Not only have the books, films, and related products circled the globe at a voracious speed, but the frenzy to translate, and even pirate, the Harry Potter materials is also a powerful indicator of the series’ success. As well, the number of Internet-based fan sites such as Mugglenet.com and Veritaserum.com dedicated to online discussions regarding Potter plot lines, characters, and films indicates the dedication of the Harry Potter fan base, not only in their desire to discuss and debate the novels as a community, but also in their zeal to contribute their own fan fiction to heighten their experience. Considering this scenario, questions that arise for literary educators are, what forces are at play behind this literary phenomenon, and what are the implications for literacy education? Before addressing these questions, however, it is important to make clear the unprecedented extent of the Harry Potter phenomenon.

The Harry Potter phenomenon

The story of author J. K. Rowling parallels Harry’s rags-to-riches ascent. Rowling, who has risen from obscurity and poverty with determination and an unsolicited manuscript, has emerged to become an award-winning author and the wealthiest woman in England (Brown, 2002, p. 7). Just as fictional Harry Potter is pulled from the anonymous ranks of the British middle-class to defeat the world’s greatest enemy, through her fictional creation, Rowling overcame her poverty to achieve unparalleled financial success and fame through literature. Like
Harry, whose wizarding lineage and benevolent nature are used for the betterment of humankind (Rowling, 2007, p. 711), Rowling’s accomplishment is portrayed as an exemplar of untainted moral behaviour and financial triumph because the tremendous influence of the novels, the critical success of the films, and the overwhelming array of the merchandise did not result from an initial marketing push (Brown, 2002, p. 6). Her perseverance, the compelling nature of the tale, and Rowling’s early fans were credited with making her a fairytale champion for this era (Brown, 2002).

The initial eight publishers to whom the first *Harry Potter* novel was offered rejected it, and, subsequently, once Bloomsbury Publishing accepted it, it received only a single review in *The Scotsman*. Stephen Brown (2002), Professor of Marketing Research at the University of Ulster, described the effect on some fans:

> Pontificators on Pottermania invariably refer to the “purity” of the phenomenon, maintaining it was achieved and sustained entirely by personal recommendation, schoolyard conversations, Internet chat rooms, and sheer consumer satisfaction, enthusiasm, evangelism. . . . The normal apparatus of pre-teen marketing—television programs, product placement sponsorship deals, and so on—was conspicuous by its absence. (p. 8)

*Harry Potter* has attracted legions of otherwise resistant literary followers and has prompted a resurgence of novel reading by youth. One of the undeniable features of the *Harry Potter* books is their ability to appeal to the reluctant reader in an era marked by diminishing readership (National Endowment for the Arts, 2007) and to provide multiple perspectives for analyses of the novels’ literary and social appeal. Critics have cited a lengthy list of the novels’ key features as reason for the *Harry Potter* phenomenon and the perspectives from which to examine it; however, these idealized qualities for which *Harry* and Rowling were first praised contrast sharply with the feared outcomes of widely promoted products, which the *Harry Potter* novels have become.
Douglas Kellner (1998) argued:

A commercially produced and dominated youth culture has replaced traditional artifacts of children’s culture. In this media youth culture, popular music, television, film, and video and computer games create new idols, aspirations, and artifacts that profoundly influence the thought and behaviour of contemporary youth. (p. 85)

In an educational environment, where marketing has been typically rejected for fear of compromising and exploiting the vulnerability of children, overwhelming reader demand makes the phenomenon difficult to dismiss as simply an event of popular cultural with no value to education (Bloom, 2002; Turner-Vorbeck, 2002).

Discussions on the level of the novels’ success are not to determine whether they are, in fact, successful or valuable but, rather, what level of phenomenon has been achieved. According to Nielsen BookScan, an independent book trade monitoring service, 2,652,656 copies of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (Rowling, 2007), the final book in the seven novel series, were sold across the United Kingdom within the first 24 hours of sales. This makes the book the fastest selling in history, and it has overtaken its predecessor, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* (Rowling, 2005), which sold 2,009,574 copies in the UK in the first 24 hours; this represents a 32% increase in the rate of sales (Bloomsbury.com, 2007). Sales in children’s literature for Bloomsbury, the series publisher in the United Kingdom, increased 261% from $55.3 million in 2006, a year when there was no *Harry Potter* novel release, to $198.1 million in 2007. The company’s increase in revenues by $142.8 to $303 million overall was the result largely of sales of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (Bloomsbury.com, 2008). With yearly releases of *Harry Potter* novels beginning in 1997, at one point *Harry Potter* novels occupied the top four spots on *The New York Times Bestseller List*. This scenario prompted the addition of a children’s bestseller list so that other popular adult-oriented novelists such as John Updike and Philip Roth might be accommodated on the regular list (Brown, 2002).
The entire *Harry Potter* franchise not only gave reluctant readers and the novel and film industries a boost, but related industries were also affected positively. Teachers, parents, and journalists came to describe the “*Harry Potter* effect” and remarked at how:

reluctant readers will not only read the *Harry Potter* books but also clamour for more, and even struggle with unwieldy hardback copies of the novels in preference to waiting for the paperback to appear. (Hopper, 2005, p. 117)

Print shops worked at full production to meet initial release dates. As well, delivery services that shipped the books to their target locations were stretched to capacity to deliver the books on time. The children’s book industry experienced an overall 24% rate of growth attributed to the desire of *Harry Potter* fans to read similar material while awaiting the next release (Brown, 2002, p. 7). Boarding schools reported increases in applications during the release of the novels, even at ‘magical’ holiday sites associated with Arthur and Merlin such as Tintagel and Cornwall, tourism increased (Brown, 2002).

Although the first novel, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* (Rowling, 1997) received no advance marketing, it enjoyed unexpected popularity and garnered attention from a number of quarters. After the novel was awarded the Gold Medal Smarties Prize in 1997, there was a bidding war for the rights to release it in the American market. Ultimately, these rights were sold to Scholastic in the US for $100,000, an unprecedented figure for a children’s novel (Thomas, 2007, p. 3). A rush to translate the novel for readers around the world followed the rapidly growing interest, and Pottermania began to spread around the globe.

The *Harry Potter* series has been translated into 67 languages worldwide (Dammann, 2008, ¶2). Release intervals from the language of origin to a foreign translation are unregulated and inconsistent from novel to novel and country to country. The rate of translation is based largely on the level of market demand and similarity to the language of origin (Lathey, 2005). Impatience for foreign-language releases of the *Harry Potter* novels grew exponentially with
each new release. The first novel, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* (Rowling, 1997) was not translated in China until 2000, a full three years after the initial UK release (Lathey, 2005, p. 142). By contrast, China was the first to translate *The Order of the Phoenix* (Rowling, 2003), the fifth in the series, only a week after the June 2003 English-language release date. The Publishers Weekly NewsLine.com website claimed the Chinese translator was the first to produce a complete translation of the 870-page text, with plans for the first printing of 800,000 copies to begin October 1, 2003 (Lathey, 2005, p. 142). (The People’s Publishing House holds the rights to the *Harry Potter* novels in China.) Germany’s *Order of the Phoenix* translation was released in November 2003, but readers were less willing to wait for the final novel’s German translation, so *The Deathly Hallows* (Rowling, 2007) sold a million English copies, despite the language barrier (Griesburger, 2003, ¶ 1; Sabbagh, 2008). While readers awaited a French language version, *The Order of the Phoenix* became the only English-language book to top the French bestseller list (BBC.com, 2003). In Italy, demand for the final book resulted in a public campaign to send feathers to the publisher (as a type of messenger owl) in an attempt to speed publication (Simon, 2004).

Rapid foreign translations, fast on the heels of an original language release, were also of interest or concern to purchasers of legal publication rights. The inability to meet the demand for new novels through legal channels heightened the opportunity for black-market versions and pirated material and diminished the profits for legitimate publishers. Black-market novels such as *Cho Chang and the Monastery Murders* (Anonymous, 2002) or *Harry Potter and the Leopard Walk-up-to-Dragon* (Anonymous, 2002), were sold for approximately $2 and sold rapidly, much to the legal publisher’s dismay. The novels and films have been released in accordance with strict regulations so that the integrity of the plots and characters would remain intact; however, the demand for new *Harry Potter* material was so great in China that in 2002 a pirated novel in
which Harry is transformed into a hairy troll sold well regardless of plot and character compromise (BBC.com, 2002). A lag of just weeks between an initial English release of a popular novel and a language translation, once the rights have been purchased, represents thousands of unrealized sales (Lathey, 2005, p. 143); and efforts to replicate an author’s tone, style, and use of appropriate cultural references become secondary in the race to produce the quickest translation to maximize sales figures, as with the example of China (Lathey, 2005). The reduction in translation time from three years to one week between The Philosopher’s Stone (Rowling, 1997) and The Order of the Phoenix (Rowling, 2003) demonstrates the frenzy that each subsequent release created.

The case of India is also an excellent example of Harry Potter’s popularity, both for its legitimate sales and the speed with which the books were pirated. Of the 2 million preordered copies of Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows (Rowling, 2007) worldwide, 240,000 were awaiting their buyers in India alone, and 170,000 sold on the first day (M, 2002, ¶ 1, 7). With the cost of legitimate copies at $23 and counterfeit copies selling for as little as $3, it is estimated that as much as 50% of the sales went to pirated versions (M, 2002, ¶ 6, 10). As a result, the measures taken to prevent piracy in India were extreme: “The book trade called the Deathly Hallows operation the single most complex distribution operation undertaken in Indian publishing history, with simultaneous deliveries being made to more than 300 destinations across the country” (¶ 5). Shipments were guarded in armed convoys from airports to stores with the aid of local police. A piracy hotline was set up to report illegal sales, and police worked with legal teams on behalf of Bloomsbury and Penguin Publishing India to minimize piracy. While pirated copies of the sixth book, Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince (Rowling, 2005) were available in street stalls on the day it was released, no counterfeit copies were visible on the first

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1 “M” is the surname used by the author.
day that *Deathly Hallows* was released, their distribution perhaps slowed by the tighter security and possible three-year imprisonment and fine. As the priority of the police forces shifts away from the novels, however, the counterfeiters will likely again rise to meet the market demand (M, 2002).

Another major indicator of the novels’ popularity is the release and success of the film adaptations of the novels. The film versions of the books helped to fill the void while anxious readers anticipated the next book launch. The initial US $125 million investment for *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone* (Rowling, 1997) was repaid almost entirely in the first weekend of its release, and the film grossed $90,292,621 in the US alone (Box Office Mojo.com, 2008; Brown, 2002, p. 6). With successive film releases in 2002, 2004, 2005, and 2007, the films have grossed $4,485,743,967 worldwide, and occupy positions 20, 28, 31, 36, and 45, respectively, on the list of all-time US box office gross rankings (Box Office Mojo.com, 2008). *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* (Rowling, 2005), released in 2009, holds the record for the highest worldwide weekend opening at $394 million; 40% of that figure is the domestic intake (Box Office Mojo.com, 2010a). These rankings also make the *Harry Potter* films the biggest film franchise of all time. With two films left in the series (the next due for release in 2010), the films have outranked the *James Bond* film franchise, which has fallen into second place, with $4.44 billion in box office receipts. The *Star Wars* series ranks third, with $4.23 billion (BBC.com, 2007). As Warner Bros.’ domestic distribution president Dan Fellman stated, “With two movies yet to come, it is amazing to think what heights the franchise could reach by the end of the decade” (BBC.com, 2007). And now, with the split of the final book, *The Deathly Hallows* (Rowling, 2007) into two films due for release in 2010 and 2011, the financial potential is even greater (BBC.com, 2008).

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2 The film and product releases will be discussed in greater depth in chapter three.
With the anticipated success of the films, associated merchandise became essential to meet the demand of a ravenous *Harry Potter* fan base. Although the first book had little publicity or marketing, by the arrival of the first film in 2001, the related merchandise alone was expected to gross $1 billion (Brown, 2002, p. 7). J. K. Rowling signed the film rights over to Warner Bros., and at least 46 other licenses were granted to various manufacturers for memorabilia production. Among these manufacturers are Mattel for board games and toys, Hasbro for trading cards and candy, and Electronic Arts for video games and computer-based accessories (p. 7). In 2001, the year the first film was released, Mattel saw significant growth in its Entertainment area. As its shareholder report states, “The Entertainment category experienced worldwide sales growth of 14 percent, due in large part to the successful global introduction of *Harry Potter*® branded products” (Mattel Investor Relations, 2002). The additional growth places the figure for Mattel’s Entertainment division at $430.6 million in the fourth quarter of 2001 alone (Mattel, 2002).

The power of *Harry Potter* extends beyond financial strength. Examination of the *Harry Potter* phenomenon reveals that opportunities now exist to utilize the *Harry Potter* methods of creating communities through promotion, writing, and reader interaction to strengthen and invigorate the popularity of other forms of literature and text in young readers.

Implications for literary and literacy educators

To return to the questions with which I began this chapter, in this thesis I will consider the forces at play behind the success of *Harry Potter* and the implications for literary and literacy educators. I will examine the success of *Harry Potter* as a literary and commercial phenomenon, as well as how Harry has become a hero for our time through a combination of the books themselves, film and videogame exposure, other merchandising materials, and the emergence of new Internet-based social software applications such as weblogs, which encourage readers to
connect with one another in an open environment by participating in discussions, posting comments, and contributing fan fiction. The following four chapters address, in turn, (a) the literary features of the novels that might have contributed to their success, (b) the marketing of the texts and the rise of the Harry Potter ‘brand,’ (c) the timing of the emergence of these novels during a period of Internet growth and the rise of the social software industry, and (d) the implications of all of this for literary education.
CHAPTER TWO: THE LITERARY APPEAL OF HARRY POTTER

The Harry Potter series has been criticized for borrowing from a variety of genres, but contributing nothing original to literature (Alton, 2003). According to the individual criteria for each genre, this amalgam of styles may be categorized as social and literary satire, romantic quest, folktale, fairytale, bildungsroman, boarding school story, adventure novel, gothic mystery, fantasy, episodic tale, and detective fiction (Alton, 2003, p. 141; Eccles share, 2003, p. 8). Because the Harry Potter novel series is, at times, commonplace in plot development and circumstances, Rowling has been criticized for being derivative (Alton, 2003, p. 140; Eccles share, 2003, p. 8). But according to Roland Barthes (1977) in The Death of the Author, all texts might be viewed as such:

The text is a tissue of quotation drawn from the innumerable centres of culture. . . . The writer can only imitate a gesture that is always interior, never original. His only power is to mix writings . . . in such a way as never to rest on any one of them. (pp. 146-147)

Anne Hiebert Alton (2003) observed that Rowling’s use of multiple genres creates anticipation in readers to discover which familiar pattern and plot structure Rowling will employ next. Alton claimed that these overlapping variations begin to form a new genre (p. 140). Thus, it may be argued that Rowling, who has spawned a literary phenomenon through the Harry Potter novel series, should not be chastised for a lack of creative contribution but, rather, praised for her skilful combination of Barthes’ “centres of culture” (p. 146). Rowling has chosen from among the most enduring, compelling, and even taboo literary genres to increase the series’ appeal.

According to Jann Lacoss (2002), the Harry Potter stories mirror the folktale structure, which is one of the most common forms of the children’s story (p. 85). Lacoss used Vladimir Propp’s (1968) systemization of the Russian magical tale, which breaks the traditional stories into 31 ‘functions,’ each of which applies to actions taken by a specific character type (Lacoss,
2002, p. 85). Propp’s principle characters, or *dramatis personae*, are the hero, the villain, the helper, the girl (and her father), the donor, the dispatcher, and the false hero (pp. 19-64). To be considered a folktale, the 7 character classifications must each participate in one of their predicted functions, although most stories employ more than 7 of the 31 anticipated character actions (pp. 79-80). Folklorists discovered that these schemata applied not only to magical tales, but also to other stories in various genres and across a variety of cultures (Lacoss, 2002, p. 85). Although the structure repeats itself in a vast range of stories, to minimize boredom, Rowling holds the reader’s interest by using vivid characters, reordering Propp’s systematized events, and introducing culturally appropriate references; however, the steps, which remain formulaic even with some reordering, help readers to develop a comfort level with the plot (Lacoss, 2002, p. 85).

For children, ‘knowing how the story goes’ is a welcome and reassuring structure that allows young readers to feel safe in the story outcome, but allows them to consider the results of uncomfortable or taboo subject matter in a nonthreatening environment (Lacoss, 2002, p. 85; Natov, 2002, p. 127). Although issues of morality may be discussed within a child’s household, the concept of ethics may not sufficiently resolve a child’s curiosity to see a desired result (Lacoss, 2002, p. 85).

The taboo material in folktales offers a safe outlet for the parameters of a child’s thought process (Dundes, 1979). The *Harry Potter* novels create such an outlet through their representation of evil and provide a controlled means of dealing with challenging forces (Lacoss, 2002, p. 83). Young readers might not even realize that certain topics make them uncomfortable until they confront them in the text (p. 87); however, the stories offer a means of addressing troubling issues with the guidance of helpful authority figures such as Professor Dumbledore or Professor McGonagall, who provide or facilitate solutions to these concerns (p. 87).
Katherine Grimes (2002) also addressed the issue of children’s experimentation with the psychological landscape in her reference to Bruno Bettelheim’s (1975/1989) *The Uses of Enchantment* and his fairytale analysis. Bettelheim asserted that reading fairytales improves children’s skills to deal with their parents and themselves by witnessing various facets of their parents’ personalities from a distance in the stories, expanding their imaginations by being offered a variety of outcomes to deal with negative situations, then reintegrating solutions through the distance created by the fairytale back into their own psyches. The stories also lead to a better understanding of good and evil and help to create a greater perception of the pleasure principle because they help readers to avoid a harsh outcome and learn the means of achieving a positive end (Grimes, 2002, p. 91); thus, because of the stories’ cross-cultural nature and set structure, Harry is a comforting and familiar guide to readers (Alton, 2003, p. 159).

According to Katherine Grimes (2002), the novels represent patterns of human behaviour that children learn through fairytales that reassure them about the world around them. Bettelheim (1975/1989) suggested that because fairytales have an expected and delivered outcome, children are able to establish a pattern of positive results in the world by being able first to imagine, then to reject, the negative options in their physical realm without having to endure the harshness of the actual circumstance. Imagining the situations helps children to understand the truths of their world and expand their experiences by using predictable universal archetypes and plotlines (Grimes, 2002, p. 90)—features that help readers to understand better their environments, including cycles of birth and death, a clear dichotomy between good and evil, and optimism. Other elements that expand a reader’s psychological environment and explain situations in a reader’s world are the use of magic and removal from ordinary time and space (p. 91).

Maria Nikolajeva (2003) demonstrated how young readers use the relationship between Harry and the Dursleys to define how fantastical aspects of the fairytale allow imagined
experimentation with a variety of outcomes, but also to gain a perceived power over the adults in their world, with some limitations:

In fairy tales retold for children, characters are usually empowered in a way that makes them superior to other human beings. They are endowed with magical agents enabling them to be transported in space, or to metamorphose into animals or other, presumably better, human beings. . . However, fairy-tale heroes normally have helpers possessing stronger powers than they do, without whom they would not be able to achieve their goals. If fairy tale protagonists are demi-gods, their helpers are gods. Ultimately, this reflects the power relationship between children and adults in society. (p. 127)

Nikolajeva explained that even though Harry is empowered by gifts such as his invisibility cloak and wand, these gifts are granted by adults. He has helpers such as Hermione, who at times seems more powerful, although she does not complete the full cycle of the hero. Despite the fact that he is the hero, Harry must, at times, defer to more powerful wizards such as Dumbledore. In the end, Harry must follow the rules laid out by Hogwarts for performing magic (p. 127). Adults, often to protect him from harm, temper Harry’s desire and ability to achieve and experiment; therefore, Harry is empowered, but not in full control (p. 127). This yielding of the hero’s power leads to an understanding of the role between children and their parents.

The absence of one particular adult, the father, is also a common fairytale feature. Harry is an orphan; Vernon Dursley, a mean and unkind individual who makes his detestation for his nephew clear, is the wholly inadequate father substitute until Harry departs for Hogwarts School (when the benevolent Professor Dumbledore replaces his uncle/stepfather). In contrast to Harry’s deceased and idealized father, James, his Uncle Vernon is unloving. He assures readers that a life too comfortable will not be a concern for Harry and delights in sending Harry to his room, a dark cupboard beneath the stairs, as a form of too-frequent and generally unwarranted punishment:

Uncle Vernon waited . . . before starting on Harry. He was so angry he could hardly speak. He managed to say, “Go—cupboard—stay—no meals,” before he collapsed into a chair, and Aunt Petunia had to run and get him a brandy. . . .

He’d lived with the Dursleys almost ten years, ten miserable years, as long as he could remember. (Rowling, 1997, pp. 26-27)
The lack of a father figure as a loving, moral guide and a mother figure who has no allegiance to the child makes it easy for the hero, Harry, to leave his home and seek a better existence in the world. Harry’s unstable home life is necessary for the beginning of the journey and to discover his essential self, which he hopes is vastly different from that of his Dursley relations (Lacoss, 2002, p. 87).

However comforting the lines of a world clearly divided into good and evil may be, it is the duty of heroes to prove themselves to be anything other than soft. The heroic figures provide inspiration to rise from humble circumstances to defeat an overwhelming darkness (Nikolajeva, 2003, p. 127) and, according to Bettelheim (1975/1989), guide readers through the security of a familiar story as a means of broadening the understanding of a reader’s world (Grimes, 2002, p. 190). Bettelheim and Nikolajeva asserted that children who read fairytales are offered assistance in understanding their parents and themselves. From Bettelheim’s perspective, children will eventually understand that both Vernon Dursley and James Potter are representative of their own families, which are both harsh and loving. For Nikolajeva, the purpose of the Dursleys is for readers to feel a sense of empathy and a deeper connection to Harry’s character as a reflection of a reader’s own powerlessness in childhood and, eventually, to learn how to transcend it in adulthood.

Despite Rowling’s stereotypical, harsh representation of a stepfather in the character of Vernon Dursley (Rowling, 1997, chap. 8) or the greasy-haired, socially inept science teacher Professor Snape (Rowling, 2007, p. 663), she has received less scrutiny for their depiction because they are male stereotypes. According to Bettelheim (1975/1989), the harsh male characters are necessary to balance positive males. The combination of the two reflects the complete male psyche from which youth may then better understand their social environment and model their behaviour. On the other hand, critics such as Elizabeth Heilman (2003) sharply
rebuked the representation of formulaic female characters. Although Rowling appears more liberal than the fairytale structure might allow with her recent announcement that Hogwarts’ beloved headmaster Professor Dumbledore is homosexual (CNN.com, 2007a), she is still criticized for following the female stereotypes on which readers rely for the familiar folktale structure: “Among the adults, Professor McGonagall seems to mirror Hermione as a smart female of clearly secondary status. Like Hermione, she is book smart, but not wise, powerful, or brave. Like Hermione, she is a stickler for rules” (Rowling, 1997, p. 267). “McGonagall’s secondary status is also evident in the nature of her interactions with students. Unlike Professor Dumbledore, students can trick her” (Heilman, 2003, p. 225). Professor McGonagall is the compassionate crone who has the capacity to replace Dumbledore (Rowling, 1997, pp. 131, 137), but Rowling reveals no other aspect of her life than her work. Hermione marries Ron, even though she is the most gifted witch of her age, and Ron’s skills and intellect are always depicted as inferior (Rowling, 2007, p. 755). Harry marries Ginny, who is popular and pretty, but needs saving:

In spite of their efforts to be beautiful and accepted, females in the Harry Potter series are often treated with secondary status in familial and romantic relationships. Both nuclear families, the Weasleys and the Dursleys, have stay-at-home mothers, and employed, head-of-the-household fathers. Harry and Ron are also in charge when placed in a dating relationship at the Yule Ball. . . Ginny is the archetypal girl and is presented as deeply passive, weak, and receptive. She has a crush on Harry which disables her. . . . Later, she is weak enough to be fully possessed and used by the evil Lord Voldemort. (Heilman, 2003, p. 230)

Even the beautiful, powerful, and sensual Fleur Delacour is twice overcome in the Triwizard Tournament in The Goblet of Fire (Rowling, 2000), first by the Merpeople, and second by the enchantments in the maze (Dresang, 2002, p. 236).

These depictions of women are challenging, particularly viewed from the perspective of research such as that of Willinsky and Hunniford (1993), which indicates that female teenage
readers interpret text in a realist manner and will therefore see romance texts as the romances in their immediate future. Young female readers interpret the text as though it is an expected outcome (pp. 91-93). It is interesting to note that there is no criticism that Harry’s father is too loving, that Vernon Dursley proves that all stepfathers must be cruel, or that male Deatheaters are presented in an overly negative light; but there is a fear that young women will interpret female secondary roles too broadly and too literally (Heilman, 2003, p. 221).

For male characters, according to Bettelheim’s (1975/1989) analysis, positive and negative are separated into different characters, allowing young readers to see both aspects of individuals in their families; however, female characters from the Harry Potter series demonstrate all the characteristics of working witch, caregiver, and, potentially, mother without division. Readers experience female traits within single characters who exhibit bravery, wisdom, and, like Bellatrix Lestange, loyalty and cruelty (Rowling, 2007, p. 9) without the separate extremes male characters possess. Bettelheim’s supposition that fairytales are a means of dealing with harsher aspects of reality through practiced patterns and that characters have the positive and negative aspects of the reader’s family remain true, but there is clear agreement as to which male characters are positive and which are negative. Those clear distinctions do not exist with the female characters in Harry Potter, which suggests her female characters are more multifaceted and better developed than the males who generally only represent one major characteristic.

Rowling avoids altering social and literary stereotypes, perhaps as a reflection of her own beliefs regarding social class and gender (Park, 2003), but she must also follow the prescribed plot and character structures of the folktale genre. To comply with Propp’s (1968) story analysis and Bettelheim’s (1975/1989) character exploration, Rowling has to lead readers through a list of character stages and female incarnations to reach the final outcome. The characters are expected
to pass through these stages, which is what makes the stories familiar. This pattern is followed
from Harry’s introduction to the final ‘fairytale-ending’ marriages. Again, the plot arc line is not
new, but is valued for its familiar pattern and limited updates.

The main character passes most obviously through the specific stages of the heroic quest.
The *Harry Potter* novels employ many of the traditional fairytale features and, as Nikolajeva
(2003) and Bettelheim (1975/1989) described, make unfamiliar and unpleasant circumstances
comprehensible and conquerable. This perceived ability to conquer results, in part, from Harry’s
role as hero or fairytale prince.

Lewis L. Feuer (1975) systematized the literary aspect of heroism and identified the roots
of the Mosaic myth, represented by heroes such as Harry Potter, as the root of all modern
ideologies in his text *Ideology and Ideologists*. He argued that the advancement of every hero
who is an “agent of progress” is portrayed as a dualistic struggle between “forces of light” and
“forces of darkness,” with dark forces also known as “reactions” (p. 1). He claimed that,
typically, only one leader per era is willing to stand apart from humanity to oppose the elements
of darkness (p. 1). Feuer identified three basic tenets in the Mosaic myth:

The first, an invariant myth; the second a compound of philosophical doctrines which
alternate cyclically in the history of ideology; the third, a historically determined decision
as to a chosen class of the time. These three ingredients, an invariant mythological
structure, an alternating set of philosophical tenets, and a historically chosen group are
inherent in every ideology. (p. 1)

Richard Colebatch (2003), author of *Return of the Heroes: The Lord of the Rings, Star
Wars, Harry Potter, and Social Conflict*, summarized Feuer’s broader definition of the Mosaic
myth into a series of plot characteristics. Colebatch’s interpretation may be summarized as the
following: (a) There is an oppressed people; (b) a young person, not of the oppressed culture,
appears among the subjugated race; (c) the new individual intervenes on their behalf; (d) the
individual must go into hiding for defending the exploited culture; (e) the individual receives a
call to redeem the oppressed people; (f) the youth returns to demand the people’s freedom; (g) the current tyrannical leader spurns the young defender; (h) the new leader inspires actions that will eventually defeat the oppressor; (i) the outsider liberates the subjugated culture; and (j) a new way of life is imported to the people (p. 28).

Feuer argued that the mythological aspect is essential to any revolutionary form of thought to advance the cause of a new ideology. Without the above steps to transformation, the new perspective is not attractive (Colebatch, 2003, p. 28). According to Joseph Campbell (1988), who spent his life studying myth, “It has always been the prime function of mythology and rite to supply the symbols that carry the human spirit forward,” (p. 5); therefore, these steps illuminate the path for an individual to anticipate and accept the personal rites of passage that will nurture and carry the spirit (p. 5). The character arc that Harry embodies is not innovative, but it follows an established pattern, which makes it attractive, or acceptable, to readers who have been conditioned by the traditional model.

The use of magic in folktales is also both established and controversial. Its use in the Harry Potter novels and other stories helps children to strengthen their belief in their personal power (Nikolajeva, 2003, p. 127). It has long-standing appeal because magic suggests the ability to alter reality through thought. Magic also plays a role in mimicking modern technology, which I will address in a later chapter.

According to Piaget (1929), children use magic as a form of causality, until about the age of 11 or 12, when they further develop their cognitive understanding. Prior to that age, Piaget asserted that children believe that they are able to alter their environments through thoughts and desires alone (Taub & Servaty, 2003, p. 58). In contrast to Piaget’s view that magical thinking is a shortcoming children work to outgrow, Rosengren and Hickling (1994) suggested that magical thinking “reflects a degree of cognitive sophistication” (p. 78). They contended that children
have no concept of magical reasoning before their preschool years but that “magical beliefs emerge as young children come to recognize shortcomings in the conventional belief systems” (p. 80).

J. D. Woolley and H. M. Wellman (1990) stated that children as young as three years old are able to distinguish between fantasy and reality (p. 946). Woolley and Wellman (1993) found that children as young as three years of age believe that imagining something will manifest it into a physical reality (p. 1). As with the use of folktale structure, the use of magic in the *Harry Potter* series is the means through which readers regain power in situations that they are unable to comprehend or find unjust.

If we consider the promise of magic as an equalizer in Harry Potter’s world, where a child has less power than an adult but is able to gain superiority in a situation with the help of magic, then those without magic are inferior. As Farah Mendlesohn (2003) commented, “We meet no one within this world who is both nice and nonmagical” (p. 170). Even Mrs. Figg, who is a Squibb (born into a wizarding family, but unable to perform magic), is revealed as an eccentric protector of Harry who lives in Harry’s neighbourhood and whose home smells unfavourably like cabbage (Rowling, 1997, p. 24). Of wizards, Mr. Weasley is among the most tolerant toward “Muggles” (those who have no magical abilities). He is the only one who is impressed with their ability to function without the aid of magic—and for his Muggle sympathies he spends much of the series as an underpaid civil servant (Mendlesohn, 2003, p. 177).

In the novels those who have the highest level of magical capabilities have the greatest opportunity for success and advancement. Harry, Hermione, and even Lord Voldemort are lifted from their surroundings and sent to Hogwarts based on their magical talents. Anne Alton (2003) believed that the magical abilities granted to Harry and his closest companions Ron and Hermione “contain the wish fulfillment of most people’s need to be special . . . [because] how
much more special can one be than to be admitted into a world filled with like-minded people
who have talents above and beyond the real world?” (p. 143). The magical abilities of the
students now make them equal, or superior in the case of Harry and Hermione, to a large counsel
of their peers and advanced in comparison to the rest of Muggle (nonwizarding) society.

As discussed, the use of magic creates the perception of an increased level of power and
is viewed as a means to deal with injustice in the world. Natov (2002) suggested that every child
will at some point experience a sense of unfairness in their environment, and that young readers
have a limited number of avenues to rectify any ‘unjust’ situation (p. 126); hence the popularity
of magic. However, the use of magic also appeals to readers as a taboo subject.

The American Library Association (2007) dubbed the first novel in the Harry Potter
series “the most challenged book of the 21st century” (¶ 1). Even with the phenomenal popularity
of the texts, their ability to overcome reader resistance with their vivid array of characters and
tightly interwoven plotlines might suggest a broad introduction into school systems; however,
sensitive elements, including magic, also increase the determination of certain parties to ban the
books while making others more determined to read them (Taub & Servaty, 2003). However, for
their use of magic and possible connection to the occult (p. 57), fundamentalist Christian groups
base their concerns largely on a Biblical passage from Deuteronomy 18:9-12, which states:

When you come into the land which the Lord gives you, you shall not learn to follow the
abominable practices of those nations. There shall not be found among you anyone who
burns his son or daughter as an offering, anyone who practices divination, a soothsayer,
or an augur, or a sorcerer, or a charmer, or a medium, or a wizard, or a necromancer. For
whoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord. (Wansbrough, 2002, p. 202)

This Bible passage presents challenges for those who fear that the Harry Potter novels portray
magic and the occult as fun, which might encourage youngsters to dabble in these forbidden
areas (Taub & Servaty, 2003, p. 54).

Minister and author Joseph Chambers (2009) stated:
The mystery of the Antichrist is using the many and varied forms of divination and witchcraft to prepare the world for the coming “mastermind.” This mastermind will possess a level of divination powers never before manifest. He will become the “god” of this earth for a short season. The Harry Potter series is a giant step in this scary direction. (¶ 1)

Chambers discussed the source of J. K. Rowling’s inspiration as a manifestation of Satan (Taub & Servaty, 2003, p. 55). Not all Christian Fundamentalist opposition is so extreme, but his comments are a reminder that some groups consider witchcraft a real threat. Even the concept of fantasy as a form of deceit that may encourage other forms of deception is a concern in fundamentalist communities (p. 55). For belief systems that are concerned with a literal hell, any possibility of deception is a potential hazard to one’s desired ethereal outcome (p. 57).

It is possible to see some similarities in the doctrine of the Catholic Church and the theme of Harry Potter. For example, in 1965 Pope Paul VI declared that the primary task of the Catholic Church is “promoting unity and love among men, indeed among nations” (¶ 1). More recently, Pope Benedict XVI (2008) observed, “It is the ascent toward ‘love to the end’ (Jn 13:1), which is God’s true mountain, the definitive place of contact between God and man” (¶ 1). Likewise, Professor Dumbledore reminds Harry, “‘If there’s one thing Voldemort cannot understand, it is love’” (Rowling, 1997, p. 216) and “Pity . . . above all those who live without love” (Rowling, 2007, p. 722). Nevertheless, the Chief Exorcist of the Catholic Church, Rev. Gabriele Amorth, has declared that Harry Potter is the “king of darkness, the Devil” (CBC.ca, 2006, ¶ 1). He also stated, “Magic is always a turn to the devil,” and compared Harry Potter and Lord Voldemort to Stalin and Hitler (¶ 2).

Cardinal Ratzinger himself, before he was named Pope Benedict XVI, expressed concern about the effects of the Harry Potter novels on young readers in a letter to German Harry Potter critic Gabriele Kuby:
It is good that you enlighten people about Harry Potter because those are subtle seductions, which act unnoticed and by this deeply distort Christianity in the soul before it can grow properly. (LifeSiteNews.com, 2005, ¶ 6)

Although the Catholic Church has no official policy on the books, it caused St. Joseph’s School in Wakefield, Massachusetts, to remove the books from recommended reading lists, adding to 16 other districts in the US that have banned the books (Taub & Servaty, 2003, p. 56).

In addition to the sensitive topic of witchcraft, the novels also address the potentially taboo subjects of adolescent sexuality and homosexuality. In his book *Childhood and Society*, Erik Erikson (1963) discussed how young people develop an identity through a self-doubt phase in which they discover who they are by meeting challenges and overcoming hurdles (pp. 275-277). For Harry, part of this trial and error begins at 14 when he notices, and then eventually kisses, Cho Chang (Rowling, 2003, p. 583). As Harry and the other characters mature mentally and physically, his feelings transfer to Ginny Weasley, Ron’s sister, and he thinks of her in Ginny’s darkest moments (Rowling, 2007, pp. 116, 403). He eventually marries her in the classic fairytale ending (Lacoss, 2002, p. 86; Rowling, 2007, p. 754).

Even more controversial than the budding romances of Harry and his friends is Professor Dumbledore’s homosexuality, which J. K. Rowling announced in October 2007 after the publication of the final *Harry Potter* book (Smith, 2007). Response to the announcement appears generally positive (Smith, 2007), but it reignited publicity for the *Harry Potter* novels on all major news organizations, including CNN, ABC, and NBC and in *Time Magazine*.

Although the allure of magic and the seductiveness of taboo subject matter may increase readership, the initial setting in an English suburb, where the Dursley home is located, may also have helped to establish Harry as a familiar and empathetic character for English audiences. From within this suburban surrounding Rowling creates the character of Harry, whose role is not
only to stir controversy as a possible advocate of the devil, but also, as Campbell (1988) suggested, to play the opposite role of “carry[ing] the human spirit forward” (p. 5).

Heroic characters in the fantasy genre often live outside time and space as readers or viewers know it. For example, Luke Skywalker’s adoptive family in the Star Wars films were moisture farmers on the planet Tatooine (Lucas, 1977). By contrast, Harry lives in a typical home behind a manicured yard in suburban England (Rowling, 1997, p. 1). Except for the lightning-shaped scar on his forehead and his poor eyesight (p. 15), there is nothing physically distinctive about Harry. His life appears ordinary, at least at the outset, and his surroundings mundane:

Nearly ten years had passed since the Dursleys had woken up to find their nephew on the front step, but Privet Drive had hardly changed at all. The sun rose on the same tidy front door; it crept into their living room, which was exactly the same as it had been on the night when Mr. Dursley had seen the fateful news report about the owls. . . . Ten years ago. (p. 19)

Although Harry is considered a representative of Feuer’s “forces of light” (p. 1), his life often leaves him feeling isolated and persecuted. He is bullied by his cousin Dudley, who ensures that he finds no comfort in his home: “[Harry] wore round glasses held together with a lot of [scotch tape] because of all the times Dudley had punched him in the nose” (p. 20). The setting at Privet Drive creates a lasting impression of conformity and familiarity, despite the neighbourhood’s tantalizing introduction when a giant on a flying motorcycle drops off Harry on the doorstep. Natov (2002) suggested that the marked contrast between the perfection of the outward appearance of Harry’s house on Privet Drive and his abuse behind closed doors is a means of connecting with readers:

However extreme this situation, it only epitomizes what I believe at one time every child feels—that she is on her own, unacknowledged, unappreciated, unseen and unheard, up against an unfair parent, and by extension, an unfair world. Justice or the lack of it reign supreme in the literature of childhood. (p. 125)
Although Harry’s situation as an orphan who lives with his abusive relations may be more pronounced than the ‘lack of justice’ that some children face, Natov still considered a sense of injustice a response that all children feel, to a greater or lesser degree, at one point or another. Natov also stressed that, no matter the degree of disruption or discomfort in a child’s life, challenge represents and further demonstrates the opportunity to grow beyond a preoccupation with one’s self and to develop into a being with a sense of personal power. As part of the hero’s journey, that strength then grows and extends to a responsibility for others (p. 126).

Amanda Cockrell (2002) argued that the ordinary nature of the Harry Potter setting is one of the most distinctive and effective factors in creating a connection with readers. Even though Harry’s world contains flying brooms, invisibility cloaks, transfiguration spells, giants, and unicorns among its many other magical features, Cockrell considered the initial setting on Privet Drive as “abandon[ing] the realm of high fantasy” (p. 15). The Privet Drive setting may appear ordinary in comparison to the grandeur and splendour of the Hogwarts School for Witchcraft and Wizardry; however, Cockrell argued that the contrast between the consistent perfection of Privet Drive and the ever-shifting, challenging, and at times frightening environment of Hogwarts facilitates the transition from magical boy to Harry’s manifestation as Joseph Campbell’s (1988) mythic hero (Cockrell, 2002, p. 19):

They’ve moved out of the society that would have protected them, and into the dark forest, into the world of fire, of original experience. Original experience has not been interpreted for you, and so you’ve got to work out your life for yourself. Either you can take it or you can’t. . . . The courage to face the trials and to bring a whole new body of possibilities into the field of interpreted experience for other people to experience—that is the hero’s deed. (Campbell, 1988, p. 41)

Cockrell believed that Harry’s journey must transition from being the story of a boy in the suburbs to a boarding school novel for Harry to develop his underutilized powers and become a heroic young man (p. 24). As in Erik Erikson’s (1963) search for one’s self, based on what one
accepts and what one rejects (pp. 275-277), the shifting nature and challenge of Hogwarts will test Harry and give him the experience to discover his true nature and his mature self. The Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry holds promise as the escape for Harry into a realm where he will now be valued, but the original setting is ordinary enough that the transition to his newer, more fantastic environment seems possible for Harry and for readers (Natov, 2002, p. 127). Harry’s ordinary realm in suburban England is the promise of connection between a magical world and the reader’s own surroundings.

Although Rowling (1997) idealizes Hogwarts with its starry ceiling and friendly ghosts (pp. 86-87), Harry Potter’s boarding school environment is criticized for being heavily politically conservative, Edwardian, and Thatcherite in its depiction of setting, teaching, and social stratification (Mendlesohn, 2002, p. 170; Stege, 2002, p. 143). David Steege discussed the familiarity of the boarding school setting and the related novel genre. The setting in the boarding school environment of Hogwarts may seem specific to the United Kingdom and be associated with high-status culture (p. 143), but as Pico Iyer\(^3\) (1999) pointed out, it is a perception of the boarding school, rather than the experience itself, with which readers and Rowling are familiar (Iyer, 1999, p. 39; Stege, 2002, p. 141). Although Rowling did not attend boarding school (Steege, 2002, p. 143), the tradition of the boarding school novel is prevalent enough and popular enough to be imitated. Novels such as Charles Dickens’ (1850/1994) *David Copperfield*, Muriel Spark’s (1961)*The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, and Thomas Hughes’ (1857/n.d.) *Tom Brown’s School Days* are among the best-known novels in the boarding school genre. Among the traits the novels share with other boarding school novels are the athletic prowess of the protagonist when a boy is the lead, a kind and charismatic headmaster, and even the beauty of the physical surroundings (Alton, 2003, pp. 152-153; Stege, 2002, pp. 144-146).

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\(^3\) Note: Pico Iyer = pico iyer.
Rowling has been criticized for not developing the genre beyond some of its conservative and Edwardian origins (Steege, 2002, p. 143); however, by utilizing the boarding school genre, Rowling benefits from the enclosed and conservative nature of the boarding school. The school has a strict code of rules, which provides ample opportunity to demonstrate the growth process of Harry and his companions as they rebel against the established rules. As well, the closed and isolated nature of Hogwarts demonstrates that it is a microcosm, a complete universe, with its own systems and defined code. There is little influence from the outside world until the threat of Lord Voldemort and his DeathEaters upsets the careful balance of the environment, and others must intervene to restore it (p. 145).

Despite challenges such as Harry’s adversary, Professor Snape, or the Dementors, who nearly eliminate him (Rowling, 1999, p. 134; Rowling, 2003, p. 16), the school is a familiar and nurturing environment that also has adults who are understanding and compassionate. Professor McGonagall, Harry’s housemaster, allows Harry to play Quidditch, the wizarding sport played on flying brooms, despite his young age (Rowling, 1997, p. 113). The headmaster, Professor Dumbledore, always shows a particular fondness for Harry (Rowling, 2007, p. 720). At Hogwarts, Harry is revered for his history and parentage. He is able to garner friends, sporting success, and magical capability in a beautiful surrounding. He is able to attain some control in the world, which was previously completely out of reach. As with the use of magic, Harry’s elevated status at Hogwarts represents an opportunity for readers to rise above challenging circumstances and gain power and control over their own environment (Natov, 2002, p. 127). It is the challenge of the hero then to share these acquired gifts with the populace (Campbell, 1988, p. 41). Rowling grants readers the perception of victory, love, and ease through idealized marriage as the reward for a successful battle. It is also the traditional final stage in the folktale cycle (Lacoss, 2002, p. 86).
The fairytale happy ending appeals to readers as a method of story closure, and the serialization of the novels increases readers’ anticipation of achieving that joyful outcome. The series is episodic in nature: Readers experience closure with each novel, and yet there is opportunity for the continuation of the narrative. Reader interest is sustained for seven lengthy volumes, when the final resolution to the great conflict between Harry and Voldemort is eventually achieved. Britain has not seen this level of frenzy for a novel since the serialization of Charles Dickens’s *Pickwick Papers* or Lord Byron’s *Childe Harold* (Brown, 2002, p. 8). As in the tradition of the Victorian serialized publication, the segmentation of the *Harry Potter* series created momentum and cyclical surges in sales. Although *Harry Potter* readers could devour each novel in its entirety, the lapses between the novels offered much opportunity for speculation regarding the characters’ motives, future plotlines, alternate endings, and even errors by the author.

Prior to any massive promotion, then, the *Potter* novels already housed a powerful and compelling story kernel. They spanned a range of genres including mystery, fairytale, heroic tale, boarding school novel, and *bildungsroman*, and met the literary needs and captured the attention of a wide range of readers and parents. The books offered the safety of literary and social constructs while allowing readers to stretch their moral and mortal boundaries even as far as dabbling in the ‘occult.’ The novels offered the opportunity to become powerful individuals while being embraced by story and the security of peer groups. The characters existed in a culture of strict rules, softened by compassionate exceptions. The beloved archetypes broke out of their moulds making unlikely heroes from a group of outcasts, the author herself among them. The books promote growth and exploration of psyche, self, and society; and all are invited to enter through a simple suburban doorway into a great world of magical empowerment. Then, moving outside the world of enchantment, the next step for profit-driven Muggles was to create a
product to meet the needs, in every form and price point, of those willing to step through that one suburban door.
CHAPTER THREE: BRANDING HARRY POTTER

Books should be marketed as well as movies are. (Wei, 2002, Remains of the Day)

The Harry Potter brand reached $4 billion in value in 2006, surpassing brands such as Starbucks and Levi’s by almost $1 billion each, despite the fact that the first book was published only in 1997, and the other aforementioned major brands have had decades to become established (Bloomberg.com, 2010). The concept of “branding literature” may seem unusual, but it clearly has played a key role in the success of Harry Potter. This chapter reviews the history of branding and contemplates the ways it was employed in the case of Harry Potter.

The concept of branding originated in the middle of the 19th century. Once shopkeepers no longer measured out foodstuffs but instead mass-produced and individually packaged them with few distinguishing features, advertisers realized that relating a product to a positive emotion would differentiate an item and increase sales (Klein, 2000). The positive association led to the creation of characters such as Aunt Jemima, whose perceived warmth extended into her pancake mix, then into the homes and bellies of her customers (Klein, 2000). Her fictional nature was of no consequence. A consistent, fictional character became the voice that replaced the local shopkeeper (Lupton & Miller, 1996).

By the 1940s, selling a feeling moved beyond individual products to selling the philosophy of a corporation, or “corporate consciousness” (Rothberg, 1995, p. 137). Promotion of the ‘brand essence’ attempted to transcend the individual product need of a consumer to promoting the meaning of a brand from an individual psychological perspective to satisfying an entire culture (Rothberg, 1995).

Beginning in the 1980s, sporting a specific logo promised immediate entry into a privileged class, which was intended to immediately connect the wearer with the traits of that
consumer community (Klein, 2000). The ‘empty meaning-space,’ or the gap that advertisers fill between what the product is and what marketers and consumers want it to be. It helped coffee and clothing to be elevated to new heights and filled with the promise of achieving heroic deeds (Waetjen & Gibson, 2007, p. 17). For example, Tiger Woods is sponsored by Nike and he is credited with breaking racial barriers on the golf course, so wearing their clothing is meant to strengthen the belief that all Nike wearers are heroes (Knittel & Stango, 2010). According to Ono and Buescher (2003), the central cipher from which product unity and coherence, then mass marketing, begin is rearticulated to suit the needs of the consumer as perceived by the producer. For example, the story of Pocahontas was detached from its 17th century historical connection and imbued with romance and environmentalism to make the Disney version safe for childhood consumption and to appeal to the concerns of consumers (Ono & Buescher, 2003).

The ideal marketing scenario occurred when the representation of the brand resonated perfectly with the target market, which made the advertising strategy appear obvious and effortless; the needs of the consumer and company aligned clearly (Holt, 2002; Klein, 2000). The momentum of the advertising approach was strengthened when an emotional connection was forged between the product and the consumer. As BMW Automobiles suggested in its 2009 advertising campaign: “We inspire fans. And fan clubs. . . . We realized a long time ago that what you make people feel is just as important . . . as what you make. And at BMW we make Joy” (Youtube.com, 2009). A brazen claim that is difficult to replicate or quantify and only believable after the fact. Much like the Harry Potter phenomenon.

However, attempts to build and understand advertising success began in the 1960s with manuals such as Consumer Behaviour, which developed rational models of consumer behaviour based on specific inputs and correlated with carefully monitored outcomes (Engel, Kollat, & Blackwell, 1968). Neat, logical, deterministic results explained why Consumer A made certain
choices (Fugate, 2008). In the case of the first Harry Potter novel, however, such models fail. It achieved success and an emotional connection with consumers without the aid of extensive advertising. Fans believed that the first book’s success was strictly their doing. Thereafter, however, the building of a brand in earnest began.

Naomi Klein (2000), author of No Logo, suggested that brand success depends on repetition and visibility, which is based mainly on the availability of advertising dollars. By 2000 the cost of Harry Potter advertising had topped $269 million (Market Research Findings, 2000, ¶ 4), which, according to Klein’s formula, would have been the major cause of success. Jack Zipes (2001), who has done extensive work on the value of children’s literature and fairytales, also considered product success as strictly commodity driven, which in turn sets levels of taste in popular culture. Zipes stated that the reason for the Harry Potter success story and the resultant overall 24% increase in sales of children’s books (Brown, 2000, p.7) was that:

the conditions under which literature for the young have been transformed through institutional corporate conglomerates controlling the mass media and market demands. Phenomena such as the Harry Potter books are driven by commodity consumption that at the same time sets the parameters of reading aesthetic taste. Today the experience of reading for the young is mediated through the mass media and marketing. (Zipes, 2001, p. 172)

Brand success was determined according to the amount of exposure correlated with the dollars directed at any given product; however, this failed to answer why one product captured popular interest over another and did not account for the ‘buzz,’ or popular interest, created online that drew attention to the first Harry Potter novel. Early Potter fans felt that the branding and promotion of the novels destroyed and debased the ‘purity’ of the Potter phenomenon. But could love alone have driven billions of dollars in product sales with more to come?

Susan Gunelius (2008) commented that successful advertising must resonate with consumers at a deeper emotional level, but for a consumer spending cycle to begin for a product,
the most essential element for success is a quality offering (p. 28). Gunelius stated that the key to establishing emotional involvement on the part of the consumer, which is essential to creating loyal customers over the life of a product, broadly involves three main factors:

1. Stability: a consistent message given by the product;
2. Sustainability: consumers are more likely to become involved in a product when they believe it will be with them for a long time or a time with an expected end;
3. Security: customers are more driven to products which provide them with a feeling of comfort and security. (p. 19)

These elements presumably help consumers to recognize, recommend, and repurchase a particular product or brand (p. 33), and the most successful means for this cycle to begin is through a word-of-mouth recommendation from family or peers. Advertisers have now tracked the value of word-of-mouth promotion against other forms and found that it outranks other means.

According to Zenith Omnimedia (Anderson, 2008), tracking studies ranked word-of-mouth recommendations, particularly those from family and friends, as the highest purchasing influences; on a scale of 1 to 100, they ranked an average of 84. The influence of media was significantly behind, with television ranked at 69, Internet searches at 67, magazines at 60, newspaper advertisements at 55, outdoor advertisements at 45, and radio advertisements at 42. Banner Internet ads ranked the lowest at 41.

The word-of-mouth recommendations of family and peers rank the highest, and a product permeated with positive emotions is thought to increase sales. As Stephen Brown (2002) reminded us, “Pontificators on Pottermania invariably refer to the ‘purity’ of the phenomenon” (p. 8), so ‘purist’ fans believe that this is the only factor worth evaluating. The debate over what makes *Harry* so successful begins with arguments like this: pure passion versus advertising dollars is better.
The challenge for advertisers, then, was to achieve for the brand the coveted status of being recommended by everyone’s inner circle without spoiling the belief that tremendous sales are generated by untainted means; that is, without marketing dollars and product manipulation. Ultimately, the Potter success appears to have been a powerful and inseparable union between quality products and an emotional connection, combined with the proliferation of the Internet and multilevel marketing.

Harry’s own heroic integrity encouraged product sales by reinforcing the value of the products with which he was associated. And a major part of the branding scheme was, of course, the rolling out of multiple Harry Potter products aimed at every age demographic. In February 2001, Hasbro signed a deal to market items like role playing games, trading cards, candy while Mattel signed for figures and board games. These would be launched by Christmas 2000, in time to promote the first film release in May 2001 (James, 2000). Like the products of Aunt Jemima, whose inviting personality imbued the syrup within her form, so too were the Potter products associated with Harry’s high expectations. Harry’s need for social, academic, and heroic success was fulfilled by purchased goods from a very exclusive selection not even available to every wizard (Waetjen & Gibson, 2007). Like a prestige brand, Harry Potter products benefited from Rowling’s implication in the novels that products from a magical source that Harry selected offer higher levels of consumer satisfaction than do nonmagical ones.

The consumer’s joy in selecting from a wealth of magically imbued Potter products was ironically promoted in the first book, before the brand frenzy swept the globe. During Harry’s time with the Dursleys, his nonmagical relations, his cousin Dudley was unable to accommodate all of his toys, electronic equipment, and pets, many of which sat broken or rejected, which demonstrated the dissatisfaction that strictly Muggle products cause:
Nearly everything in here was broken. The month-old video camera was lying on top of a small, working tank Dudley had once driven over the next door neighbour’s dog; in the corner was Dudley’s first-ever television set, which he’d put his foot through when his favourite television program had been cancelled; there was a large birdcage, which had once held a parrot that Dudley had swapped at school for a real air rifle, which was up on a shelf with the end all bent because Dudley had sat on it. Other shelves were full of books. They were the only things in the room that looked as though they’d never been touched. (Rowling, 1997, p. 32)

By contrast, in the magical world, Harry’s newly acquired goods and wealth offered exceptional satisfaction. Harry’s wand, magical books, spell ingredients, cauldron, Quidditch brooms, owl, and even candy were all more desirable and rewarding than anything that the Muggle world had to offer (pp. 56, 61-62, 63-66):

They bought Harry’s school books in a shop called Flourish and Blotts where the shelves were stacked to the ceiling with books as large as paving stones; books the size of postage stamps in covers of silk; books full of peculiar symbols and a few books with nothing in them at all. Even Dudley who never read anything, would have been wild to get his hands on some of these. (p. 62)

The wizard goods not only brought Harry fascination and delight, but also offered him even greater social acceptance into the wizarding world. When Harry anonymously received a valuable, new broomstick, he and Ron discussed its many merits:

‘Hey, Harry—’ Ron gave a great whoop of laughter. ‘Malfoy! Wait ’til he sees you on this! He’ll be sick as a pig! This is an international standard broom, this is!’

‘I can’t believe this,’ Harry muttered, running a hand along the Firebolt, while Ron sank onto Harry’s bed, laughing his head off at the thought of Malfoy. (Rowling 1999, p. 166)

Better wizarding products lead to a better life. Harry’s material possessions allowed him to live his heroic, academic, and thus commercial destiny more fully, but still did not diminish his judgment; therefore, aspiring, real-life young fans may have desired Potter magical merchandise because, no matter their lineage, it suggested that their lives would be improved by purchasing wizard-related goods (Waetjen & Gibson, 2007).
The buzz about wizarding merchandise, which began with Harry and his peers moved in short order the fan sites on the Internet. I will discuss the growth of online communities at the time of the first book’s release, which allowed the rapid transfer of information and recommendations, in greater detail in chapter four. However, it should be noted that the Internet was one of the initial factors in the books’ promotion because it not only fostered dialogue among the books’ already faithful followers, but also converted nonfans and achieved that precious word-of-mouth recognition (Gunelius, 2008, p. 41). In 2005 the Mugglenet.com site alone attracted over 27 million visitors from over 180 countries (p. 98).

Prior to the Internet, the traditional means of book promotion consisted mainly of sending out galleys to secure positive reviews for newspaper publication or arranging author signings at bookstores (Gunelius, 2008). This was typically enough to create consumer awareness of the product and enough interest in the book for consumers to consider its value, purchase it, repurchase it, and then recommend it to others, which, as I mentioned previously, are the necessary steps for product success. However, the book exceeded all expectation, and by August 1998 Scholastic, the US distributor, had sold 70,000 copies (p. 26).

Although still in the early stages, new research into marketing using brain scans may provide insight into what triggers consumer obsession with particular products. Investigations are being carried out to discover why consumers make purchasing decisions, why personal recommendations or other types of promotion are effective, and why certain methods of advertising will ensure the greatest promotional success. The research thus far has determined that products that meet a short-term need or have a strong emotional connection elicit a greater limbic response and a greater likelihood of purchase (Fugate, 2009). The more emotions triggered in the brain the likelier the purchase and, similar to the multiple genres embodied in the
novels that appeal to a broad spectrum of readers, *Harry Potter* generates a range of key emotions which lead a consumer to consider purchase.

*Harry Potter* marketers latched on to the novels’ combination of a quality product, emotional involvement from the readers, word-of-mouth support, an online buzz, story serialization, and brand consistency to help create Harry Potter’s iconic status (Gunelius, 2008). Analysts speculate that strong characterization, encapsulation of a complete world, appeal to the youth market, elements of a counterculture, a spanning of genres, and even marketers’ initial failure to recognize the novel’s appeal created the perfect vehicle for the rise of the world’s largest literary brand (Brown, 2002; Colebatch, 2003).

Martin Lindstrom (2008), working with neuromarketing researchers Dr. Gemma Calvert and Professor Richard Silberstein, believed that essential elements within the novels have strengthened the possibilities for success. He described 10 major pillars that activate the brain’s limbic system and attract *Potter* followers: a sense of belonging, a clear vision, power over enemies, sensory appeal, storytelling, grandeur, evangelism, symbols, mystery, and rituals (p. 111). Many of these overlap with categories mentioned previously. Researchers are not yet certain why these initial traits elicit strong neural responses, but all that they have identified seem to correspond with the powerful emotion connected to *Harry Potter’s* success (Fugate, 2008).

Marketers’ initial lapse in recognizing Potter’s potential for popularity complies with Lindstrom’s (2008) belief that mystery and secrecy are compelling to readers. Lindstrom suggested that certain brands that enjoy similar consumer devotion and create greater neural activity also share a higher number of traits with the world’s major religions. Lindstrom used the concept of religious symbology as confirmation of the suggestion that mystery and secrecy strengthen some of the most compelling brands.
Even merchandise as seemingly common as dirt from the Holy Land has generated huge sales (Lindstrom, 2008). Rituals and grandeur such as elaborate religious ceremonies and ornate houses of worship that may attract people to a particular faith may also attract readers to the rigours and splendour of the Hogwarts school environment (Lindstrom, 2008).

Theorists such as Joseph Campbell (1988) originally hypothesized the reasons for our attraction to fictional heroes as a means of advancement of the self for personal growth and success within a community. In the discussion between Bill Moyers and Joseph Campbell, which became the book *The Power of Myth*, Moyers asked Campbell whether he considered the myths to be the aspirations of humanity. Campbell replied:

> They are the world’s dreams. They are archetypal dreams and deal with great human problems. I know when I come to one of these thresholds now. The myth tells me about it, how to respond to certain crises of disappointment or delight or failure or success. The myths tell me where I am. (pp. 19-20)

The hero’s story becomes a set of instructions to mimic the most adaptive and successful member of our tribe to ensure our long-term communal survival as a species. Rowling suggested from the start that Harry Potter was a protector and would eventually vanquish a great evil in the world (Ganelius 2008, p. 20). The combination of Campbell’s belief that we seek to achieve our higher selves through heroic mythology such as *Harry’s*, which was then fiercely promoted in Internet chat rooms and followed by a massive marketing push, propelled *Harry Potter* forward into the larger and, according to Campbell, higher state of collective consciousness, where *Potter* dominated the psyches of young fans. It is difficult to know whether Harry will have the longevity of a hero such as King Arthur, but Harry Potter’s rise mirrors that of the classic hero and if consumers want similar longevity the suggestion is that they require similar goods.
Jerome S. Bruner (1979) suggested that spending money to externalize our own mythic form by purchasing goods associated with heroic figures such as Harry Potter creates a communal experience to strengthen our social and societal bonds:

It provides . . . a basis for communion between men. What is “out there” can be named and shared in a manner beyond the sharing of subjectivity. By the subjectifying of our worlds through externalization, we are able, paradoxically enough, to share communally in the nature of internal experience. (p. 32)

Word-of-mouth promotion and a quality product helped to create the strong emotional ties on which marketers have relied for purchase, but the Potter spin-off products have also reinforced the ability of consumers to express their personal experience by purchasing its outward manifestation and in so doing staying connected to their community in the same way that Harry and Ron received peer acceptance with better goods (Gunelius, 2008).

Numerous successful brands have embedded the heroic paradigm within their marketing strategy. Among the most familiar are athletic clothing and drink providers such as Nike, Reebok, Adidas, and Gatorade, which use the achievements and reputations of successful athletes to suggest that those who use similar products will have the same transformative results. These and other brands already have established a formula for product success by adhering to expensive, multileveled strategies. This type of market-dominating success had not yet been seen to extend from a children’s novel, but young consumers were already exposed to it. Athletic equipment stores such as Nike Town urged the heroic principles of “courage,” “honour,” and “victory” (Klein, 2000, p. 56).

Bruner (1979) stated that such tales are compelling because of our desire to externalize our heroic nature and have “internal plight . . . converted into a story plot” (p. 350). As Campbell (1988) insisted, followers have a desire to see their heroes transcend their plight and succeed
Intriguingly, the archetypal myth plays out on two levels in the case of *Potter*: in the fictional deeds of the novels’ characters and in the rise of their creator, J. K. Rowling.

As mentioned in the last chapter, the story of a socially disadvantaged female using literature to convert her plight into wealth mirrors the Cinderella archetype. Ostensibly, like Harry, Rowling was rewarded for her love, devotion, and integrity with “instant riches” (Brown, 2002, p. 6). The sympathetic parents of Harry’s young reading audience transformed Rowling into a fairytale heroine (Brown, 2002; Gunelius, 2008). Rowling was not expected to succeed, but continued despite adversity, and her compelling personal history added to her likeability and the marketability of the novels (Gunelius 2002).

Rowling, a young, single mother who was on social assistance and trying to find work and affordable childcare, was a compelling figure; and aspects of her life were familiar to many parents (Nel, 2001). She borrowed money to return to school and sacrificed meals to feed her daughter while she wrote the first *Harry Potter* novel (p. 21). Rowling submitted her manuscript (which she retyped because she could not afford to photocopy it) to random literary agents, the second of which was attracted to it, but 12 publishers rejected the manuscript. After being told that there was no money in children’s books, Bloomsbury offered Rowling the small sum of $6,500 against royalties earned for the initial 500-copy print run, which for Rowling was an initial sign of recognition. In June 1997, against challenging odds, the first *Harry Potter* novel was released (Gunelius, 2008, pp. 6, 23).

The brands that appear to have succeeded in achieving a balance of successful elements receive the greatest devotion from consumers and, according to Lindstrom, the greatest financial response. Rowling’s vivid descriptions, Harry’s goodness and strong heroic stature, the grandeur and rituals of Hogwarts, the codes and symbols of the Potter world that help him and his companions to conquer evil are all strong elements contributing to fan devotion.
In addition to these elements, there were other marketing ploys. Prior to publication of the first novel, Joanne Kathleen Rowling’s name was shortened to J. K. Rowling in an attempt to make her more androgynous to interest more young male readers who might find it less appealing to read a novel written by a woman (Nel, 2001, p. 23). Despite the initial attempts to hide her gender, Rowling became a popular public figure at the book readings. The young witches and wizards who would previously have attended small author readings now had the opportunity to be one of as many as 20,000 fans clamouring for Rowling’s autograph at an author reading such as the one in October 24, 2000 in Toronto (p. 24). So not only did Harry encapsulate social and financial disadvantage as a mistreated orphan, but he was also tied to Rowling’s social and financial disadvantage. Rowling gave Harry Potter an added marketing boost because audiences wanted both the motherless Cinderella\textsuperscript{4} and the orphaned young wizard to succeed. Marketers took full advantage by using costumes and other paraphernalia to help young fans to transform themselves and, in some cases, to meet Harry’s maker.

J. K. Rowling was discouraged from making a career of literature and told that she could not expect to make a living from writing children’s novels. Like other children’s novelists, she did not benefit from an initial marketing strategy because the first book with its magical themes was supposed to have only limited-niche market appeal. It was thought to be too long for its young audience, and therefore it was believed that marketing would not broaden book sales (Nel, 2001, p. 22; Gunelius, 2008, p. 14). In the US the original title was changed from \textit{Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone} to \textit{Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone} to suggest magical themes for US readers who were thought to be less aware of the alchemical concept of the Philosopher’s Stone. But Internet discussions about \textit{Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone} created word-of-

\textsuperscript{4} Rowling’s own mother passed away in 1990, and she has credited the dark tone of the later novels and Mirror of Erised from the \textit{Philosopher’s Stone} (Rowling, 1997, pp. 152-156) to the passing of her mother (Nel, 2001, p. 18).
mouth appeal for adults and young male readers who might have traditionally rejected the books, so when *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* exploded onto the children’s literary scene after its chat room introduction, it was primed for the maximization of its growing potential. Marketers saw the opportunity to move the world of Harry and his companions from the personal to the commercial sphere.

The *Harry Potter* series fulfilled all three criteria for Gunelius’ (2008) formula for brand success: stability, sustainability, and security, achieved because of the quality of the material. According to Lindstrom (2008), a lack of formal marketing was an excellent beginning to the *Potter* marketing strategy because the belief that the first book was a secret shared only with those privy to the information quickened its spread and increased its commodity value (p. 120). The *Potter* novels begin to match criteria for long-term marketing success because the first book had achieved the initial essential feature of becoming a product that friends and family recommend to one another.\(^5\) Promotion then spread in every direction.

Other brands had already established this as a pattern for success. *Harry Potter* merchandise was produced at every price point and in every variation, much like *The Simpsons* or *Star Wars*, so whatever facet of the books appealed to readers, consumers could find a product to externalize their interest to the general public and other fans, invade popular culture, and increase profits (Gunelius, 2008). Much like the merchandise itself, which offered a broad, yet personal appeal, many of the books were sold in massive big-box bookstores with their adjoining chain coffee shops. The bookstores now brand themselves as “university library, theme park, playground, pickup joint, community centre, literary salon, and coffee house all in one” (Klein, 2000, p. 159). Nike stores were filled with slightly differentiated sports merchandise, all

\(^5\) Word-of-mouth marketing is considered so potentially powerful that new product approaches include paying young people to talk casually about a particular firm’s new “cool” video games with their peers at school (Lindstrom, 2009).
emblazoned with the Nike logo at a full range of price points and supported by the company’s adopted precepts of victory and honour, which allowed potential members of the community to participate as much or as little as they were able, financially and physically, and created a sense of belonging to an elite community on the part of participants and market domination for Nike (Gunelius, 2008; Klein, 2000; Holt, 2002). Harry Potter—heroic tale, fairytale, fantasy, mystery, boarding school novel, and bildungsroman all in one—fits well into an environment that also tries to be all things to all people. A subtle adult cover was even commissioned to make older readers more comfortable reading the book in public as the novel gained popularity (Nel, 2001, p. 23).

Even with the books’ wide appeal, the nature of the Potter products is that if they remain a secret, like the magical world itself, they will be better than Muggle products; however, the brand is clearly no longer a secret. In 2006 the Harry Potter brand, at $4 billion, ranked among giants such as Disney at $27.8 billion, Apple at $9.1 billion, and Starbucks at $3.1 billion (Bloomberg.com, 2008). As noted earlier, the available products were numerous. Among the toys available in the Harry Potter line were action figures, plush toys, LEGO sets, broomsticks, and kites. Games included board games, video games, trading cards, and chess sets. In the clothing category there were costumes, pyjamas, scarves, t-shirts, and ties. Household items included mugs, posters, tree ornaments, snow globes, and playhouses. The setting for the books was Hogwarts School, so every type of school supply was available to re-create the school’s magical environment. Every candy mentioned in the books, such as Canary Creams, Chocolate Frogs, and Bertie Bott’s Every Flavour Beans, were re-created, of course lacking the transformative magical properties described in the books; and every cup, plate, and streamer was available to cover every event and rite of passage in a young witch or wizard’s life (Brown, 2002, p. 10; Gunelius, 2008, p. 90). The myriad of goods could be hoarded as collectors’ items,
exhibited at book readings, worn on specially themed days, displayed on bedroom walls, and splashed across children’s parties. Fans could fashion their own magical world.

But Rowling, first characterized as the impoverished Cinderella, guarded her brand carefully. This helped to maintain the esteem of her followers, who considered her initial success a phenomenon, untainted by marketing, and protected the exclusive nature of the brand, despite the above list (Brown, 2002, p. 8; Gunelius, 2008, p. 36). Rowling professed a strong emotional connection to the characters (she was still in the process of writing the series when promotion for the earlier books began) and did not want the brand image to stray off course. The traditional elements of promotion such as concurrent film and video game release were applied to the Potter book series; however, other forms of standard movie promotion were ignored at J. K. Rowling’s insistence, some of which seemed even potentially damaging and contrary to brand success. Despite the integrated methods of promotion of the characters, Rowling worked to maintain brand integrity rather than unlimited profit (Gunelius, 2008, p. 36). To retain control of these rights she was paid as much as $1 million less in her deal with Warner Bros. (p. 37). She also turned down the opportunity for her characters to be featured as part of MacDonald’s Happy Meals. Despite the massive profit potential and ease of exposure possible in tying Harry Potter to such a well-established brand as McDonald’s, she felt that this association would not portray the Potter characters correctly (p. 36). The implication of Rowling’s actions for her readers was that her primary objective was her story and the integrity of her characters. Like her characters, her actions and even the profits appeared to be the result of strong moral choices. Her readers appeared to believe that her main objective was not solely profit, even if the products were still widely available and there was no question that revenue was at stake, Rowling could now afford to be picky about how she accumulated her wealth.
Figures are available for Rowling’s lost income because of contractual demands as a result of her wish for brand control, but minimizing the availability of Potter products seems only to have added value to the brand. The sense of ‘coolness’ that opposing a major corporation or the sense of secrecy created, as Klein (2000, p. 68) and Lindstrom (2008, p. 111) suggested, may have boosted the long-term strength of the brand; however, it is difficult to calculate the long-term added value of restricting the means of product distribution and boosting ‘cool.’ Rowling’s devotion to her characters cemented her integrity in the eyes of many readers, rightly or wrongly, because she presumably would not compromise her beliefs for a substantial payout. She inadvertently followed the countercultural pattern for product success by investing the Harry Potter brand with personal and social meaning for increased sales (Williams, 1999, p. 422).

The limited printing of the first novel that did meet unexpected demand generated by word-of-mouth (or word on screen in the case of the Internet) promotion eventually was itself adopted as a main strategy. Taking a cue from the past, Bloomsbury.com (2000) hinted that the supply of Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire (Rowling, 2000) would be unable to meet the demand. Much like the serialized release of Charles Dickens’ The Pickwick Papers in 1870, this control of the supply created tension in the marketplace, heightened fan expectation, tantalized consumers, and created a buzz (Gunelius, 2008, p. 52; Holt, 2002, p. 12); therefore, what was the initial demand for an undersupply of novels became a valuable Potter marketing technique. In addition to a complete blackout of any advance information on the fourth novel, release of the title only two weeks prior to launch, strict physical protection of the books themselves prior to release, the well-timed introduction of complementary products such as video games and film adaptations of the previous novels also aided the promotion and sales for each additional novel. Table 1 illustrates Harry Potter’s continual exposure and momentum in the media and popular

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culture from the time of the first novel’s release. *Harry Potter* books and films will have been a dominant force in popular culture for at least 14 years.

Table 1

*Timeline of Harry Potter Books and Film Releases*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of release</th>
<th>Book or film</th>
<th>Country of release</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>June 26, 1997</td>
<td>Book 1: <em>Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone</em></td>
<td>Britain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 2, 1998</td>
<td>Book 2: <em>Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets</em></td>
<td>Britain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 1998</td>
<td>Book 1: <em>Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone</em></td>
<td>United States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 1999</td>
<td>Book 3: <em>Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban</em></td>
<td>Britain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 1999</td>
<td>Book 3: <em>Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban</em></td>
<td>United States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 8, 2000</td>
<td>Book 4: <em>Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire</em></td>
<td>United States and Britain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 16, 2001</td>
<td>Movie 1: <em>Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone</em></td>
<td>[Released]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 15, 2002</td>
<td>Movie 2: <em>Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets</em></td>
<td>[Released]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 4, 2004</td>
<td>Movie 3: <em>Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban</em></td>
<td>[Released]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 18, 2005</td>
<td>Movie 4: <em>Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire</em></td>
<td>[Released]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 11, 2007</td>
<td>Movie 5: <em>Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix</em></td>
<td>[Released]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 13, 2007</td>
<td>Book 7: <em>Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows</em></td>
<td>International</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 15, 2009</td>
<td>Movie 6: <em>Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince</em></td>
<td>[Released]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 19, 2010</td>
<td>Movie 7: <em>Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows, Part 1</em></td>
<td>[Due to be released]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 15, 2011</td>
<td>Movie 8: <em>Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows, Part 2</em></td>
<td>[Due to be released]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Adapted from Gunelius, 2008, pp. 64-54; with adjustments made to the final film release dates from Mugglenet.com., 2010a)*

Although Rowling may have unintentionally created greater demand for her books by limiting the buying public access to the *Harry Potter* brand, the publishing and film industry maintained maximum profit and access as a primary concern. The *Harry Potter* novels fit easily into the highly successful, blockbuster movie paradigm because of the possible multisensory
interpretation of the books in films and videogames. Film adaptations both expanded audiences and multiplied the value of the *Harry Potter* brand to record levels (Kapur, 2005, p. 148). In 2000, $3.5 million had already been spent on book advertising; in comparison, $142.7 million was spent on movie advertising and another $68.5 million on DVD and video advertising (Market Research World, 2007). Most *Harry Potter* moviegoers were already aware of the novels but sought the film versions of the books, potentially as a means of sating their desire for more *Harry Potter* material before the release of the next novel. The films were designed to please both ardent *Harry Potter* fans and media conglomerates that sponsored their release (Kapur, 2005, p. 149).

The *Harry Potter* books already demonstrated their appeal through record sales that suggested to producers the potential for a similar triumph in the film industry. Adaptation of the novels into other forms of media was expected to be successful because of the narrative structure of the stories, which was readily transferable to the successful blockbuster format (Kapur, 2005, p. 149). Success also depended on the staggered release of the novels, films, and video game adaptations, all of which created repeat exposure and ample visibility and appealed to numerous physical senses. Blockbuster films are among the most financially successful, despite the high cost of special effects, because they are plot driven and visually engaging, which gives them broad audience appeal (Kapur, 2005, 148).

Among the greatest enticements to media conglomerates and production companies to produce a blockbuster film is the potential for a trilogy if the first film is successful. The *Harry

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6 In the late 20th century the film industry merged with other forms of media such as television, cable, home video distribution, and the Internet. As movie studios combined with these *uber* media interests, the role of actual film production shifted to smaller production companies, and larger firms took on the role primarily of film distributors. Smaller production companies now had the responsibility of organizing the resources for all film projects, such as the cast, director, and all the financing, without the initial backing of a major studio. Financial risks to smaller firms increased considerably, so projects were increasingly chosen according to formulae, which allowed for greater visibility in all forms of media (Kapur, 2005, p. 149).
Potter novels held even greater appeal in this regard because the novels were a series of seven lengthy books—so lengthy, in fact, that the final novel will become two films because it could not be trimmed sufficiently to keep the storyline intact (Boucher, 2008). The film series is nearly three trilogies in length, with few dips in popularity and viewers showing no signs of oversaturation (Gunelius, 2008, p. 68); therefore, based on the success of the novels and previous films, the series has the potential to generate nearly three times the profit of a regular blockbuster.

The Harry Potter films were developed to extend the brand loyalty and profit potential by maximizing the momentum of the brand (Kapur, 2005, p. 106). In comparison, Roald Dahl’s Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, written in 1964, was first adapted for film in 1971; Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory cost $3 million to make and grossed only $4 million. It did not benefit from the profit potential that successful novel and quick film adaptations offer and was not considered a success (Box Office Mojo.com, 2010b). The second adaptation, Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, was released in 2005 in an effort to fill the requirement for children’s material generated by the insatiable demand for more Potter material. Amid the momentum and the push of the Potter craze, the film’s second adaptation grossed US $474,968,763 worldwide (Box Office Mojo.com, 2010b).

The narrative structure, vivid characters, and magical properties of the Harry Potter books were adaptable to the large screen. Fan familiarity with the books enticed the reading audience to see the films while they were awaiting the next novel, which strengthened the brand through increased exposure. Directors made choices in consideration of who would carefully interpret and adhere to the novels’ plot structure. Directors such as Terry Gilliam (12 Monkeys) and Steven Spielberg (Star Wars) were not encouraged because it was feared that they would
exercise too much creative license when readers wanted the novels reproduced as accurately as possible (Kapur, 2005, pp. 147-148).

Part of the desire for film accuracy also enticed readers into theatres to see the latest advances in screen technology, which would be required to effectively mimic the fantastical elements of the novels to meet or better the reader’s own imagination (Kapur, 2005, p. 159). Filmgoers were attracted by the possibility of seeing the spectacle of the shifting staircases (Rowling, 1997, pp. 98), moving portraits (p. 98), Quidditch matches (pp. 136-141), Patronus charms (Rowling, 1999, p. 282), Pensieve memories (Rowling, 2000, pp. 507-518), villains such as the Dementors (Rowling, 1999, p. 66), and Voldemort himself (Rowling, 2000, p. 558), which could be liberated from static pages by computer graphics (Kapur, 2005, p. 157).

The next level of the multisensory experience began with the opening of the *Harry Potter* theme park as part of a joint collaboration between Warner Bros. and Universal Orlando Resort. The 20-acre park opened on June 18, 2010 and cost between US $230 million and US $265 million (Gunelius, 2008, p. 114). It is the next phase in fulfilling the fantasy of readers to be completely mentally and physically immersed in the *Harry Potter* world.

Early advertisers relied on the formula that more money spent equals more success, and in the case of *Harry Potter*, as with many other products, the exposure offered by a significant advertising revenue is beneficial; but the real mystery has been where advertisers should put their support to maximize the benefits of groundswell popularity because each intentional marketing practice, computer chat room proliferation, or even failure to promote seemed only to increase the popularity of the boy wizard and his friends. The answer to his success may be found in capturing elements of the secret, the sacred, and the beloved, and then repackaging those elements in a tangible, identifiable, reliable, and affordable form. Marketing sought to transform Harry’s one literary doorway into many enticing doors that led participants deeper into the
magical realm and appealed to the senses through films, videogames, and theme parks, all while charging users admission. The *Harry Potter* story first met a wide range of emotional and social needs; now the products would follow suit over a time period that would not allow them to be forgotten. The reader, transformed by internalization of the story experience, sought outward symbols to represent the inner journey, and marketing strategists were pleased to provide them.
CHAPTER FOUR: *HARRY POTTER MEETS THE INTERNET*

“The Web is more about a conversation,” he said. “Books are more one-way.” (Rich, 2008, But This Is Reading Too section, ¶ 5)

Although advertisers have long worked to establish an emotional connection to products as a means of increasing sales, the Internet produced an unexpected opportunity for readers and advertisers by creating strong bonds of community in cyberspace. The proliferation of social networking sites (SNSs), fan sites, and online fan fiction has propelled the *Harry Potter* novels and brand forward immeasurably. Even though fan fiction has likely existed in some form for years, the concurrent rise of the Internet, the ease of Internet postings, and the limitless value and potential for reimagining the novels may have led readers to contribute reinterpretations of the *Harry Potter* series in unexpected and unprecedented numbers.

Some have observed that the dispersal of thought away from traditional linear patterns is what seems valuable in both the Internet and magic (e.g., Bolter, 2001): the unanticipated reshaping of stories or physical materials either emerging from or disappearing into a limitless void, the immediately available outcome for both, the surprise revealed when information is obtained or the spell is complete is present in both. On the Internet there is no delay in obtaining information of any manner, and the user understands the thought correlation best. A request for information or materials on the Internet is delayed only by word choice and the restrictions of funds and shipping. The principles of magic are similar: Ask by knowing the correct incantations and wand strokes, and all requests are granted. A witch or wizard is limited by skill.

This flood of *Harry Potter* material on the Internet is a manifestation of McLuhan’s (1964) hypothesis: the medium is the message. The idea of Harry Potter’s instantaneous world

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7 Even the concept of the Internet as “escape” manifests the mental and physical concepts. If humans were more adept at multiple levels of thinking to escape predators (Harkin, 2009), then the Internet became the mental
is multiplied in the medium that demonstrates similar principles of immediate gratification and specific navigational choices. The Internet also allows for discussion, which from a trusted source is a powerful source of influence, so that the simultaneous growth of websites and chat rooms has created a unique and unforeseen opportunity for the Potter books because they were released when the Internet was beginning to develop into its current form.

The bond between books and chat rooms began when Rowling made it clear from the publication of the first novel that there would be seven novels, and apparently the final lines of the series already existed in a safety deposit box, which only strengthened reader interest (Gunelius, 2008). In the gaps between the novels, extremely devoted fans had an opportunity to fill the story void by connecting with each other through the Internet. Numerous Harry Potter websites such as Mugglenet.com and Veritaserum.com sprang up to promote Rowling’s work. They were initially challenged on the grounds of copyright infringement; however, realizing that the sites were free promotion, publishers and marketers eventually allowed them to flourish.⁸ While fans waited for the next novel, they could discuss previous events, predict upcoming ones, and publish their own fan fiction, art, and videos based on characters and events from the novels (Gunelius, 2008). Even with an eventual backlash of less favourable reviews, the sites offered a welcoming environment for faithful supporters to discuss their perspectives and share their own work (Gunelius, 2008). When the official Warner Bros. site opened on February 15, 2001, it received 10,000 posted messages within 40 days (p. 32), which proved the medium to be a popular and relatively accessible form of information and communication. With the aid of escape mechanism when the brain functions in that mode. The screen and computer keys manifest the means of escape in a physical form, like an electronic Room of Requirement—an available hiding place whenever needed.⁸ Rowling considered founders of websites such as Steven Vander Ark’s Harry Potter Lexicon Website among her greatest supporters, until material released on his website was to be published in book form. Vander Ark had been working on his website since 1999, and it launched in 2000 (Neumeister, 2008); however, the book publication conflicted with Rowling’s future plans for a lexicon of her own. The courts ruled that Vander Ark produced no new material for the lexicon and banned publication. Rowling won the lawsuit but commented, “I took no pleasure in bringing legal action” (¶ 3).
information on websites, marketers realized that the emotional connection was so strong with this “product” that research teams were employed to restrategize the promotion of the books to supplement the unanticipated momentum. Many of the discussions centered around marketing tease tactics based on the serialization of the novels, such as late title releases for new additions, the final word of the final seventh novel, “scar,” being released, countdown clocks on websites, and a limited number of appearances by Rowling (Gunelius, 2008, p. 42)—all of which further pushed users toward SNSs, where their need for discussion could be sated. An integral part of the Internet phenomenon for the Potter novels is the introduction of the SNS, which like magic allowed for some invisibility and permitted users to reveal only the specific dimensions of themselves that they chose.

Boyd and Ellison (2007) defined SNSs as

web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. The nature and nomenclature of these connections may vary from site to site. (5)

According to Boyd and Ellison, the earliest site that met the criteria was SixDegrees.com, which was created in 1997, the year of the first Potter release. Although previous sites had employed these three features individually, like dating sites that require a profile, SNSs combine the features of the profile and community with the ability to scan the friends of others (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Early users also complained that once they had accepted friends, there were few activities to maintain the connection (p. 4). The lack of means to maintain the associations among friends diminished the need for users to continue to “type [themselves] into being” (Sundén, 2003, p. 3) and develop their online personas from relationship feedback. Part of the

9 Danah Boyd does not capitalize her name. Allowances have been made for grammar.
attraction of joining an online community is the ability to create posts and comment on those of
other users (Backstrom, Huttenlocher, Kleinberg, & Lan, 2006). Once the potential of such sites
was realized, other SNSs also began to flourish from 1997 to 2001, using various combinations
of public friends and personal, professional, and dating profiles (boyd & Ellison, 2007, p. 4).

Although the first sites were intended to attract a broad range of the populace, those
aimed at religious, ethnic, sexual orientation, political, and other identity-driven categories also
began to develop (boyd & Ellison, 2007, p. 3). Centola, Macy, and Eguiluz (2005) discussed the
unfolding of greater social diffusion in “highly clustered networks” (p. 7), which would allow
movement through a broad range of Harry Potter discussion topics. Centola et al. also observed
that one receives stronger approval from a community if there is a common interest among a
group of connected friends (p. 27), which is valuable in Harry Potter sites where young people
focused on discussing celebrities they adored. Users could move through a broad range of Harry
Potter discussion topics with ease while maintaining strong bonds with people who share a
common interest.

Research at Cornell University stated that members of online communities are likelier to
join initially if they have at least one friend who is a member, and even likelier if they have two
friends. Users are expected to remain active members if there are activities that unite online
members (Backstrom et al, 2006; boyd & Ellison, 2007). boyd and Ellison called these spaces
“networked publics” (p. 119) that allow youth to tailor them to their needs and thus support
sociability (p. 119). The sites that offer community forum discussions and the ability to post
comments in response to fan fiction offered the activities needed to draw members. Although
users may not have known each other, they knew the Potter characters and this appeared
sufficient to create a sense of community among millions of users who could not possibly have
had personal connections. Users were and are so closely tied to the Potter characters that some
fans see them as an extension of themselves and the sites as a means to share their feelings about their literary manifestations. Among the many examples is loopyloomyoony’s comment from April 2, 2005:

I think im most like Ginny because i have a pretty bad temper and a sense of humour, a bit anyway!
I think im also a bit like Hermione, though i’m not a nerd and i also have really puffy hair. (Veritaserum.com, 2010)

Even if the respondents’ online explanations of their personalities lack dimension or offer a narrow representation, the books create a common foundation of information, so whatever is lacking in fan description may either be assumed from the characters’ book personality or further developed, potentially through fan fiction.

Between 2000 and 2003 Harry Potter online communities saw exponential growth, as did the Internet itself. Online usage grew 200% from 2000 to 2007, and an estimated 1 billion-plus individuals were using the Internet regularly (Gunlock, 2008, p. 97). Warner Bros., Scholastic, Bloomsbury, and Rowling herself initially opposed the Harry Potter online phenomenon (p. 99), but the sheer volume of online material and the negative backlash that would have been created by trying to stop the viral spread of the material would have damaged the image of Harry and Rowling, who were recognized as fictional and actual champions, respectively, of the ‘underdog.’

If readers use stories as a modeling tool to internalize the conventions and structures of the tale for later use as a means of analyzing or reproducing the genre, the Internet and fan fiction offer a means of externalizing the structure (Bond & Michelson, 2009). The fact that the Potter stories offer conventions for multiple genres creates more avenues for writers to learn to express themselves. Rowling eventually supported the sites as ways of giving struggling writers the opportunity to hone their skills. Her approach to fan fiction seems fairly liberal: A

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representative for Rowling’s agent states that ‘the general feeling is one of flattery’—as long as it’s clear that the author isn’t JK Rowling” (Cheeser, 2003, ¶ 1).

Meanwhile, other writers have opposed fan fiction on legal and personal grounds. For example, Anne Rice (AnneRice.com, 2010), author of The Vampire Chronicles, stated:

I do not allow fan fiction. The characters are copyrighted. It upsets me terribly to even think about fan fiction with my characters. I advise my readers to write your own original stories with your own characters. It is absolutely essential that you respect my wishes. (Important Message From Anne Rice on “Fan Fiction” section, ¶ 1)

Rice insisted that fan fiction using her characters be removed from sites such as Fanfiction.net. Even though fan fiction may be considered copyright infringement because of the reproduction of characters without the author’s permission, Rowling has been keen to encourage her fans; however, Rowling’s lawyers did draw the line in some instances, sending cease-and-desist orders to sites that hosted pornographic Potter fan fiction. Likewise, Rowling and Warner Bros. sued and won against Steven VanDer Ark, who began the Harry Potter Lexicon site, and later made plans to publish a similar compilation of their own.

It is now estimated that there are millions of Harry Potter fan pages in numerous languages (Gunelius, 2008, p. 99). Among the most well known, the Mugglenet.com website was originally formed in 1999 by Emerson Spartz. In addition to the news, editorials, encyclopedia, and a synopsis of Harry Potter books and films, the site also contains more interactive portions such as the weekly caption contest and an IRC network, which allows followers to debate theories and predict future outcomes of the novels. Among the most active sections of the site is the Mugglenet Fan Fiction section, which opened in 2004. In June 2007 the popularity of Harry Potter fan fiction online spiked prior to the release of the final novel Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows (Rowling, 2007), and it became the most popular online fan fiction search on Google (Google.com, 2008).
Rebecca Tushnet (1995) succinctly defined fan fiction as “any kind of written creativity that is based on an identifiable segment of popular culture, such as a television show, and is not produced as ‘professional’ writing” (p. 655); however, the concept originated long before television. The earliest form of fan fiction is likely oral narrative itself, in which stories and characters evolved to answer the question, “What would happen if?” (McCordle, 2003, p. 437). The practice grew to its pre-Internet height perhaps during the Elizabethan era, when borrowing characters and settings became common practice (McCordle, 2003; White, 1965). The concept of *fair use*, which allowed the adaptation of original works, gained popularity in the mid-19th century when fans, including noted writers such as Christina Rossetti and Francis Hodgson Burnett, began to rewrite the endings of the tales of Lewis Carroll or penned new works using his characters (McCordle, 2003, p. 440).

The practice continued unregulated for the next 100 years. When *Star Trek* aired in the 1960s, for example, the show’s popularity grew in part because of fan-based magazines, or *fanzines*, which were based on characters from the television programme. When Paramount Studios, the *Star Trek* copyright holder, discovered that some fanzine material was adult, it sent cease-and-desist letters to the publishers of the *Star Trek* fanzine; however, Paramount dropped the suit when it realized that the publication was not professional (McCordle, 2003, p. 441). Copyright holders had to decide whether the outcome of a legal course of action had greater value than the potential detriment of losing fan support. Determining whether a use is fair is based largely on four principles:

1. the purpose and character of the use, including whether such use is of a commercial nature or is for nonprofit educational purposes;
2. the nature of the copyrighted work;
3. the amount and substantiality of the portion used in relation to the copyrighted work as a whole; and
4. the effect of the use upon the potential market for or value of the copyrighted work. (US Copyright Office, 2010, §107. Limitations on Exclusive Rights: Fair Use, ¶ 1)
Because most fanzines were unlikely to generate any notable profit but would broaden the market by bringing more attention to the original works and increasing ratings or sales, legal action was often avoided (McCardle, 2003, 441); however, as Anne Rice (2009) mentioned, the potential for legal retribution exists because characters are borrowed from the original canon and violate copyright (McCardle, 2000, p. 445). Part of the original argument against fan fiction was also a violation of social norms.

Despite Rice’s criticism, the value of fan-fiction is acknowledged beyond generating higher sales. When Paula Smith wrote the unofficial story of Mary Sue, the first female commander of the Starship Enterprise from the Star Trek series, her efforts were criticized as narcissistic, but fan fiction is now recognized as a means of exploring the choices made by specific characters in the original canon as a method of re-imagining our cultural landscape and as “granting agency to those denied in popular mythology” (Chander & Sunder, 2007, p. 597), or simply to learn better writing skills by building on the foundation of other writers (McCardle, 2003, p. 442; Chander & Sunder, 2007, p. 597). As 30-year-old Debra Fulmer stated:

> I have written scenes to express, “I wish this is how the episode had really gone,” or to fill in a character’s history or future. . . . I love seeing the potential in ‘unconventional’ pairings—those which are not explored in a show or book’s canon. (McCardle, 2003, p. 442)

Or as 23-year-old Kellie Bindas, a university admissions director, wrote: “There is nothing quite like the feeling of pouring your heart and soul and all your energy into a chapter, and then being told that it’s actually good, that people like it, even love it. It’s a rush” (McCardle, 2003, p. 442).

Di Rooks (1998) demonstrated the same enthusiasm from much younger storytellers. Her studies with younger children who were told stories in class, had to retell them to each other and offer kindly criticism, then retell them to the class showed that a connection between improved storytelling and improved story writing. Discussion amongst peers improved storytelling skills,
and increased experimentation with dialogue and story structure resulted. Rooks also noted the children’s enjoyment of story time.

The value of storytelling originates outside the classroom and extends beyond it. Rooks (1998) built on the work of Betty Rosen (1988), who felt that storytelling and retelling lead to children’s healthy expression of their own views of the world and are innate: “Everyone is a storyteller, and given some nurturing can become a better one. . . . Once set loose, the storytelling impulse enables the most unlikely people to deploy unsuspected linguistic resources and strategies” (p. 167). Rosen’s work with poorly motivated boys and the retelling of Greek myths as a safe means for them to articulate their views is similar to the potential outcomes achieved by readers of Harry’s heroic endeavours. Young readers may not feel in charge of their learning processes in school or elsewhere, but they have the opportunity to experiment with Potter-like choices sans magic in their stories and lives as a means of self-expression and control. While maintaining a safe emotional distance from their lives through storytelling, young storytellers are also able to maintain a safe physical distance when they are online; however, they may be prompted to tailor a more accurate picture.

Studies in literature and television reflect the need for writers to represent humanity more accurately. A study on popular literature in the early 1980s demonstrated that adult characters were three times as likely to be male as female, and central characters were two-and-a-half times more likely to be boys than girls (Grauerholz & Pescosolido, 1989, p. 118). Nor do television and films represent an accurate cross-section of the population. Children Now (2009b) determined that male characters have outnumbered female characters almost two to one since 1999 (p. 5). There is also a marked divide in the gender representation of occupations on television. Male characters have outnumbered females as attorneys by 71%, 80% of CEOs and physicians on television have been men, 82% of law enforcement officers have been male, and
84% of paramedics and firefighters have been male. Almost in equal measure are elected or appointed officials and criminals, at 92% and 93% male, respectively (Children Now, p. 6). Racial diversity is no more accurately represented at any time on television and is heavily characterized by stereotypes. For example, Asian characters are the least likely to be in leading roles, Asian women are most often cast as “China dolls” or “dragon ladies.” Latinos are most often cast in low-status occupations or as “criminals, buffoons, Latin lovers, or law enforcers” (Mastro & Greenburg, 2000, p. 691; de Moreas, 2006, p. C1; Prasso, 2005, p. 334 Children Now, 2009a, p. 4). Rowling’s characters also lack gender and cultural diversity.

Even though her characters originate from strong archetypes, who in the Potter novels are mainly white British boarding school students, readers still identify with them, but gaps exist between the fictional archetypes and how readers would like to see the characters, and perhaps themselves, portrayed fully. The novels feature the strong female heroine and Harry’s brilliant and loyal friend, Hermione Granger; however, the books are still criticized for perpetuating a gender and racial gap. Although J. K. Rowling wrote the stories, the lead role and most of the strong characters are males (Schoefer, 2000). Professor Dumbledore, Professor Snape, Draco and Lucius Malfoy, the Weasley twins, Ron, and Neville Longbottom all prove their strength, ingenuity, and resolve; however, Hermione, who is named after a Greek goddess who represents strength, intellect, and determination and is aligned with the problem-solving and resilient St. Hermione (Dresang, 2002, p. 214), must fight for the respect of her peers and is still considered a “bossy know-it-all” (Schoefer, 2000, ¶ 2) by Ron and Harry until the third novel. She is heard to “shriek,” “squeak,” “wail,” “squeal,” and “whimper” (Dresang, 2002, pp. 222-223) despite her achievements and her role as the rational problem solver. Her male counterparts never make these sounds, nor do they cry like Hermione, who often bursts into tears (p. 223) to the point some Potter fans were led to wonder whether there is a clear disadvantage to
being a female in a Rowling novel. When a 13-year-old fan on the *Un-official Harry Potter Fan Club* website asked, “Do you ever get the feeling that the HP books are SEXIST?” part of her initial post was as follows:

I was just thinking about this and it occurred to me that the most developed and interesting characters are all males, and the major roles in the book are male roles. Harry’s the hero, Voldemort’s the most powerful villain in the world, Dumbledore’s one of the best, Moody’s the most interesting Auror, nearly the whole Ministry is male, the Weasley twins are comic relief. . . .

And Hermione? Well, I’ll take a poll. Who has the larger part in the story, Hermione or Ron? (Dresang, 2002, p. 236)

Despite breaks in gender and what may be considered racial inequality among Rowling’s characters, readers still feel a strong affinity for personas such as Hermione. On the Veritaserum.com (2010) forum, her online fans write in her defence. When asked, “What character are you most like?” respondents admire Hermione’s studiousness, loyalty, and kindness. As Goms said on February 27, 2009, “I luv hermione so much.”

In a Veritaserum.com (2010) survey that asked *Harry Potter* readers which character they thought they were most like, as of July 19, 2010, 281 of the 920 (31%) participants in the online discussion said that they were most like Hermione. Her closest competition was Ginny, with 185 (20%) votes. The women of the series dominated in this survey. More participants said that they were more like Luna Lovegood (11%) than like Harry or Ron (7% and 6%, respectively). In their own words, the respondents described their connections to the characters as follows:

I am definately like Hermione. I study hard, occasionally let my friends copy, I force my friends to study and do their own work and I really do look alot like her! I have bushy, curly brown hair and kinda big teeth. Our eyes are like the same and yeah, I just look like her and I was really surprised when I reread the books about how much I was like her! (FollowTheSpiders, July 15, 2009)

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10 No corrections have bee made to spelling or grammar from any of the online quotations.

11 Clearly, the results lack scientific rigour, but offer insight into respondents’ thoughts and perspectives.
Sadly to say, I would probably most like Hermione with a gender change. My school is well-known for being nerds and I’m no exception. I’d be like Hermione saying “Professor Binns asked for 2 rolls of parchment and mine is 4.” . . . That’d be me lol. (Joeshmoe1228, September 2, 2004)

I’m also a bit like Hermione, cause I want to get good grades, and I never really leave my homework till the last moment, and I’m kinda disappointed if I don’t get a real good grade. But I’m not a total nerd, though. (Dracoluver, September 2, 2004)

Many respondents had difficulty choosing just one character with whom they most identified. For example, Nick claimed on April 26, 2005, “id like to think im a lot like harry, but i think im more like ron just without the hair!” In May 2005 Celeone stated, “I’m most like Luna. I’m really strange and vague (and crazy, but who cares?). I can be very Hermione-ish too, and Ginny like. . . . Sometimes a little bit of Ron. . . . I’ve got many, many sides.”

Other female characters such as the beloved Hogwarts teacher, Professor Minerva McGonagall, deputy Headmistress of Hogwarts, demonstrates fairness and compassion in the judgment of all students (whether her students like it or not). As a member of her house Harry states, “Wish McGonagall favored us,” because “it hadn’t stopped her from giving them a huge pile of homework the day before” (Rowling, 1997, p. 135). However, as I discussed in chapter one, she demonstrates compassion (and some measure of self-interest) by bending or breaking a rule when she deems it in a student’s best interest:

“I shall speak to Professor Dumbledore and see if we can’t bend the first-year rule. Heaven knows, we need a better team than last year. . . .
“Your father would have been proud,” she said. “He was an excellent Quidditch player himself.” (p. 113)

Although McGonagall remains beloved, her dedication to Hogwarts limits her life beyond the walls of the school, but as one user on Veritasereum.com commented, “Prof. McGonagall is deffinatly one of my favorite characters, in the top 3. I think her character is really well-developed. . . . I think she is awesome.” Readers notice that Hogwarts teachers do not seem to
marry, but other wizards seem to have successful relationships. As Anneth stated in a Veritaserum.com forum on the subject, “I think it would be slightly . . . unnatural (is that the right word?) for all the teachers at Hogwarts to be single. Especially ’cause we know that wizards do get married” (Veritaserum, Inc. 2010); thus, there is an unlikely gap between some characters and a natural curiosity among readers to explore the gap, which leads to most popular forum areas, the “ship” discussions. Currently, more than 80 discussion groups on Veritaserum.com are debating potential or existing couples in the Harry Potter series, everyone from Harry and Hermione to the house elves. Also, over 3,000 stories in 17 different categories explore a variety of romantic pairings on Mugglenet Fan Fiction (Mugglenet.com, 2010b) with the most popular relationship discussion being: Should Harry have chosen Hermione over Ginny?

Racial and cultural minorities are represented among the students in the Harry Potter books, but they are singled out among the mainly White characters. Cho Chang, the Patil twins, and Seamus Finnegan show Rowling’s efforts to be inclusive by representing minority populations. Harry dated Cho Chang, and he and Ron each escorted a Patil twin to the Yule Ball. Harry saves Seamus, despite his questionable wizarding parentage (Rowling, 2000, 2003, 2007); however, the majority of the Hogwarts populace appear to be White males, so there is reason for readers to envision a world with a different social structure and Rowling has made it clear that she supports the efforts of young writers who are improving their writing skills and according to Bettelheim (1989), themselves.

Readers have stated a definite interest in having every facet of the books represented. In a Veritaserum.com forum the respondents were asked which other character’s perspective in the novels interested them most or who would be a better main character. Although there were only 33 respondents as of July 2010, in sharp contrast to the appreciation for Hermione’s
righteousness, the majority were most interested in Severus Snape and Draco Malfoy’s darker viewpoint (30% voted for the former and 24% for the latter). As Fairy stated on October 21, 2008, regarding who else’s viewpoint is most interesting:

Without any shadow of a doubt, Draco Malfoy. I’m sick of seeing everything from the good side, I want to know what it was like for Draco growing up, how his parents treated him, how he met Crabbe and Goyle—I want to see the pureblood families interact. We know Bellatrix taught Draco Occlumency, so they must have had a connection, and I would have loved to explore that.

Draco is a more interesting character, with a much more interesting life. (Veritaserum.com, 2010)

And as Sister of the Dark Lord stated on the same date:

I chose Snape because Snape has a very tragic and action-packed life that would keep me, at least, on the edge of my seat. Also, Severus’s POV would give us an exclusive and inside look at the Marauders, Lily, and other adult characters. I say the Marauders because he is being constantly pranked by them, and would soon learn their favorite methods, accessories, etc. Long Live Sev! (Veritaserum.com, 2010)

These spaces that exist between the actual fiction and the readers’ reality become an opportunity to express social commentary and explore aspects of the self through fiction, which McCardle (2000, p. 434) described as necessary to spawn fan fiction.

The books offer opportunities to explore characters and circumstances in part because Rowling follows rigid heroic and fairytale storylines, in addition to the adequate time between the serialized novels for a frenzy for new material to build, however, the fanzine scene would still have restricted fan fiction production to small, self-produced publications with limited distribution had it not been for the rise of the Internet, which offered ease of access and publication (McCardle, 2000, p. 441) and an endless amount of space.

Just as fanzines helped to redefine social norms in literature in the exploration of facets of established archetypes, the Internet also created vast new spaces for exploration that could be satiated, in part, through online communities and social networks that delve into each of these
archetypal facets. Readers and fans could now select in which aspects they chose to participate and to what degree (Harkin, 2009, p. 135). Readers and writers begin to build social communities in cyberspace based on their own concerns or curiosities, which they can discuss through commentaries and hypertext fiction with others who have similar interests and a need to express themselves.

Although the all-encompassing website FanFiction.net had 403,500 stories dedicated to *Harry Potter* fan fiction as of April 2010, the Mugglenet.com (2010b) Fan Fiction site boasts 145,000 users and has some of the highest quality *Harry Potter* fan fiction because of the approximately 20 editors who moderate submissions. Mugglenet.com also offers a beta board to whom writers may submit their work for comments and suggestions before submission to the editors for online posting.

Categories of fan fiction include the post-Hogwarts era lives of characters; fiction that depicts the lives of Harry’s father and his companions; and, of course, the exploration of romantic pairings, including same-sex relationships and a variety of outcomes (Mugglenet.com, 2010b). The section even offers a rating system to provide age-appropriate guidelines for readers. In 2006 the site began to offer Quick Silver Quill Awards, and readers could be nominated and receive recognition in a variety of categories such as Best Story, Best Romance-Canon/non-Canon, or Best Alternate Universe Story. To support the site, Mugglenet.com began to accept advertising in 2003, to the dismay of some users, who preferred the site without banner advertising, and it now receives over $100,000 in yearly income.

Established in 2001, the second largest *Harry Potter* fan fiction site and the most popular according to traffic is harrypotterfanfiction.com (2009), or HPFF. As of July 2010, the site still boasts 60,000 fan fiction stories and 30 million hits per month (harrypotterfanfiction.com). The site includes a ratings system based on language and sexual content (no NC-17 material is
allowed\textsuperscript{12}). Genres include action, horror, fluff, romance, and angst. Under the romance category are some 40 character pairings, either pre-existing in the novels or imagined by fan fiction writers, such as a further exploration of Harry and Ginny’s relationship or the start of Hermione and Draco Malfoy’s life together. Whatever fans found to be an unexplored aspect of the stories, thousands of them filled in of their own volition.

The cyber-communities that are being built (Harkin, 2009) may be externalizations of subcultures that are first built in the human psyche, and then given ample space to expand an individual’s personal journey through discussion and fan fiction in the limitless expanse of the Internet. Each hero and heroine has the opportunity to move the human spirit forward in his or her manner and particular pace by adjusting or filling in whichever facet of their story and their psyche they feel require attention. The Internet has removed the limits of *Harry*’s one suburban doorway, or the tantalizing prefabricated doorways of marketing, by allowing each individual user to stake their own claim in cyberspace, in a new genre, in a new universe instantly—like magic, and intertwine it with the journeys and cyber-civilizations of every other creator. Every point in the *Potter* story has become a potential entry point to the Potter universe.

\textsuperscript{12} The NC-17 rating replaced the “X”-rating for films in the US in 1990. It stands for No Children Under 17 Admitted and is the strictest rating to date classifying material that may be considered pornographic (MPAA.org, 2010).
EPILOGUE

The *Harry Potter* phenomenon demonstrates that, in spite of the claims of some, books are alive and well in the digital era. In fact, the *Harry Potter* series is the most well-read children’s literature of all time and the children's book industry grew substantially through the decade of its publication. There are many possible reasons for this success, as iterated in previous chapters. From the point of view of the literary appeal of the series, readers can relate to the characters and perhaps live vicariously through them, the subject matter is suspenseful and ingenious, with just the right mix of magic and Muggle, the plot follows a familiar folktale rags-to-riches trajectory, and in retrospect seems strangely autobiographical, as though Hogwarts magic seeped from the page and worked itself on Rowling herself, whose rise in some ways paralleled that of her hero.

Another key factor that contributed to the success of this series was savvy marketing and “branding,” as discussed in chapter three. The quiet entry of the first novel into the children’s book market was rapidly followed by an onslaught of every physical, electronic, or filmic *Harry Potter* product imaginable in this world or borrowed from the magical one, promoted by Harry and guarded by Rowling. The extent of the *Potter* marketing success was so great that it bolstered the whole of the children’s book industry.

The linchpin in the case of *Harry Potter* seems to be the simultaneous rise of the novels and social media which allowed for the word-of-mouth effect, deemed so important by marketers, to spread as never it had before in the promotion of a literary text. Millions of young people, finding a common interest, have used the Internet to promote, extend, discuss, critique, applaud, and even denounce the novels. They have expressed their concerns over gender
imbalance; they have mused on appropriate relationships; they have voiced their opinions about who is most likable, forgivable, detestable, and so on; they have celebrated Rowling’s work and one another. And they have done so primarily without the oversight of teachers.

The extent to which fans have contributed opinions and related stories supports Lacoss’s (2002) view that children wish to consider alternate storylines and desire a different result to expand their own life experience. Chat room discussions and fan fiction readily allow for experimentation with story processes, and the anonymity of the Internet perhaps encourages risk taking in the form of sharing writing among youth who would worry about sharing their work with their peers in a face-to-face setting. Of their own accord, millions of Internet users have already expanded and rebuilt the plotline and timeline of every Potter character.

This supports the principles that educational theorists like John Dewey, Paolo Freire, and Lev Vygotsky identified for children’s educational success:

1) children learn better if learning is part of lived experience;
2) children learn better if they are truly in charge of their own learning processes;
3) conversation plays a crucial role in learning. (Bond & Michelson, 2003, p. 120)

Internalizing the experience of Harry and his companions, discussing such experiences amongst themselves, and re-envisioning the experience to suit their needs are activities that fit well into this paradigm. As Bronwyn Davies (1993) proposed, this offers participants the chance to then live their storylines once they have imagined the outcome.

Should teachers of literature be put off or concerned about the potential effect of the Internet on their students’ willingness and ability to engage literature? I do not wish to enter into the business of making prophecies; however, I would suggest that far from being threatened with demise, literature and literary education are in good health and the Internet has become a major vehicle for their promotion. Clearly young people are motivated to read as much as ever they have been. They are prepared to become invested in what they read; they will debate important
issues; they will use literature as a catalyst for their own critical thinking; they are ready and willing to engage in all of the activities we might deem important in an English language arts classroom. Rather than bemoan the fate of reading in an electronic age (Birkerts, 1994), we should take the *Harry Potter* phenomenon as a sign that new communications technologies can in fact become an important vehicle for literary education and debate.

In *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, Rowling writes, “It’s a strange thing, but when you are dreading something, and would give anything to slow down time, it has a disobliging habit of speeding up” (Rowling, 2000, p. 278). Perhaps if we temper our dread somewhat, the swirl of new media would come into focus long enough for us to take stock of its potential affordances for literary education. If the success of *Harry Potter* has taught us anything, it is that anything is possible when many people are able to come together with creative energy and imagination in contemplating story.
REFERENCES


