

“Don‘t be afraid, Hermione!” ?

Gender and emotional expressions in female and male characters in

“Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone”

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The concept of gender is a historically formed sociocultural construct with firm roles for men and women within a given society. Zimmerman & West (1987:125) emphasize that gender is to be decoded as an achieved status, which is formed and altered through psychological, cultural and social processes. The term “doing gender“ involves “a complex of socially influenced perceptual, interactional, micropolitical activities that explicitly follow expressions of masculine and feminine natures (Zimmerman & West 1987:126). According to Zimmerman & West, the expressions made by men and women are rooted in gender roles and both genders differ in expressing emotions in order to fulfill the roles assigned to them by society (Zimmerman & West 1987:130). Kring & Gordon (1998:669) summarize that a substantial amount of research has suggested that women do – on average – express emotions more frequently than men. This does not mean, though, that women actually have more emotions.

The aim of this research is to analyze the differences between genders in regard to their emotional expressions in literature, in particular in children’s literature. Culp (1977:252) ascertains in her study that literature has an influence on the reader, especially on self-image, sensitivity to others, awareness of moral and ethical issues, and awareness of social problems. Books for young readers were chosen because social and societal values are reflected in literature and the characters in these books seem to have an immense influence on the young readers. Those young readers are familiarized with these social and societal values by reading. “Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone” by J. K. Rowling was chosen as it is a

very influential book, having, as the best-selling book of all time, reached many young and older readers¹

Taking into account the gender roles in regard to emotions that were mentioned above, we presume that female and male characters in “Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone” express their emotions differently and that female characters express more emotions compared to male characters. The psychologist Robert Plutchik distinguishes between eight so-called “primary” emotions: anticipation, disgust, fear, joy, sadness, surprise and trust (Karimova 2021: without page). We expect to find these eight emotions more frequently in the expressions of the female characters.

Hypothesis 1: Men and women as a product of socialization express their emotions differently. If this thought is transferred to literature, male and female characters in books also express their emotions differently.

Hypothesis 2: Female characters are more expressive in anger, anticipation, disgust, fear, joy, sadness, surprise, and trust as compared to male characters. Among these eight emotions, some will be expressed even more often than others by female characters.

Method: We chose several female and male main characters (Hermione Granger, Ron Weasley, Vernon Dursley, Petunia Dursley, Prof. Snape and Prof. McGonagall), taking not only gender into account, but also different ages and different roles (teacher/student for example). We searched for direct speech with the AntConc software, afterwards identifying the words with the lexicon NRC-Emotion-Lexicon-Wordlevel.v0.92-txt. This resource lists words according to the following categories: *anger, anticipation, disgust, fear, joy, sadness, surprise* and *trust*, augmented with the sentiments *positive* and *negative*. We clustered the results according to the two sentiments and Plutchik’s eight primary emotions.

Results: The characters that express the more emotions are Petunia Dursley (female, 39.29%) and Vernon Dursley (male, 48.15%); followed by Ron Weasley (male, 40.22%), Professor Snape (male, 38.46%), Hermione Granger (female, 37.8%) and Professor McGonagall

¹ According to the publisher *Barnes and Noble*, the “Harry Potter” series is suitable for ages 9 to 12. “When is Your Kid Ready for *Harry Potter*? A Guide for Getting Started.” *Barnes and Noble*. Website. January 21, 2016. Website. February 7, 2021. <https://www.barnesandnoble.com/blog/kids/is-your-kid-old-enough-for-harry-potter-a-guide-for-getting-started/>.

(female, 33.65%). The results show that for example Hermione is less emotionally expressive than Ron. The couple Petunia and Vernon expressed *anticipation* most, whereas *trust* is the emotion that came in first with the students and the teacher Prof. McGonagall at “Hogwarts School of Witchcraft.” *Disgust* was the emotion Hermione, Ron and Professor McGonagall expressed the least.

Conclusion: Both hypotheses have been proven wrong, as female characters in the book do not express more emotions and do not all express the same emotions in the same frequency. The findings suggest that it is rather social class or the ability for magic that determines the emotions which were expressed and their frequency.

Discussion: We would suggest analyzing more characters in order to prove our findings. It would be interesting to find out whether the author tried to avoid gender stereotypes or whether only the analysis of the direct speech suggests this.

References: • Culp, Mary Beth. Case Studies of the Influence of Literature on the Attitudes, Values, and Behavior of Adolescents. *Research in the Teaching of English*. 11(3). (1997). 245-253. Journal. • Karimova, Hokuma. “The Emotion Wheel: What It Is and How to Use It?” *Positive Psychology*. January 29, 2021. Website. February 2, 2021. <https://positivepsychology.com/emotion-wheel/>. • Kring, Ann M. & Gordon, A. “Sex differences in emotion: expression, experience, and physiology.” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. 74. 3. (1998): 686–703. Journal. • Rowling, Joanne K. *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*. London: Bloomsbury, 1997. • West, Candance & Zimmerman, Don H. “Doing Gender.” *Gender and Society*. Vol. 1. No. 2. (1987): 125-151. Online Journal. February 7, 2021. <http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0891-2432%28198706%291%3A2%3C125%3ADG%3E2.0.CO%3B2-W> • Wikipedia. “List of best-selling books”. *Wikipedia*. Website. February 2, 2021. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_best-selling_books