

Harry Potter and the Promise of Sociology
Edinboro Potterfest 2016
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Hello! Thank you all for coming.

I hope you all have been enjoying the Potterfest events. I was able to take part in the wand making earlier today which was really nice. A special thank you to Corbin Fowler for organizing and for inviting me to attend and speak this year.

My name is Jenn Sims. I'm an adjunct professor of sociology at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls and the editor and contributing author of the book *The Sociology of Harry Potter: 22 Enchanting Essays on the Wizarding World*.

The title of my presentation tonight is "Harry Potter and the Promise of Sociology." Before I get to the Promise part, however, first I want to answer the main question that I frequently receive when folks hear that I write about Sociology and Harry Potter: Why a *Sociology* of Harry Potter?

Well, for one, before our book, it had not been done.

[adapted from *The Sociology of Harry Potter, Chapter 1: Why a Sociology of Harry Potter*]

Given the global popularity of J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter novels, it was inevitable that scholars from all academic disciplines would analyze, criticize, and theorize about the story, its message, and worldwide "Pottermania." Naturally, literary scholars acted first, publishing analysis before *Prison of Azkaban* could settle in on the New York Times best seller list. Other analyses of the series as a work of literature quickly followed suit. These, and the many subsequent books by John Granger and Travis Prinzi of Zossima Press, pictured here, offered an intriguing look into Ms. Rowling's craftsmanship as well as others' efforts at interpreting the underlying messages and themes of the story.

The social sciences took a little longer to take note of Harry. First was *Harry Potter and Philosophy*, and then two years later came *The Psychology of Harry Potter*. Interdisciplinary books such as *Critical Perspectives on Harry Potter* then sought to bring together the different academic perspectives, such as cultural and media studies, with literary and social science analyses.

However, within this vast collection of Harry Potter analysis there are only a few disconnected chapters that attempted a sociological analysis of the wizarding world.

To offer a quick definition: Sociology is the scientific study of human social behavior and groups. Whereas earlier academic work on Harry Potter examined it as literature or examined how readers engaged with the story, what was missing, in my view, was analysis on the rich social world J.K. Rowling had created.

When I pointed this out to my sister she said “You do it.” So I did.

But the absence of sociological work on Harry Potter was not the only reason I wanted to write the book. A second, equally important reason was because sociology and Harry Potter have a lot to offer each other. I personally realized this because, as fate would have it, I dove into the two of them at the same time; and I so have never known one without the other.

So I’m a Sociologist, but I actually began college as a Chemistry major. I took Introduction to Sociology for my social science general education course second semester of freshman year and loved it so much I changed my major before the semester was even over. I could not believe that one could not only get a degree in but have a career studying and writing about all the intriguing social phenomena I had always noticed and wondered about.

For example, at my elementary school “you run like girl” was a harsh insult. This always seemed ironic to me because I, a girl, was the fastest runner at the school. When I looked at my new sociology major course outline and saw that classes called “Gender and Society” and “Sociology of Sport” were electives, I knew I had found the right major.

During my first year at college, whenever I would call home and ask my little sister what was new with her she would mention Harry. At the time *Sorcerer’s Stone* and *Chamber of Secrets* were best sellers and *Prison of Azkaban* was getting ready to follow. My sister excitedly told me I should read the story, she was sure I would love it. I, however, was convinced I would not. I’m a college student now, why on earth would a hugely popular kids’ book interest me?

My sister continued to pester me when I came home for the summer, and when I continued to refuse to read the books she did the only thing a sane person would do: Sat on the floor in my room and read it out loud to me. I could do nothing but laugh, and listen... and fall in love.

You see, as she was reading *Sorcerer’s Stone*, as I was being introduced to the fictional society that is the British Wizarding World, I was filtering it through the Introduction to Sociology material I had just learned. For example, Intro to Soc discusses disciplinarily basics like social norms. Norms are rules and expectations by which a society guides the behavior of its members (Macionis 2011).

In our world, it is the expectation that mail will arrive at your house via the United States Postal Service. When my sister read about owls bringing the mail in the wizarding world I did not just think “wow that’s creative, and potentially messy” I thought “what a great example of how different cultures have different social norms!”

These connections continued as I took more sociology classes and read more Harry Potter books. I read *Prison of Azkaban* and *Goblet of Fire* in college; *Order of the Phoenix* and *Half Blood Prince* while working on my Masters; and *Deathly Hallows* right before beginning my PhD program. Thus, I not only was able to identify sociological concepts I was learning, like norms, in the wizarding world, but also, as it turns out, the Harry Potter books actually helped me better understand what I was learning in my sociology classes.

Here's my favorite example:

In Classical Sociological Theory classes students learn about Emile Durkheim and his theory that deviance, while not "good" in the moral sense, is nonetheless "functional" for society. Durkheim was a social theorist in a tradition called Functionalism. These theorists used the analogy of an organism, like the human body, to study society. All parts of society, like all parts of the human body, have a role, a function to do that contributes to the overall cohesion and success of the organism.

Partly because of the difficulty of the ideas themselves and partly because of the erudite writing style, making sense of theory could sometimes be a daunting task, especially for students who are new to the subject. But the first time I was introduced to Durkheim's theory, though, I instantly thought of the Death Eaters, like Bellatrix Lestrange.

[adapted from *The Sociology of Harry Potter, Chapter 7: Why We Need Death Eaters*]

The atrocities committed by the Death Eaters definitely count as deviance. They destroyed the Millennium Bridge in London, tortured the Longbottoms to the point of insanity, and killed Muggles and Muggle-born witches and wizards just for entertainment. How could that possibly be functional for society? What beneficial role does someone like Bella contribute to society? As it turns out, a lot!

Here is a bullet point list summarizing Durkheim's theory.

1 The first premise of Durkheim's theory of the functionality of crime is that it "defines the norms of a society," (Kidd 2007: 70). Being well understood by members of society, norms are not often thought about. We stand facing front ways in the elevator, put our pants on one leg at a time versus trying to hop in with both feet, we wear our wedding rings on our left hand, and expect new acquaintances to extend their right hand to shake ours. It is not until these norms are broken - not until someone is deviant by NOT doing it - that we even notice that there are "unspoken" rules, i.e., norms, about how to do things in a certain way.

In the Wizarding World, one function of deviants like Bella is to continually remind the society of its values and norms. When she and others tortured the Longbottoms and the rest of the community quickly and rightly considered them deviant criminals for it, their actions nonetheless helps define - for example to young children growing up learning the ways of their society- that respect for life is a value that they hold and not harming others is a norm in their community.

2 Crime not only makes explicit society's norms and values, but it also "establishes social boundaries," (Kidd 2007: 70). Criminals' like Bella and the Death Eaters serve as an out-group against which the rest of the law abiding members of society define their social identity. Dumbledore touches on this when he asked Snape to kill him quickly to spare him the "messy" death Greyback would deliver or the prolonged suffering he would experience at Bella's hands given that she likes to play with her food before she eats. In defining their actions as deviant and bad, Dumbledore was drawing a social boundary with decent compassionate euthanizers like Snape on one side and deviant torture happy murderers like Death Eaters on the other.

Social Psychologists point out that we need out-groups to form our own identity. How do we know if we are tall or short? We must compare ourselves to others. Similarly, the way we know that we are good Quidditch players, hard-working students, or behaving in moral versus reprehensible ways is by drawing boundaries and comparing ourselves across it. Thus again Bella serves a vital function.

3 Durkheimian scholars are not condoning deviant acts, and in fact they note that punishing criminals is a large part of the functionality of deviance. Punishing deviants “strengthens social solidarity through the reaffirmation of moral commitment among the confirming population,” (Reiner 1984). See what I mean about erudite writing style? In other words, the court trials and public sentencing to prison Bella and other Death Eaters provided “rituals that helps build solitary” (Kidd 2007: 70), cohesion, among the rest of the law abiding population.

4 and 5 The final two points Durkheim makes are that crime “directly pre-paves the way for change” and that criminals’ activities are “useful for prosperity” ([Durkheim 1895] Lukes 1982: 102). This is so because “crime produces innovation” and “can provide the necessary impetus for social change,” (Kidd 2007: 70-71). Innovations resulting from responses to crime include new laws, protocols, technology, or discovering new uses for existing technology that then can lead to positive social changes.

The DA’s meeting notification coins, which were designed by Hermione and instrumental in alerting fellow students during the Battle of the Astronomy Tower and the Battle of Hogwarts, were modeled on the Death Eaters’ Dark Mark. Moreover, because of the Death Eaters’ crimes Harry, Ron, and Neville made significant improvements to Auror’s department, thereby better protecting the wizarding community from future harm of this kind.

So we should thank dear Bellatrix and the other Death Eaters for their contribution to the wizarding world, and my Classical Theory grade... while sentencing them to a life sentence in Azkaban.

Now, not everyone needs to go around discussing 19th and 20th century French theorists to get on with their life, so what can sociology offer non-sociologist Harry Potter fans? The answer to that lays in the “promise” of sociology.

Thinking about Bella’s deviance in a more social way versus in an individualistic “she’s just crazy” way doesn’t just help explain an esoteric theory but it teaches us to view social phenomenon, not just from the psychological perspective that is so ubiquitous in our society, but with what C. Wright Mills calls the Sociological Imagination.

According to Mills (1959: 15) viewing the world through a sociological lens provides “understanding of the intimate realities of ourselves in connection with the larger social realities.” This ability to deeply understand is the promise of sociology. It is the promise that you will be able to better make sense of the world around you and, in so doing, be in a better position to effect social change and improve conditions for yourself and your loved ones.

Mills was concerned with the real world, but with our focus on the fictional wizarding world, the promise of the Sociology of Harry Potter is that viewing the wizarding world with a sociological imagination will not only deepen readers' enjoyment and appreciation of the series but will also teach readers, who may not have taken a sociology class, how to think sociologically with respect to their own real world too.

So let's take a couple of examples of how viewing people and events in the wizarding world through a sociological lens provides both more insight into the story as well as helps us more critically understand our own real world. Starting with one of the easiest example, because the series itself discusses it, everyone's favorite potions master Prof. Severus Snape.

[adapted from *The Sociology of Harry Potter, Chapter 6: Pedagogy of the Half Blood Prince*]

Dumbledore once said that "it matters not what one is born but what one grows to be" (GOF 708). Sociology reminds us that far from being solely based on personal choices, many larger factors, over which we have little or no control, have a profound impact on what we grow to become and even what we are able to become. Looking at Snape for instance we know that he was the only child of Tobias Snape, a Muggle, and Eileen Prince, a witch. Severus' parents were low income and this was reflected his appearance and dress. Furthermore, his parents had an abusive relationship, for example Snape could not only hear them fighting but also see Tobias yelling at a cowering Eileen.

From these descriptions we learn that Snape had an impoverished and violent home life. Sociological research has consistently shown that such circumstances have lasting negative effects on children. A 2013 report based on a two decades of data collection found that children raised in poverty had worse life outcomes (e.g., performance in school) than non-poor children who had been born addicted to crack or cocaine due to their mother doing drugs while pregnant (Welsh 2013).

One pathway by which poverty negatively effects children is not just access to fewer resources but due to the negative impact of poor treatment due to society's contempt for the poor, even children. This is especially so in the UK because it is a very classist society. Petunia's dismissive behavior regarding a boy from the other side of town is common. British Literature like *Oliver Twist* and *A Christmas Carol* make clear that the poor are looked down upon.

Moreover, while in the US we have always had our notion of upward mobility and the American Dream, in other cultures like the UK class is seen as a much more constant trait of a person. Class is not just a number in your bank account, it is how you behave and your values, who you "are."

For a quick side example, remember when William married Kate and folks started dreaming about the adorable little family they would soon have? "Lord Voldemort" on Twitter noted that if they have a son he would be a half blood prince. Now, this was just a Twitter joke and reference to Harry Potter of course; but the fact that a royal marrying a non-royal still brings to mind mixing BLOOD differences, even if just to jest about it, demonstrates how more central to one's self class is seen in that culture.

Now, as we know when Snape was 9 or 10 years old he met his best friend Lily Evans. While Petunia, Lily's older sister, looked down on Severus, judging him based on his poor appearance and residence, Lily was always kind to him. When they went off to school however, other students at Hogwarts were not kind though. Severus was befriended by Lucius Malfoy and older fellow Slytherins, but in his year he was isolated and frequently bullied, particularly by James Potter and Sirius Black.

Bullying is a problem at schools other than Hogwarts of course, and research shows that children who are bullied can experience negative physical and mental health issues such as depression and anxiety, changes in sleep and eating patterns. Additionally, "a very small number of bullied children might retaliate through extremely violent measures. In 12 of 15 school shooting cases in the 1990s, the shooters had a history of being bullied," (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services). This does not, as some accuse sociologists of doing, "excuse" violent behavior like school shootings; but it *does* provide information on the shooters' motives that can be used to prevent future tragedies.

In Snape's case, he may not have gone on a murderous cursing spree throughout Hogwarts but he did join the Death Eaters. By the time Snape graduated from Hogwarts, Lord Voldemort had risen to power. Having lived his entire life as lower economic class and lower social class, it is easy to understand the allure of being in Voldemort's inner circle where, for the first time in his life, he was respected and held high status.

He turned against them though when Lily was threatened and the rest is history; but the important point is that only by looking at him sociologically can we understand the effects of social experiences and positionality within the social structure. Thus, even more so than simply reading "The Prince's Tale," which my sister will argue is quite possibly the best chapter in the series, taking a sociological look at Snape helps us enjoy the books and movies more.

You can reread books and excitedly wonder at parts when Snape is behaving in a certain way, staring at Harry before turning away in disgust for example-- what was he thinking? We can have a bit more compassion for why Neville's boggart being him upset him, maybe because he knows what it's like to be in Neville's shoes. We can understand why abuse was a tool he so often reached for in dealing with children, because that is what he learned as a child. And while J.K. Rowling is right to say he is not a "hero" and while likely no one besides Harry will ever name their child in his honor, understanding him deeply adds enjoyment to the story.

Conversely, once we can use our sociological imagination to understand a fictional character like Snape we can then turn it to the real world. My department at UW-River Falls is a Sociology, Criminology, and Anthropology department. And regarding the criminology part, the insight into Snape's life story that is revealed by taking a sociological view is important.

From Snape's life for example we see the impact of poverty on children, of stigmatizing them and reducing opportunities to form friendships and participate in mainstream activities. When my students graduate and become probation officers these are understandings they will need to have to help the population they will serve. When we understand why Snape turned to the only group

that accepted him, the Death Eaters, then when we see real children in impoverished areas turning to gangs we might not be as quick to dismiss them as just “bad kids.” A sociological view would look at their opportunity structure and recognize that because human beings need love and acceptance if one is not getting it in socially approved institutions such as the family or school, one will seek it out, perhaps even among Death Eaters and other gangs.

Again, this doesn’t “excuse” deviant or criminal behavior, that’s why J.K. Rowling says Snape is no hero. He’s a mean man who bullied little kids. But it helps us understand *why*, which gives us both compassion for one of the bravest men Hogwarts has seen as well as arms us with the knowledge of how to improve real social conditions such that real children do not have to suffer childhoods and adulthoods of pain and loneliness.

A second example.

Misters Moony, Wormtail, Padfoot, and Prongs may have paid their compliments to Professor Snape but they were not very compassionate to him. But then again, some of them were dealing with their own issues.

Remus Lupin for example thought he would never be able to go to Hogwarts. Bitten by a werewolf as a young child, both the physical toil of his condition as well as the anti-werewolf prejudice in the wizarding community at large almost assured his exclusion from the school. So how then was he able to attend?

As he explained to Harry, Dumbledore helped ensure “certain precautions” were taken. The shrieking shake was identified as a place where he could go and transform in private. The Whomping Willow was planted to “protect” the passage way there to protect other students. The hospital staff accompanied him and no doubt provided vague sick notes to his professors since he was missing class.

In sum, Lupin’s ability to attend school was less a function of his intelligence or individual hard work and more dependent on whether or not the structure of the school was set up in such a way as to be accessible by wizards like him. I see the impact that school accessibility has on students everyday as a professor. I once had a deaf student in my class, for example, and her ability to do the classwork and learn the material was not simply reflective of how smart she was or how hard she studied. Being unable to hear lecturers meant that my simply speaking as I am doing now was educating in a way that was inaccessible to those with hearing impairments.

So my university hired a stenographer to sit in my classes and type as I lectured, and my university’s ADA compliance office found captioned versions of all the videos I showed in class. And as with the young Remus Lupin, these slight modifications to the structure of the classroom/school were not crutches or some kind of unfair additional aid provided to some students not others, they were totally doable, simple structural modifications that opened up the classroom/school to people who had previously been excluded simply because they were a little different.

When the social structure is open to people, they can flourish. Dumbledore arranged for Lupin to attend school where he not only got an education but made (sadly short) life-long friends. Lupin's ability later in life to hold down a job had less to do with his willingness to work or laziness and a lot to do with prejudices laws that made it near impossible for werewolves to have a decent job. Dumbledore then hired Lupin as Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher years later thus providing him with an opportunity to work. Joining the Order meant he had the opportunity to meet other friends, one of whom became more than a friend but his family. As an aside, the website where I found this picture said "no it's okay, I didn't need to not cry today."

As with Snape, taking a sociological look at Lupin's life, in his case not his family and school experiences but how the structures and laws of the society excluded or allowed wizards like him to participate in various aspects of society, helps us to understand him, his choices, and fears better, which gives us both respect for Mr. Moony and explains why this bottom picture pulls at so many of our heart strings.

Also as with analyzing Snape, understanding how the social structure and laws effected Lupin teaches us to recognize how social structure and laws facilitate or thwart real people's participation in society. Take Andromeda Tonks, Teddy's grandmother who raised him after his mother and father's death during the Battle of Hogwarts. She was a single (grand)mother. In many countries women like this, unmarried/divorced/widowed women with children compose a disproportionate proportion of the poor.

In other countries, however this is not so. Comparing the US to the Nordic social democracies of Finland, Norway, and Sweden shows that while all countries have roughly the same percent of single mother households, due to the different way taxes and social programs are run their single mother child poverty rate is about 10% while ours is around 60% (Bruenig 2014). High poverty rates for real children like Teddy Lupin being raised in single (grand)mother families are thus, like Lupin's ability to attend school and my former student's ability to learn in my classroom, dependent upon the policies, practices, and structure of the society.

Thus far we I have given you a few individual cases-- Snape, Lupin-- of the utility of looking sociologically at an individual's social circumstances. But the case of Grandma Tonks and other single mother witches shows that the sociological imagination can also be used to analyze and understand whole groups. To see how we have to go back to Mills' book *The Sociological Imagination* which tells us that that are two types of problems: personal troubles and social issues.

Personal Troubles: "occur within the character of the individual and within the range of his immediate relations to others; they have to do with his self and with those limited areas of social life of which he is directly and personally aware. Accordingly, the statement and the resolution of troubles properly life within the individual," (Mills 1959: 8).

Social Issues: "have to do with matters that transcend these local environments of the individual and the range of his inner life. They have to do with organization of many such milieux into the institutions of an historical society as a whole." (Mills 1959: 8). Their resolutions cannot be expected to lay within any individuals' personal reach.

I always give my students the example of students' failing a midterm exam. If in a class of 40 students two people fail the mid-term, the professor and those students' friends are going to assume it is their individual fault. Maybe they didn't study, maybe they were out drinking firewhiskey the night before, whatever, they need to work harder next time and do better. But if out of 40 students, 25 fail, it is not very likely that over half the class didn't study or was out drinking the night before. No, in this case it's more likely that the test itself was poorly written, maybe some of the questions had more than one correct answer. Or maybe the professor just did not teach the material well or maybe she or he accidentally messed up programming the scantron grading machine and it mis-graded all the tests.

Likewise, if only five students fail, but that happens to be half of all the men in the class, we are not going to look to the students but to the instructor. In addition to Harry Potter examples I used lots of *Sex and the City* and other really girly examples in class. If disproportionately more men than women were failing my classes--- this is not the case, but let's just say hypothetically-- it would not be sociological to assume men are less intelligent than women or that men don't care about sociology and so aren't studying. Maybe the examples I'm giving or my teaching style is just not working for them.

As we saw with regard to Lupin, in the wizarding world, werewolves, giants, and other groups are stigmatized and devalued compared to human witches and wizards. These groups are often on the receiving end of attitudes and practices that discriminate against them for their nature or behavior, ranging from verbal insults all the way to incarceration for little more than being from the 'wrong' background (Hayes 2012).

Only house elves are enslaved though. When Hermione finds out that the Hogwarts fires are lit, rooms are cleaned, and food is prepared by an entire class of unpaid - i.e. enslaved - magical creatures she is livid. So she founds an organization, S.P.E.W., to promote their welfare. For those who have only seen the movies, which sadly cut this plot, the short term goals of the Society for the Promotion of Elfish Welfare are "to secure house elves fair wages and working conditions;" the long term goals include changing the law prohibiting them from using wands and getting elves' a representative in the Department for the Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures (GOF 225).

As with the first abolitionists in Europe and America, Hermione had trouble convincing anyone, even her two best friends, to join or take an interest in working to free an enslaved people. They like it. They like being enslaved Ron told her (GOF 224). They're happy and don't want sick leave or pensions another wizard said (GOF 182). The real issue though, as Hermione pointed out, was that witches and wizards were complacent in the "rotten unjust system" because they benefited from it. Changing it, freeing house elves, would mean they would lose those benefits. Freeing house elves might mean Hogwarts students have to make their own beds, or the school might not be able to afford all gold table ware if they had to pay 100 more staff members.

If Lucius Malfoy's anger that Harry "lost him his servant!" is any indication, and if sweet Mrs. Wesley's wish that she had a house elf to do some of the house work for her for free is any indication, then witches and wizards were no more excited about doing their menial labor, or spending their money to properly pay someone to do it, than were the anti-bellum slave owners

who opposed real emancipation. It's a hard sell to get those who benefit from a system, even a clearly exploitative one, to support changing it.

While the 19th century anti-slavery efforts in Europe and America are an obvious parallel to Hermione's desires to end house elf enslavement in the wizarding world, there are other examples of this dynamic that can be observed in our contemporary real world. While Hermione wanted house elves to have some wages, vacation days, and pensions, real workers across the country and across the world, while receiving these things, often receive proportionately little such that, while not enslaved, their situation nonetheless constitutes exploitation. Similarly, the social devaluation of house elves, as beings considered less important than wizards and thus not being allowed to use wands and not having equal political representation, also finds parallel in the ethnic, racial, religious, and sexual orientation stratification that exist in real modern nations.

If we can understand why Hermione is shaking a collection can in students faces to raise money for S.P.E.W., and why her fellow students were reluctant to join her in her efforts to create change, then we can not only love the character that much more for standing up for her beliefs that all magical creatures are created equal but we can also then turn our sociological imagination onto the real world and understand why some folks are going on strike from their jobs or kneeling during the National Anthem; and we can understand why other folks are annoyed by their efforts and are reluctant to support them in their quest for change.

Last example: Bill and Fleur's marriage.

This example is a bit different. This is a happy couple who I personally wanted to get together from that first day before the third Tri-Wizard task when she was eyeing him with that fang earning in his ear. This example is different because it is a happy one. Mills only talked of troubles, and indeed sociologists are quite often the academic ambulance chasers in that we focus a lot of attention on analyzing social problems. But the sociological imagination can also be used to understand the joys of life. For like life's troubles, life's triumphs are not completely due to individual psychology or personality. The social structure and groups' positionality within it also impact our joys in life.

[adapted from *The Sociology of Harry Potter, Chapter 17: Inter 'Racial' Dating at Hogwarts*]

Looking at Bill and Fleur and other magical couples we can note that race plays a major part in which groups are desirable versus undesirable as partners in the wizarding world. Not race as muggles understand it though. In the wizarding world there are lots of what muggles would call interracial couples. At the Yule Ball held the year Hogwarts hosted the Tri-Wizard Tournament, for example, there were a plethora of what we would call mixed race couples. Among the four Champions, two crossed racial borders in selecting dates. Cedric Diggory, a white wizard, attended with Cho Chang, a Chinese witch. Harry Potter, a white wizard, secured a last minute date with Parvati Patil, an Indian witch. If we remember that Fleur is actually a quarter Veela, then she and Rogers Davies, who is 100% human to our knowledge, constitute a third interracial couple.

Among the student attendees, Parvati's twin sister Padma's (reluctant) attendance with Ron Weasley marked a third white/Asian Yule Ball couple. Glancing around the Great Hall one could see other mixed race couples as well: a black wizard with an Asian witch and another black wizard with a white witch. And of course everyone on the dance floor made sure to steer clear of black/white couple Angelina Johnson and Fred Weasley "exuberantly" dancing together.

The Yule Ball was a special occasion, but that doesn't mean that Hogwarts students need an extraordinary event to bring people of different races together romantically. In Order of the Phoenix, after Cedric's tragic death in Goblet of Fire, Cho interracially dates Harry then Michael Corner. Ginny and Dean date throughout most of Half Blood Prince. And years after their Quidditch playing days, Angelina and George Weasley (no doubt bonded over mutual grieving at the loss of Fred during the Battle of Hogwarts) marry across racial lines.

With so many witches and wizards ignoring race in matters of the heart, why do I say that race matters in who gets married in the wizarding world? Can't we conclude that the wizarding world is a color blind utopia in which everyone is judged, not for their race, but the content of their character? Not quite.

Sociologists define race as a socially constructed category of people who share identified biologically transmitted traits that members of a society consider important, (adapted from Macionis 2011). While the biologically transmitted traits that muggles have decided are most important relate to outward physical appearance, that is not the biological traits that witches and wizards consider most important. Magic is. Wizarding categorization is based on "amount" of magical ancestry. A wizarding world census would not ask if you're black, white, or Asian as the US and UK Censuses do; it would ask if you're pureblood, half-blood, half-breed, muggle born, or squib.

And when we look at coupling in the wizarding world, we see that purebloods, half-bloods, muggleborns, and half-breeds where the non-human is a high status magical creature (e.g., Veela), are married; and half-breeds where the non-human part is a low status magical creature (e.g., giant) and especially squibs are the most devalued racial group in the society and the least likely to be coupled or married.

Hagrid and Madame Maxime seemed to eventually establish a nice friendship, but squibs like Mr. Flich and Mrs. Figg are both literally lonely cat people. Human/animal relationships, particularly for those who are of lower status magical races like muggleborns, devalued half-breeds, and squibs was discussed in a chapter by Anna Chilewska in *The Sociology of Harry Potter*.

While Mrs. Figg lived in the muggle world, and given that she is called Mrs. at one point possibly married a muggle man, Anna explains that Argus Filch, who is a caretaker of Hogwarts and thus lives in the magical society, is, in his birth society, a person whose existence is constantly marked by his perceived deficiencies. Because he is part of the wizard society he would not be comfortable in the Muggle world. Mrs. Figg being seen by neighbors as "eccentric" suggests that there is more than simply magical powers that separate those of wizarding society from muggles such that

blending in is not always easy. On the other hand, because he is NOT a wizard, Filch cannot be fully integrated into the wizard society either.

Even more so than Snape due to poverty or Lupin due to being a werewolf, Filch's extremely low social status resulted in him having no friends and only marginal acceptance in society. His only companion is a female cat called Mrs. Norris. And while Anna explains that the relationship that Filch has with his cat is multilayered, she points out that given that Filch's social status of a squib and how that makes it difficult for him to form relationships, filial or romantic, the cat's title Mrs. suggests that Filch has created a metaphorical marriage between himself and the only female, the only being period really, who loved him.

The fact that Squibs are devalued in society is not to say that Bill and Fleur did not love each other. They absolutely did. Nothing, not a war, not his mother's cool attitude, not a werewolf mutilating his face was going to stop Bill and Fleur from being together. But what paying attention to the hierarchical valuation of groups in the magical dating and marriage market does show us is that, as sociologists of sexuality and relationships tell us, our love interests, marriage patterns, and family formations in the real world are "not 'just a preference,' because why one is attracted to what one is attracted to wasn't written into one's DNA. We come to our desires because of a profound socialization process.... When you are habitually exposed to certain kinds of bodies deemed attractive, the messages a person receives from those cues are internalized," (Orne 2012).

Discussing the flip side of oppression, groups which are privilege by society, is one of the hardest lessons for my sociology students. Despite not having used any positive examples, Mills (1959: 5) anticipated this when he warned readers of his book that obtaining a sociological imagination: "In many ways it is a terrible lesson; in many ways a magnificent one."

It is a terrible lesson because one can feel trapped, helpless, by the enormity and depth of the problems one now recognizes. Poverty can seem too large of problem to solve. Trying to stop bullying can seem like a futile effort. Getting institutions to change their exclusionary practices can seem like fighting a losing battle; and trying to get folks who have the cards stacked in their favor in one area of life to join you in knocking the cards down so as to create a society in which all enjoy good wages and loving spouses might seem like down right utopian insanity.

Seeing the world through a sociological lens is also magnificent though. If we can resist the temptation to fall under the spell of fatalism then, depressing as our new insights often are, they do at least arm us with the knowledge of a way to change. Yes poverty and bullying are huge issues, but if we understand their root causes we can better prevent them than if we were still erroneously assuming people's circumstance and behavior are solely due to their individual actions. Yes biased laws and exploitative systems exist, but if we recognize that these are due to human-made laws then we can pressure our leaders to change those laws; or we can withdraw our businesses and other patronage from those areas, say a state that passes a discriminatory law, in protest and to send the message that, like Dumbledore, we too think that it matters not what someone is born but what s/he is able to grow to become.

In conclusion, because of their release the day before the semester began, I have not yet read the new eBooks from Pottermore. And while I read *Cursed Child* the day it came out, I have thus far refrained from mentioning anything about it just in case not everyone has read it. Spoilers are worse than the Dursely's Christmas presents to Harry in my view. I rank them right up there with Kreacher's first Christmas present to him. But I will end by making one vague, non-spoiler containing point about *Cursed Child*.

More than any other text in the series *Cursed Child* shows the necessity of viewing the world through a sociological lens. The things that happen to people, their social locations, and how they are viewed, valued, or denigrated by society have a profound impact on the results - the reality - that we see before us. *Cursed Child* shows this and by so doing is yet another way that Harry Potter is an asset to those wishing to think sociologically.

So, to end, using our sociological imagination means we get a lucid understanding of not only the world around us but of our place in it. Whether someone becomes a Death Eater in part due to childhood humiliation, whether a student is able to attend school and get a good job after graduation, whether workers are paid a living wage, and even whether two people fall head over wand in love and get married or not, the Harry Potter universe shows us again and again that taking a sociological view helps us to better understand the characters, the world that J.K. Rowling has created for us, and ourselves too.

At first it may seem like a terrible lesson; but ultimately it is a magnificent one, a magical one.

And that is the promise of sociology. Thank you.

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