Harry Potter and the Fat Stereotypes
Abstract

In the field of research within film studies which consider how aspects such as gender or race affect the portrayal of a character, the aspect of characters' body sizes are not always taken into account. By analysing the fat characters in the popular children's and young adult film series about Harry Potter, I bring attention to the fact that the use of stereotypes is significant in these characterisations, and further contributes to the marginalisation of this particular group of people. I looked specifically at what the characters had in common with each other, and if they adhered to already established stereotypes concerning fat people, and found that the one thing they all share is a lack of academic or intellectual skill to varying degrees, which is in line with the common stereotypes of fat people as dumb. I further analysed the differences between the fat men and fat women in the series, and found that fat men were a far more common occurrence than fat women, and that fat girls did not even exist in these stories. This is not surprising, as the exclusion of fat women and girls is abundant in mainstream culture.

Key words

Harry Potter, fat studies, fat stereotypes, gender studies, children's films, young adult series, intersectionality

Thanks

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1 Introduction

There is a movement on social media platforms, such as Instagram and Twitter, called body positivity. It is a kind of counter culture, a reaction to the over-representation of slim bodies in mainstream media, which has been further emphasized with the rise of social media. The people behind the body positive accounts try to counter this over-representation by embracing who they are and what they look like, no matter their size, ability or skin colour. This representation of differently sized people has historically been lacking in popular culture and the movement has therefore sparked important conversations about health, beauty and, on a larger scale, feminism and the control of women's bodies.

With exposure to this movement comes a certain deprogramming and relearning. Suddenly, the social structures that tell us that slim equals happy, sexy and successful become all too apparent, and so does the fact that this message is everywhere around us, especially in much of the audiovisual popular culture we consume. The more one looks, the more difficult it is to find truly positive examples of characters with bigger bodies, where the story is not, for example, centred around them losing weight and then becoming the person they were meant to be.

While there have long been discussions regarding the cinematic representation of for example women or people of colour, these discussions have excluded representation of people of other sizes than the standard slim female actress or the slim, muscular male actor. As Brenda Risch notes: “all viewers benefit by experiencing a fuller representation of the human experience. Individual fat viewers exposed to fat-positive portrayals stand to gain insight and empowerment for their own lives.” I would add that it is beneficial for people who are not fat to see positive portrayals of fat people as well, because it works against stigmatization and might open people's minds to what it is like to be fat in a fat-phobic society, which

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could create sympathy and a better understanding of other people's struggles. As Risch continues: “ultimately, breaking down the lines of fat and skinny strengthens a nuanced understanding of the world, rather than reinforcing the conventional binary categories.”

Furthermore, this on-screen over-representation of slim people and under-representation of overweight, dynamic people can deepen issues with body image in viewers, and there have been several studies that show that young children perceive fat or overweight peers as less smart, less kind and less talented. These prejudices are reinforced by the fact that fat characters are often portrayed as either bullies or the ones being bullied. They rarely have as much agency of their own as slim characters do, and are often reduced to comic relief or the punch-lines of jokes.

"Fat is a type of difference that is commonly believed to be under the control of the individual. This belief is a foundation for constructing, applying, and reinforcing stigmatizing narratives about fat people.” What this quote by Risch explains is that while racism and sexism, for example, are condemned by most people these days, fat-phobia is still rampant because of the belief that being fat is something someone chooses; that it is a product of lack of self control. Therefore, it is acceptable to make fun of and discriminate against fat people, since it is their own fault that they are the way they are. This is not entirely true, however. A person's size can be determined by many things, most importantly genetics. Size is not always an indication that a person is overeating or a reflection of what they eat, nor their level of exercise. And even if this was actually the case, is this really a reason to mock people and have them be universally judged for this one part of their personality? Instead of continuing the harmful stereotyping which leads to children harbouring preconceived ideas of fat people, it would be more beneficial to all to have a more dynamic and multidimensional portrayal of fat people on screen.

3 Risch, 2012. p. 20
1.1 Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to closely examine the portrayals of characters who are, or are perceived as, fat in the children's and young adult fantasy film series about Harry Potter. The reason I have chosen these particular films is that they are very popular and well-known, and are aimed at a young audience. While there have already been several academic articles and books written about, for example, the representation of women, race and LGBTQ+ characters in the Harry Potter universe, such as Critical Perspectives on Harry Potter by Elizabeth E. Heilman, writing about the representation of bodies that are outside of the weight norm of mainstream media is lacking. If children from a rather young age are presented with images of fat people as mean or stupid, it could affect the image they bring with them into adulthood, perpetuating the already established fat-phobia of modern society.

What I am trying to discern through this paper is whether there are aspects that all or most of the fat or plus sized characters in the Harry Potter universe have in common. Are there certain traits that they share, despite the characters being quite different from each other? Are they contributing to or affected by some of the already established stereotypes of fat people? I am also curious to see if there are differences between the portrayals of male and female fat characters, and if so, what those are. Additionally, I will demonstrate how fatness could be a significant category in the field of intersectional research into popular culture.

The underlying objective with this paper is to take a critical look at the way popular culture treats people who do not fit into societal standards of beauty. This is particularly significant when it involves movies and stories aimed at children and young adults, because those are the ages where one is under the most pressure to conform to social norms, and because popular culture plays a big role in conveying those rules. As the Harry Potter series had, and still have, such a big following and cultural impact, it is a good example of stories to look more closely at, since many young people are familiar with them and watch them repeatedly. They “offer important insight for analyzing popular narratives. These narratives reflect and reproduce dominant understandings of our social world and therefore are important
sites for analysis,” as Amy Gullage puts it. Analysing stories that have gained this level of popularity is relevant because they can reflect social structures in ways that stories which are not considered popular culture, do not. Those stories can shift dynamics more easily, because they are not produced for a mass-audience, which popular culture is. Elisabeth Heilman and Trevor Donaldson write: “part of the popularity of the Harry Potter books stems from their highly familiar depictions of gender and power.” As audience members, we look for a certain level of familiarity in the narratives we read or watch, and while we may not be used to seeing the magical things that are part of the Harry Potter universe in our daily lives, that might make it even more important that other parts, such as social structures and gender norms, are familiar to us, in order for these stories to be successful on a larger scale. If there are no familiar aspects, it will become too hard to relate to them. While all of this is true, it is still worth acknowledging that norms are upheld this way and to question the use of these structures.

Issues of representation can often take the form of a lack of characters of a certain group; too few women, no people of colour, only straight romantic couples etc. However, as Heilman and Donaldson write “it is not simply who is present, but also how characters are portrayed, and what they do, that matters.” Just because a group is represented, does not mean they are done so in a dynamic and fair way. While there are several instances of fat characters in the Harry Potter franchises, they may not be very complex. This is part of what I will be analysing in this paper.

1.2 Method and Material

In order to answer the research questions posed in the previous section, I will be doing a close analysis of the characters who are fat, and how the characters around them perceive and react to them, while keeping previous research on fat characters

8 Heilman and Donaldson, 2009, p. 146
in mind. The main focus will be on the original eight films, starting with *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (Chris Columbus) in 2001 and ending with *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows Part 2* (David Yates) ten years later. I will also take into account the seven books upon which these films are based, however, this is not an analysis of adaptation or a paper about literature, but an analysis of the film characters, so the books will mainly be used to emphasize certain points of reference or distinct differences that affect the cinematic portrayal of the fat characters. Furthermore, I will include the two films that have been released so far in the series concerning Newt Scamander; *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* (David Yates, 2016) and *Fantastic Beasts: the Crimes of Grindelwald* (David Yates, 2018). Since the latter premiered in November the year this paper was being written, I will only touch upon it briefly. As the universe of what is now being called the Wizarding World is so vast and intermedial, it is difficult to determine what to include and not to include. I will, however, be disregarding the stage-play *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* (J.K. Rowling, Jack Thorne & John Tiffany, 2016) since there are no mentions within the script regarding the size of the characters, and I have not been able to see it live. I will briefly mention the mobile application game *Harry Potter: Hogwarts Mystery*, and though it is not a main source for this paper, it is an interesting addition to take into account.

Additionally, I will be using previous research, mainly in the form of articles about the portrayal of fat characters on screen, and scholarly books and papers about the universe of Harry Potter. This material will be addressed in more detail in the section on previous research.

This paper is an analysis of a series of films and the characters therein. What I am looking at is the *portrayal* of fat people, and not why they are fat or any other biological aspects of these characters. I do not draw any kind of line for who is fat based on a certain weight limit, but instead focus on the perception of the characters I analyse. Some of them would perhaps be deemed fat by some and not by others. There are vastly different standards for what qualifies as fat in mainstream media and in real life, as well as in the medical fields and among the general population. Therefore it would be arbitrary to try and define exactly who is fat and who is not by any kind of size based system. There are characters not featured in this paper
whom many would argue are fat, and there are probably people who would contend
the fact that Dolores Umbridge, for example, is featured instead. I have chosen these
characters based on how they are described, treated by others, or how they look, or a
combination of these aspects.

I will throughout this paper use the word *fat* to describe the characters of which I
speak. While some may think of this word as insulting, I will refer to this quote by
Marilyn Wann in *The Fat Studies Reader*:

> In fat studies, there is respect for the political project of reclaiming the word *fat* both as the
> preferred neutral adjective (i.e. short/tall, young/old, fat/thin) and also as a preferred term
> of political identity. There is nothing negative or rude in the word *fat* unless someone
> makes the effort to put it there; using the word *fat* as a descriptor (not a discriminator) can
> help dispel prejudice.⁹

While there are problematic aspects of words such as *obese* or *heavy*, *fat* is fairly
neutral, and as stated in the quote above, is a word that is being reclaimed by the
community with which it is associated. As this paper is based in fat studies, as well
as film studies, I feel it is important to adhere to the established language
surrounding this field of research.

### 1.3 Previous Research

Though body positivity as a movement has gained prominence and introduced fat
acceptance to the mainstream since the introduction of social media in the 2000’s,
what was then called the “size acceptance movement” actually started in the US in
the late 1960’s and early 1970’s, with the National Association to Advance Fat
Acceptance.¹⁰ It developed into the academic field of fat studies, much in the vein of
how gender or queer studies did before it. Much like these other fields of study, fat
studies aims to challenge and redefine the perception of fat through research within
different fields, such as for example film studies. As Marilyn Wann writes: “fat

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¹⁰ Wann, 2009. p. x
studies can offer an analysis that is in solidarity with resistance to other forms of oppression by offering a new and unique view of alienation.”¹¹ Fat studies is part of what is called intersectionality, which addresses the ways in which different types of oppression, such as racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, ageism, ableism, and fatphobia etc., can intersect and combine. For example, while women in general are still oppressed in society in a number of ways, a fat, black, trans-woman would in theory be more discriminated against than a cis-gendered, slim, white woman. Intersectionality is important to keep in mind when studying any of these fields.

Interestingly, out of the fat characters in the Harry Potter films, there is only one who is not white. He appears in the third film and does not even have a name, despite the fact that he has several lines of dialogue, which could be a reflection of the fact that he is part of several marginalised groups.

Moreover, fat studies is tightly connected to the Health at Every Size-movement, which fights to undo health stigmas surrounding weight. These stigmas are common not just in the general population, but among health professionals as well, who equate fatness with ill health, even though this is not always the case. What is a normal weight for one person may not be so for another. As I am not educated in the field of medicine, I will not base my writing on this, but it is worth pointing out, as the idea that fat people are inherently unhealthy can affect the portrayal of fat people, and works as justification for some of the common stereotypes surrounding them.

Within this paper, I have used many articles concerning fat studies and fat stereotypes, but most relevant has been The Fat Studies Reader, a collection of papers edited by Esther Rothblum and Sondra Solovay, that pertain not just to fat people on screen, but in fields such a medicine and law as well. It has been a great resource for background on the subject in general. Besides this, I have also found particularly good use of two texts written by Brenda Risch; the introductory sections of her dissertation Reforming the Fat Woman: The Narrative Encoding of Size in Contemporary Feature Films, and her article “Wrestling with Size: Transforming Visions of Fat Women in Contemporary American and European Films”, both of which focus primarily on fat women in media, though some of her arguments apply

¹¹ Wann, 2009, p. xxii
when considering fat men as well.

Besides fat studies and other similar topics regarding representation, I take into account the many academic articles and books that have been written specifically about the *Harry Potter* books and film series as well. While there has not been anything published with focus on the portrayal of fat people within the stories, there have been texts written about the portrayal of women and gender, LGBTQ+ characters, or rather the lack of them, and race, both magical and real, and how these are represented. The stories, except in the final book and last two films, mostly enforce already established gender norms, where the female characters are more responsible and the caretakers of any group, as well as dependent upon the male characters, who take risks and are leaders.  

This feeds in to my perspective on how gender and fat connect, which I will address in the section on fat stereotypes.

### 1.3.1 Defining Fat Stereotypes

In order to establish whether or not the characters in the *Harry Potter* series adhere to existing stereotypes of fat people, I need to first define what some of the most common of these are. It is worth acknowledging that there are differences between the portrayals of fat men and fat women, as this will be a factor that this paper addresses later on. It should be noted that I cannot cover every existing stereotype within the scope of this paper. I will focus on the ones most relevant to the films which I am analysing and the ones who are most common in mainstream films and television. There are other stereotypes concerning other types of media but as the *Harry Potter* films are very much part of popular, mainstream culture, it is more logical for me to focus on the stereotypes relevant to this type of narrative.

Stereotypes exist about all people, and for understandable reasons. Without stereotypes, comedy, for example, would not work as well as it does, because so much is based on the shared ideas we have about certain groups of people. It is therefore important to keep in mind how and in what context a stereotype is used. As Heilman and Donaldson write: “though any one [...] stereotype would not be

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12 Heilman and Donaldson, 2009, p. 139
significant, repeated and varied examples of demeaning stereotypes are very significant.”¹³ For example, it may not be particularly harmful to portray a fat person as funny, but if they are funny only because they are stupid, and all other examples of fat people within the same narrative are also stupid, it perpetuates stereotypes that are more damaging to the general public's view of fat people, as well as to fat people themselves, who may internalize these stereotypes. Films are not created in a vacuum, and when the choice is made to continue to perpetuate a stereotype that is already well-established in other mainstream, popular media, the risk is reinforcing that stereotype in the public consciousness. A more interesting use of stereotypes is to use them to challenge the audience's perception of a character and make us think about our own preconceived ideas, by playing into what we assume to be true about a character based on for example their body size, and then proving the audience wrong. Basing a character in a stereotype and then moving beyond it can help the audience feel familiar and safe with the character before challenging that stereotype.

The first of the stereotypes I will discuss applies to both men and women, and is one of the most common concerning fat people; that they are rather stupid. Added to this stupidity is the fact that fat characters are often portrayed as physically clumsy, and their stupidity is a kind of mental version of this clumsiness. Both of these aspects are often used for comedy, either through the fat character saying things that are inappropriate given the situation they are in, which translates to them being stupid, or through the physical clumsiness, where the fat person falls over or has trouble moving in the same way a slim person would. This is, supposedly, funny because, as Gullage writes “people laugh when they encounter a person or situation in which they feel intellectually, morally, or physically superior.” In short, the audience laughs “because [they] understand [them]selves to be better than [the fat person]: [their] fatness renders [them] inferior to the viewing audience.”¹⁴

These aspects contribute to another stereotype, which is that fat characters are presumed to be funny. This is perhaps not a harmful stereotype, as humour can make a character likeable and relatable. However, there are different kinds of humour connected to fatness. For example, the fat character can be funny, not

¹³ Heilman and Donaldson, 2009, p. 140
¹⁴ Gullage, 2012, p. 182
because of their fatness or physical comedy, but simply because the actor is a comedic actor. In this instance, context is needed in order to discern whether it is a positive or a negative stereotype. More commonly however, fat characters are funny for the simple reason that they are fat, in which case the humour surrounding them becomes more problematic.

In the case of bullying, fat characters often appear on both sides of the spectrum. They are often teased because of their appearance and/or lack of intellectual prowess, and are ridiculed not only by antagonists, but sometimes even by the protagonists. At the other end of the scale, however, there are fat characters, most often boys, who are bullies themselves. Due to their perceived otherness, they feel the need to protect themselves from being teased, and do this by becoming the bully. Their size helps in this matter, as it lends itself to appearing physically threatening. Once again the stereotype of fat people as stupid comes into play, as fat bullies are often of the physical kind, as opposed to the type who mentally abuses their victim, which would require cunning and cleverness. Moreover, they are often depicted as the sidekicks of the real bully, acting as bodyguards and doing their dirty work.

Furthermore, gender plays a role when it comes to fat stereotypes, because, as Kate Flynn writes in her essay “Fat and the Land”: “fat makes gender ambiguous.” My interpretation of this statement is that fatness can take away from a male character's perceived stereotypical masculinity. Fat men are not the classical heroes we so often see on screen, and are often not particularly physically strong, and can therefore be delegated to the roles traditionally held by women, as someone who needs to be saved, or as the caretaker and motherly figure of the group. Samwise Gamgee in The Lord of the Rings trilogy (Peter Jackson, 2001-2003) is an excellent example of this; he is chubby and continuously called “fat” by Gollum, and he is without a doubt the carer of the group, cooking and rationing food and water, and giving up his own share for the more classical, broody hero, Frodo, much like a mother would. While many would argue that Sam is the true hero of the story, since Frodo would

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16 Flynn, p. 436-437
not have made it to the end without him, they are positioned in the classic roles of protagonist and sidekick. This perceived connection between fatness, feeding, and lack of masculinity is summed up thus by Flynn: “feeding is nurturing, and nurturing is inappropriate for boys.”

This nurturing aspect further plays into a common portrayal of fat women in popular entertainment, described thus by Brenda Risch: “fat female characters most often fit in the moralizing narratives in contemporary films as flawed sidekicks/mothers/sisters/wives who redeem themselves through their devotion to friends or family.”

The “redemption” Risch mentions implies that fat people need to make up for the fact that they are outside of the norm by being of service to the other characters in the story, either as, for example, the caring mother-figure mentioned previously, who feeds and nurtures, or as the useful sidekick of the antagonist. Fat people's existence in mainstream films has to be earned.

The statement by Risch further explains that it is rare that a fat person is the main protagonist of a story, and even more rare that this fat person is a woman. Fat women are mostly mothers or sisters, and almost never the romantic interest of the protagonist of the film or television series. As a mother or sister is not someone who is supposed to be sexually attractive, it does not matter if they are fat, as their appearance is not of as much perceived value as a romantic interest's.

Another common stereotype of fat women, is that they are portrayed as “crazy” or bitter, often because they have been rejected by a potential romantic partner. They go after their love interest with an intensity that is somewhat frightening and supposedly laughable, because their goal is clearly unobtainable in the eyes of the audience. Only through a redemptive arc of weight-loss can they win the heart of a man, and as Gullage writes in the case of “Fat Monica” on Friends (1994-2004): “this narrative use of fatness serves to reinforce notions of normative gender roles, in which women are expected to strive for the idealized feminine physical form.”

I would argue that, much like fat would appear to undermine a man's masculinity, it undermines a woman's femininity as well, at least in the way femininity relates to

17 Flynn, p. 440
18 Risch, 2012, p. 4
19 Gullage, 2012, p. 183
relationships between men and women. It is true, as Risch writes, that “happy endings are associated with 'good' or 'normal' characters (i.e. thin), or when 'abnormal' characters change (i.e. from fat to thin) to reduce the threat from their deviations to the norm.”

The fat woman has to conform to societal standards by losing weight and regaining her femininity, before she can have a happy ending with a man.

This redemptive arc of weight-loss is based on the idea that fat people are greedy and gluttonous when it comes to food. They eat substantial amounts, not just at traditional meal times, and are often connected with jobs where they are either confined to a chair, so that they get little to no exercise, or that are food-related, such as a chef or a baker. It is not uncommon for stories about fat people to centre around this, and to contain narratives of weight-loss. Fat people are seen as unhealthy, regardless of whether this is true in reality or not.

While on the topic of fat stereotypes, it is relevant to mention the use of fat suits. Although they can be worn in ways which are not problematic, for example if an actor is portraying a person from real life in a biographical film, where the person is portrayed dynamically and thoughtfully, fat suits do have a history of being used for comedic effect. While it can be problematic when a fat person uses their own fatness in demeaning ways in order to be funny, at least then it is up to the fat person themselves. If, on the other hand, a slim person puts on a fat suit in order to gain laughter at the expense of fat people, it is offensive. As Amy Gullage writes in her article concerning the use of a fat suit on Friends: “fat suits often evoke fatness to support limited and clichéd narratives.”

She goes on: “Often used in popular television and film to reinforce popular narratives about fatness, actors wearing fat suits depict dominant understandings that fat people are lazy, gluttonous, and unable to control their appetites.” Fat suits symbolise “the prevailing belief that fatness is merely a suit that can and should be changed at will,” which relates to the idea that a fat person has to redeem themselves by weight-loss in order to have a happy ending. If fat is a choice that can be changed, it should, and inside every fat person

20 Risch, 2003, p. 5
21 Gullage, 2012, p. 178
22 Gullage, 2012, p. 179
23 Gullage, 2012, p. 187
is a thin person wanting to come out, is what these narratives convey.

I would argue that the reason it is rare for a fat person to be the hero of a story has to do with the moralizing of fat bodies; there is a common perception that the outside of a person matches the inside, and that because a person is fat, which is perceived as flawed, they must also be flawed people. The body is seen as a physical manifestation of a person’s inner being. Kate Flynn writes about this aspect in the case of animated characters, where body shape is described by the animation company Pixar itself as the “essence of a character.” 24 It is probably even more pronounced in that case, as those characters are animated and not played by real people, yet there is still an aspect of this idea present in the characterizations of fat people in live action films today, especially in films aimed at children. Additionally, because fat people are perceived to not resist impulses, in that they do not control their appetite, they are deemed more primal and animalistic than slim people, which once again relates to the perception of fat people as stupid, as those traits are not seen as civilised or intellectual.

2 Analysis

2.1 Male characters

In the Harry Potter films, there are actually quite a few people who could be considered as fat. One example that probably comes to mind for many is Rubeus Hagrid, the gullible gamekeeper. However, seeing as he is revealed in the fourth book to be part giant, 25 I feel it would be unfair to include him here. He is by far the largest character, and displays many of the traits I have mentioned as stereotypical for fat characters, but he is abnormally large, and made so by trick filming and the use of well-thought out camera angles. The fact that he is not the brightest of characters in this series, might have to do with the fact that he is half-giant, because they are not portrayed as particularly clever. In order to include Hagrid, I would have to take all of this into account, and it would take focus away from the purpose of this paper.

24 Flynn, p. 435-436
Within the universe created by J.K. Rowling, most of the fat characters are male. I will address the female representations further on in this essay, but suffice it to say, at this point, that while there are at least four fat boys in these movies, with names and lines, there are no girls who are plus sized. It is not uncommon for this disparity between the genders when it comes to fat representation on screen, since men have historically been given more leeway and don't have as much pressure to live up to societal standards of beauty as women do. A fat man can still act as a romantic lead, while there are very few instances of a fat woman doing the same thing.²⁶ A fat woman dating a traditionally handsome and slim man is very rare, while there are several instances of the reverse happening, one of which I will discuss in the section concerning Jacob Kowalski.

There are several characters who could be considered as fat, whom I will not dedicate a whole section to, for different reasons; mainly that it would be impossible within the scope of this paper to fit in all of them. For example, much of what I write concerning Dudley Dursley, Harry Potter's cousin, could just as well be applied to his father Vernon, or the two thugs Vincent Crabbe and Gregory Goyle. However, because those stereotypes are covered in the section on Dudley, those characters have been omitted. The four characters I discuss in this particular section are the ones who have the most importance with regards to plot, in particular Neville Longbottom, friend of the three main characters; Peter Pettigrew, without whom the villain of the series would not have risen again; and Jacob Kowalski, who is part of the main cast of the newer films, as well as Dudley Dursley, who is the one character with the most focus put on his weight. Two of these characters are children, and are therefore comparable to the main characters Harry, Ron and Hermione. These are stories aimed at children and teens, and it is therefore of particular interest how these stories treat fatness amongst youth.

### 2.1.1 Neville Longbottom

Neville Longbottom is a chubby little boy with round cheeks, and from the very beginning of the movies he is made out to be inept and unlucky. For example, in

The Philosopher's Stone, he receives a “Rememberall” from his grandmother; a glass orb in which there is smoke that turns red if the owner has forgotten something, and his response when this immediately happens is “the only problem is, I can't remember what I've forgotten.”

It is worth noting that Neville's role has been made smaller in the films compared to the books upon which they are based. This is probably mostly due to the fact that the films have a time limit which the books do not, and he is certainly not alone in this fate, since many of the secondary characters get little screen time and few lines. It does however, in the case of the first film in particular, mean that Neville's role in the adventures in which Harry and his friends partake, becomes small and rather insignificant. He gets less of a chance to prove his worth in the films, has less agency, and is reduced to a clumsy side character, mostly used for comic relief. This is not because he is aware that he is funny, but rather because he is seen as a punch-line. An important example of how his character gets diminished compared to the book, is that when he is bullied by Draco Malfoy, who casts the Jelly-legs Curse at him, Ron Weasley tells him to stand up to his bullies, something he actually does later on. In the film, however, Malfoy mocks him behind his back instead of cursing him, calling him “fat” for example, but there is no retribution for Neville here. Moreover, the fact that Ron told him to stand up for himself is why he, in the book, tries to stop the three main characters when they are once again going to sneak out past bedtime, which could land them in trouble. He has become confident during the course of the story and this act of bravery is more motivated and natural in the book. In the film, he merely shows up and tries to stop them, but the audience is given no information as to why he is actually there. In the book, it is obvious he is waiting for Harry, Ron and Hermione, and therefore had to have been building up courage to stand up to them, which I think is even more brave than doing so in the spur of the moment.

Though he may not actually be all that fat in any of the movies, he is still coded as such, a phenomenon explained thus by Risch: “they express the belief that they are

fat, they are designated as fat by others, they are visually treated as 'other' within the film, and they are embodied (or costumed) as larger than the size females 'should' be within the film.”29 Her text considers only fat women, but I think this particular statement applies to all genders, and is very accurate in the case of Neville. He constantly has baggy clothes that make it look as though he has a bit of a pot belly, he walks with slouching shoulders and his cheeks are round and puffy, all attributes that make it look as though he is bigger than he actually is. He may not express the belief that he is fat, but he does get called so by Malfoy, and has very little confidence in general. The fact that he is not particularly popular or talented at magic contributes to the fact that he is perceived as fat, as it all plays into the common stereotypes of fat people as unintelligent losers. In this particular case, the common prejudices regarding fat people actually feed the audience's perception of a character as fat.

Throughout the course of the films, he does grow more confident and magically competent, but he is still not on the same wavelength as the three heroes, or even most of the other characters for that matter. While he is brave enough to join Dumbledore's Army in the fifth film, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (David Yates, 2006), and is even the one who, accidentally, finds the Room of Requirement in which they hold their meetings, he is far behind even the younger students when it comes to magical skills. When he finally learns to “Disarm” an opponent, the whole room cheers and congratulates him, indicating that while they are all happy for him, they are quite surprised. Furthermore, he goes along with the three main characters on the final adventure in this film, along with Ron's sister Ginny, and Luna Lovegood, as they battle Death Eaters at the Ministry of Magic. He comes face to face with the witch who tortured his parents to insanity and remains courageous, even challenging her, and manages to successfully curse one of the other Death Eaters, though with a look of utter surprise on his face. While the others are confident in their magical abilities and perform more difficult spells, Neville does get to prove himself in this fight. This film is the most positive with regards to Neville, and here he is still looking chubby and is still a bit clumsy, but valiant at the same time, which will not be the case later on.

29 Risch, 2003. s. 2
In addition to Neville adhering to stereotypes, there is the fact that the film-makers made the actor playing him, Matthew Lewis, wear a fat suit from film number three onwards. He was not allowed to fix his crooked teeth,30 and had hair cuts that made him look less attractive,31 all so that he would continue to look like a stereotypical loser. It is worth noting that the actors in these films were hired when they were very young, and the way they looked was bound to change. This is a difficult situation, in particular when it comes to Neville, because there does not seem to be a right way to handle it. Putting Lewis in a fat suit and forcing him to not fix his teeth is problematic, even though the fat suit is not particularly big. As previously stated, fat suits have a history of being used to ridicule fat people and reinforce stereotypes, and as Neville is not actually a real person whom Lewis had to be made to look like, the use of a fat suit is questionable. The character could have just grown up along with the actor playing him, and have taken on his physicality. On the other hand, Neville does grow more brave and traditionally masculine as the films progress, and by the last one, he is quite a bit thinner than previously. The narrative of going from clumsy and pudgy to confident and skinny is in itself part of a stereotype, and what drives many body image issues and eating disorders; that life cannot be lived until you have lost weight and as you shed your old body you become who you were supposed to be all along; in this case, a hero. This story arc is not new, and even a film expert such as Kristin Thompson writes on her blog about the fact that Lewis grew handsome as “thoroughly appropriate for the new determined and heroic Neville.”32 This writing shows that this trope is well established and common, and while it is not a bad thing for Neville to have found courage and confidence, it is sad that this has to be connected, in the way Thompson writes, to his weight-loss. Had he not been perceived as brave and heroic if he had not lost weight? What is it that makes this physical transformation so “appropriate” to his inner change? Once again, it appears as though the perception that the outside should match the inside is

30 Unsigned. “Matthew Lewis was under contract not to fix his teeth” Daily Star. 2016-09-16 https://www.dailystar.co.uk/gossip/339001/Matthew-Lewis-was-under-contract-not-to-fix-his-teeth (visited 2018-11-26)
at play, problematic as it is.

Furthermore, Thompson writes that there has been a fair bit of “gushing” online about how Lewis grew up to be so handsome, something which was apparently unexpected by most, probably owing to the fact that he was made to look less handsome in the films than he actually was. This phenomenon has even coined the colloquial term “Longbottomed”, referring to a child actor suddenly blooming into good looks, often through puberty. BuzzFeed even refers to Lewis' supposed transformation as “ultimate proof that puberty works miracles.” Though many of the other child actors in this series have also gone through puberty since their first appearance on the screen, Lewis is the one who gets the most attention for it, as he is “virtually unrecognisable as the unfortunate-looking character who made him famous”, as the Mirror puts it.

Neville's “redemption through weight-loss” narrative arc, further coincides with a happy romantic ending, as it is suggested that he gets the girl he is in love with. In the midst of the final battle, he says that he has to tell Luna that he is “mad for her,” and in the end, they are seen sitting next to each other with little smiles on their faces, indicating that she took his confession well. While this is a sweet and satisfying ending for two characters whom the audience where probably rooting for, it does play into the narrative that happy endings are for characters who are “normal”; now that Neville has lost weight and become gallant as well as more traditionally masculine, he is desirable and can be a romantic hero. He could be considered the character who develops most from the first to the last film, however, this development does not, unfortunately, challenge any pre-existing stereotypes.

### 2.1.2 Peter Pettigrew

33 Thompson, 2015.
Another fat character who starts out somewhat similar to Neville, yet develops in the opposite direction, is Peter Pettigrew, also known as Wormtail. At Hogwarts, he was part of a group who called themselves the Marauders, which consists of Harry's father James, Sirius Black, and Remus Lupin. While all three of the others were academically accomplished as well as popular, Peter was the outsider of the group, who was not as talented. He is described in the third film by Professor McGonagall as “a little lump of a boy” who was always “trailing after” the others, as though he was not actually part of the group, merely someone they let stick around out of pity. While we are actually never told that he was bullied, it would be safe to assume that he would have been had he not made friends with the other Marauders, who became a kind of protection, while occasionally being mean to him themselves, calling him “thick。”\(^{36}\) for example.

The group were all, except Lupin, so-called Animagi; people who can turn into animals at will. While James and Sirius turn into impressive animals, a stag and a big black dog respectively, Peter turns into a rat, once again perpetuating the idea that the outside reflects the inside, as he is cowardly and untrustworthy. He even stops being called Peter after the third film, going only by the nickname Wormtail, something which dehumanizes him significantly. Considering he has spent thirteen years as a rat by that point, it plays into a lack of humanity in him, and reinforces the idea of fat people as more animalistic and primitive than slim people.

Later, in his hunt for Harry's parents, Voldemort finds Peter and threatens him. Peter then gives up the location of the Potter family, causing Harry's parents' deaths. When he later makes the excuse that Voldemort would have killed him had he not done so, Sirius screams that he himself would have died rather than betray his friends, something Peter was not brave enough to do. Later, Peter willingly returns to Voldemort and aids in his return to power, proving that his cowardice led him to actually becoming a true believer of the Dark Lord, a villain, completing his development into the mirrored and opposing version of Neville, who instead becomes a hero.

Peter is definitely not a leader in any capacity. He is described as literally following  

his friends around at school, and while he does search for Voldemort, it is “out of fear, not loyalty” as Voldemort says. He helps the Dark Lord because he knows that he cannot defend himself against him, should he return, and therefore wishes to be on what he perceives as the winning side. The way he looks and acts is reminiscent of Igor the hunchbacked helper of Doctor Frankenstein in *Young Frankenstein* (Mel Brooks, 1974), and much like Igor, he does not display any particular intelligence.

The way in which he looks after Voldemort in the fourth film brings one back to the previously mentioned mothering aspect of fat male characters, and as Voldemort's body is reminiscent of that of an infant, Wormtail has to care for him like a mother in order for him to stay alive. He later literally sacrifices his right hand in order to bring Voldemort back. As he cannot contribute much due to his lack of magical skill, he very much redeems himself by caring for his master. He lives up to many of the established stereotypes mentioned in this paper, and does not challenge any of them.

### 2.1.3 Dudley Dursley

While Neville and Peter are stereotypes of fat boys in the way that they are clumsy and get picked on, Dudley falls on the other end of the spectrum; he is a bully. By virtue of his size alone he is intimidating and can therefore push people around physically. He can easily manipulate his parents as well. For example, in the first film, he throws a tantrum over the fact that he has received fewer presents for his birthday than he did the year before, and his parents immediately agree to get him more. These aspects contribute to making him a very manipulative and mean person, who will beat up people he does not like. This brutish nature is a very common portrayal of fat people in mainstream media, and as he does not really have any other personality traits, he is more like a caricature than a thought-out, dimensional character.

Dudley is the character whose weight is examined most in the series. In the books he is referred to as “roughly the size and weight of a young killer whale”, and he is

37 Rowling, 2000. p. 30
even put on a diet in the fourth book.\textsuperscript{38} The most striking example of his weight being brought to attention in the films occurs in the first one, when Hagrid arrives to give Harry his acceptance letter to Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. He sees Dudley first and says “you're a bit more along than I would have expected, particularly 'round the middle,” indicating his surprise at finding who he thinks is Harry so fat. Later, we see Dudley sneaking over to Harry's birthday cake, and standing with his back towards the others, he eats said cake with his bare hands, the sound effects emphasizing his loud chewing. In the heat of an argument between the adults in the scene, Hagrid casts a spell which gives Dudley a pigtail. In the book, Hagrid comments that he meant to turn him into a pig completely, but “I suppose he was so much like a pig anyway there wasn't much left ter do.”\textsuperscript{39} This whole scene is problematic because it reiterates the common perspective that fat people are gluttonous and greedy, and it is hardly the first time a fat person has been likened to a pig in popular culture. Dudley lives up to these ideas fully, as he very much is both gluttonous and greedy. Additionally, it is a sign of lack of self-control, that while the others are arguing and revealing quite extraordinary things, such as the fact that magic is real, all he thinks of is the cake. It indicates that he is rather dumb and uninterested in anything that is not about him. This particular stereotypical trait shows once again in the third film, \textit{Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban} (Alfonso Cuarón, 2004), when Aunt Marge visits the Dursleys. The whole time spent at their house, Dudley is watching television and/or eating. He does not even look up when Marge, who sits opposite him, swells up like a balloon. He only notices once she actually starts to float, at which point one of the buttons on her shirt, which no longer fits her, hits Dudley hard in the face, and he falls off his chair. Once Marge has sailed away out of the room and into the night, we see Uncle Vernon on the lawn outside howling at the sky, while Dudley is once again consumed by the television in front of him, eating the food that has stuck to the napkin hanging on the front of his sweater like a bib, as though he were a baby or a toddler.

In the fifth film, Dudley's position as bully is further cemented, as the film starts with him and his gang picking on Harry, which Harry responds to by asking if they

\textsuperscript{38} Rowling, 2000. p. 30
\textsuperscript{39} Rowling, 1997. p. 48
have “beat up another ten-year-old?” This emphasizes the fact that Dudley is actually quite cowardly, since he goes after people who cannot defend themselves against him. He has a slur in his speech in this film, and uses homophobic undertones to tease Harry, both of which contribute to the overall perception that he is unintelligent. When he and Harry are later attacked by Dementors, Dudley thinks it is Harry trying to hex him. This is portrayed in the film as though we are supposed to think Dudley is being stupid, however, people without magical abilities cannot see Dementors, which is acknowledged in the film later on. Therefore, Dudley only sees Harry waving his wand around, so of course he thinks Harry is the one doing something to him. Harry then has to half-carry Dudley back home, and almost buckles under the weight of his cousin, who drags along, cross-eyed and unable to speak. This scene appears as though it is supposed to be funny, using Dudley's weight and intelligence as punch-lines. This particular part of the story acts as a turning point in the books, as Dudley later realises that Harry was in fact saving his life, after which Dudley grows a little nicer towards Harry. In the films, this is not featured, and Dudley does not get the chance to improve and show a different side of himself, which could have made him a more complex character and might have challenged some of the stereotypes concerning him and his body size, which are currently only enforced instead.

It is further worth noting that Harry Melling, who played Dudley, had to wear a fat suit in the last film he participated in, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows part 1* (David Yates, 2010), much like Matthew Lewis had already been doing for several movies by then. Dudley has a very small part in the film, and one has to wonder if it would even have been particularly noticeable that he had lost much weight, had they chosen to just put him in baggier clothes, instead of using a prosthetic with such problematic connotations.

### 2.1.4 Jacob Kowalski

In *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*, the audience is introduced to Jacob

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Kowalski, an American man without magical powers, and without knowledge that there even is such a thing as magic. He is quite different from most of the other fat characters in the Wizarding World, however, he still has traits that could be considered as stereotypical for a fat man, such as the fact that he is a baker and rather fumbling and clumsy. He does however, possess social abilities that are more advanced than those of his skinny counterpart, Newt Scamander, who is the main character of the film. While Newt has a hard time making friends and interacting with people, making him prefer the magical beasts with which he works, Jacob is friendly, funny and easy-going, thereby providing a challenge to some of the stereotypes established in the previous films. Jacob is, however, still very much Newt's funny sidekick, and reinforcing the idea that fat people are the humorous friend, but never the lead.

Initially, it is easy to assume that Jacob falls into the same category of low intellectual talent as the other fat characters in this narrative world. However, most of his confusion and the almost constant look of astonishment on his face in the first film is based on the fact that the magical world is new to him. He literally cannot believe his eyes. He does at one point say to Newt “I don't think I'm dreaming. […] I ain't got the brains to make this up”, which would indicate that he does not have a very high opinion of his own intelligence, but to be fair, very few people would be able to come up with the strange and wondrous world Rowling has created. In the second film, he is not as shocked by what is happening around him, and therefore appears more intelligent than in the first. On the whole, Jacob acts pretty logically. One example of this is that he realises his own limitations in the fight that ensues at the end of the first film, and instead of participating, stays to protect the suitcase containing magical creatures, so that no more of them escape. And while he certainly plays the role of comic relief, it is based in self-awareness, and we are laughing with him, instead of at him. He is funny without being a punch-line, and the jokes are not based on or around his weight.

If Neville stands on the “bullied” part of the scale for stereotypes of fat males, and Dudley on the “bully” part, Jacob is not on this scale at all. While some might attribute this to the fact that he is a grown-up, I would point out that Hagrid is a grown-up as well, and still continues to be bullied by Malfoy and his friends. Jacob
is secure in who he is and knows what he is good at. He does not seem at all surprised that the beautiful Queenie falls in love with him, despite the fact that he does not conform to conventional standards of handsomeness. This confidence, coupled with his kindness and sweet nature, is actually not part of the stereotype for fat men in mainstream media. They are portrayed as confident and mean, or sweet and insecure, but Jacob does not fit in to either of these categories. In the second instalment of the franchise, he even gives Newt advise regarding his love life, despite having just been in a fight with his own girlfriend. This would not even be imaginable in the case of the other fat male characters in the franchise.

This all suggests a change regarding the portrayal of fat characters in this story world. Yes, he does still conform to some stereotypes of fat men, in that he is very fond of food and is the comic relief of the films, and while the initial impression of him may be that he is much like the others on an intelligence level, with a deeper reading he actually challenges the more harmful stereotypes of fat people. He challenges traditional ideas of masculinity as well, since he is both caring and sweet, yet can still fight when needed.

2.2 Female Characters

On the subject of female characters in the Harry Potter films who are fat or are perceived as fat, there are a few things to note. First of all, there are no young females who are even remotely chubby. Even looking at background extras, it is difficult to find any girl who stands out as plus sized. Whereas there are at least four named, young male characters who are fat, there is not a single female counterpart. This is, in fact, not very surprising. While there are harmful stereotypes and many limitations put on how fat males are portrayed on screen, these are even more common when it comes to women, because it is even less socially acceptable for a woman to be fat than it is for a man, and much of the pressure mentioned in the introduction of this paper is aimed more specifically at young women. The control of female bodies plays a large part in a patriarchal society, whether it is on the scale of reproductive rights, or how they should look.

This complete absence of fat girls creates a total loss of representation and this is problematic, as it is hardly the first time this occurs. Jerry Mosher writes: “fat girls rarely are seen—reflecting the widespread marginalization of fat women in American media.”\textsuperscript{42} I would argue that this applies to not only American media, but mainstream media in most of the western hemisphere. Instead of there being stereotypes perpetuated, as in the case of fat boys, fat girls are made completely invisible. This complete lack of representation perpetuates the stigmatisation of a group which is already marginalised not only within popular culture, but by the clothing industry, the medical field and in social settings as well. By not seeing themselves represented at all in mainstream media, this further ostracises fat girls and makes them feel unwelcome and as though they need to change in order to be worthy of representation. This could potentially lead to a negative self image, which in turn leads to eating disorders and even self-harm.

It should be acknowledged, however, that in the books upon which this film series is based, there is actually a female student who is mentioned to be fat or “squat”: the ghost Moaning Myrtle. The Poltergeist Peeves teases her and calls her fat in the books,\textsuperscript{43} and she is another fat character who is bullied, thereby contributing to the stereotype. However, in the films, not only is she just as slim as the other girls, but played by an actress who was 37 years old at the time of her first appearance in the second film. Because of this she can not be used as an example of a fat girl, and it means that the one mention of a fat girl from the books was changed in the process of adaptation, further erasing fat girls from view.

Although there are no fat girls in the films, there are examples of larger bodied women. The most prominent of these are Molly Weasley, mother of Ron, Harry's best friend, as well as Dolores Umbridge, Ministry of Magic employee and teacher for Defence Against the Dark Arts in the fifth film, and Aunt Marge, Harry's aunt by marriage, who comes to visit the Dursleys in the third film. While Umbridge and Marge definitely fall into the “bully” category that I have already established, Molly


\textsuperscript{43} Rowling, J. K. \textit{Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets}. London: Bloomsbury. 1998. p. 103
does not. However, she is not bullied either, but fits into the category that is specific for *female* fat characters, which was mentioned at the beginning of this paper; they are most often portrayed as motherly figures devoted to family and friends.

Additionally, it is worth noting that all three of these women are not only grown up, but around or above middle-aged, and have probably gone through, or are about to go through, menopause. This means that they are no longer able to bear children, and therefore do not “need” to be physically attractive, and it decreases their importance in a patriarchal society. Their bodies are not under scrutiny any more, and are therefore granted permission to grow wider than the bodies of younger women. It is not a coincidence that all the fat women are older, but rather an expression of ageism, where the women are paid less attention and have less value because of their age.

### 2.2.1 Molly Weasley

As a mother of seven children, Molly Weasley is defined by her status as homemaker. This, in combination with her age, appears to grant her “permission” to be larger than other female characters, because it lends itself to her motherly nature to be big bosomed and soft, and because she is not meant to be attractive to the audience. Her clothes are big and layered, and we do not actually see much of the shape of her body, just as in the case of Neville. The effect of this choice in styling for the character, and because of her rather large breasts, is that she looks rather chubby, especially compared to how women in mainstream media in general look. This is why I would argue that she fits within the scope of this paper, as she is what Risch describes as “constructed as fat within this film.”

She is coded as fat, not only through these physical factors, but because much of her character is connected to the feeding of her children and Harry, and because she lives up to the mothering stereotype presented earlier in this paper. She spends almost all of her time cooking or taking care of others, and while she is never shown to be bad at magic or unintelligent, she does not really get to show her magic skills until the very last film. It is even touched upon in the mobile application game

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Hogwarts Mystery that Molly is particularly good at “household spells” and “healing magic”, contributing once again to the perception of her as tightly connected with the home and as a carer of others. Though she is kind and welcoming, she is quite stern with her own children, and sensible in her child rearing, which could indicate not only that she is a natural-born mother, but that she is actually quite smart, even though she may not be academically gifted. As to whether or not she did well in school, the audience is never told, however, she is most certainly not a career woman and could therefore be seen as less intellectual than others. Being a stay-at-home mother is not regarded by society as something you need to be particularly smart in order to do.

Molly acts as a comforting presence and a mother figure to Harry, and as Heilman and Donaldson write: “females in children's storybooks [are more likely to] be comforting, consoling and providers of emotional support, while males [are] more likely to be represented obtaining a goal or overcoming an obstacle” 45 and in the case of Molly Weasley, this is true. She does not take part in the fighting that happens in the films until at the very end, and even there, the fighting we see her do is in direct relation to her children, as she does it to protect her daughter Ginny. Even though the audience knows that she is in the Order of the Phoenix from the fifth film onwards, we still mostly see her cooking or staying behind while the others are fighting, instead of taking an active part herself. The fact that she avoids fighting is an aspect that could be used to cast further doubt on her magical and intellectual abilities, enforcing the stereotypes concerning fat women as incompetent.

2.2.2 Dolores Umbridge

Dolores Umbridge on the other hand, is anything but motherly, even stating herself that she “really hate[s] children.” Instead of wanting the students she is responsible for to learn things that will be useful to them later in life (presumably what an actual mother would want), Umbridge wants her students to learn only the theoretical parts of her subject. That is all that will be needed in order for the students to pass their

45 Heilman and Donaldson, 2009 p. 149
exams, which according to her is “what school is all about.” While Molly is a comforting presence in the rather threatening world of magic, Umbridge is the complete opposite, and though she tries to feign friendliness, all of the students and teachers at Hogwarts see through her façade. She emphasizes her womanhood by wearing only pink and decorating her office with little plates with kittens on them, almost as if her femininity is supposed to mask the fact that she is cruel. The kittens on the plates bring to mind the common trope of the “crazy cat lady”, however, Umbridge is so far from being a mother figure that she does not even have real cats, only painted ones. The false sweetness she exudes adds an air of sinister dishonesty to her, which is particularly menacing when considering the fact that she repeatedly physically punishes Harry for telling what she claims are lies.

Just like many of the other fat characters, Umbridge appears to be rather stupid. While she is perhaps more of a career woman than the other fat women, she does not give the impression of being very smart, seeing as she does not have even a basic understanding of how education should work, and she is never able to anticipate what the students will do next to challenge her rule at Hogwarts. In the books, she is unable to counteract many of the prank-spells the children cast in order to annoy her, and since the other teachers do not like her, they do not help her, leaving the castle in chaos.\(^\text{46}\) This contributes to her appearing unintelligent and untalented at magic, as she is bested by children.

Though she would perhaps not be considered as fat by all, by the standards of what is common in mainstream media, I would argue that she is. In the books she is often described as toad-like, and as “squat with a broad, flabby face”\(^\text{47}\) when Harry first sees her. In the films she wears clothes that make her look rather as though she had been stuffed into them, as they constrict her movement and make her look as though she is bigger than she probably is.

Though she goes completely against the stereotype of mothering fat woman, she does play into the idea of fat women as crazy, especially when it comes to men. Though we are never explicitly told that she is in love with the Minister for Magic Cornelius Fudge, she is certainly obsessed with him. She has a portrait of him on

\(^{46}\) Rowling, 2003, p. 598

\(^{47}\) Rowling, 2003, p. 134
her desk, which she turns away in a scene where she is about to do something illegal. She constantly refers to him in conversation, using only his first name, which she is almost alone in doing, making her seem close with him, even though it is implied that this closeness is rather one-sided. She reports every single thing that happens at Hogwarts to him personally, suggesting that she is desperate for his approval and attention. This obsession adheres to the idea of fat women as desperate in their chase after a man, and how the feelings are often not reciprocated, as we never see Fudge return this devotion.

Furthermore, she is a follower, much like Peter Pettigrew. She complies with orders from the Ministry of Magic without question, even when it is later taken over by Lord Voldemort. She becomes part of his administration and is in charge of separating muggle-borns from pure-blood wizards, displaying her extreme methods to get the results she wants. These ideas regarding muggle-borns are not her own however, and in the films she is portrayed as an enforcer and a puppet, not a mastermind, once again perpetuating stereotypes of fat people as followers. The character of Umbridge does not challenge fat stereotypes much, despite avoiding the most common one among women, instead adhering to others.

2.2.3 Aunt Marge

Even though Aunt Marge has a rather small role in these stories, as she is only in one film, she is interesting from a fat studies point of view. She comes to visit the Dursleys in the third film, and is even meaner to Harry than his aunt and uncle. She is unaware of magic, and is under the impression that Harry goes to a school for troubled and criminal youth, asking if “they use the cane”, of which she is implied to approve, conveying her callous personality.

She then compares Harry's parents to the dogs she breeds. The audience are never told whether or not she has a significant other, however, her attachment to her dogs suggests that she is unmarried, playing into the trope of the “crazy cat-lady” once again, but with dogs instead of cats. The dogs are surrogates for the children she does not have, and much like Umbridge, she is not motherly and therefore portrayed as cruel and heartless.
What is truly interesting in this case, is when she insults Harry's parents and he unintentionally makes her swell like a balloon and float out the window. It is difficult to believe that it is a coincidence that a fat woman gets compared to a balloon, and gets blown up to become even bigger than she already was. It could be a reflection of her rather large ego and opinion of herself, nevertheless, had she been skinny, one has to wonder if the unintentional magic would have taken the same form. This scene is also interesting from the perspective of portraying fatness as grotesque, since her size now becomes inhuman and can even be seen as disgusting by some. Furthermore, this scene is clearly used for humour, once again using fatness as a point of ridicule. She is definitely not laughed at because she is funny in any way, but purely because of her fatness.

As Marge is in the film for such a short time, she does not become a very well developed character, and so does live up to stereotypes, as she has little time to challenge them. This is not an excuse however, as stereotypes can be turned on their heads in an even shorter time, if a film-maker was so inclined. This is not the case in these films however.

3 Conclusion

In summary, the fat characters of the Harry Potter universe all live up to one or more of the stereotypes regarding fat people, which have already been long established in mainstream media. While there are some examples of characters challenging these stereotypes to a degree, they are few and far outweighed by the perpetuating of preconceived ideas about fat people.

At the beginning of this paper, I asked whether or not there are things that all or most of the fat characters in the Harry Potter films have in common. I have come to the conclusion that the one aspect most of them share is that they are coded as not particularly bright. They are either outright stupid, like Dudley, or just not academically inclined, like Neville and Peter. Even Molly, who may not be coded as stupid as such, has chosen to be a housewife rather than pursuing a career of her own, a choice which could be considered indicative of the fact that she is not scholarly gifted. This portrayal of fat people as not smart is a common stereotype.
Even when it comes to Jacob Kowalski, who I would argue is not actually stupid, there is an undertone that suggests that the audience is supposed to perceive him as such, since he spends most of the first film he is in looking incredulous. Despite all of these characters being quite different from each other, they share this trait to some degree. It is further worth noting that there are characters whom I did not feature in this paper, who could easily fit into this stereotype as well, such as Crabbe and Goyle, Vernon Dursley, and even Hagrid. This further evidence indicates that this stereotype is so intrinsic in these stories that they could be said to be truly fat-phobic. While this is not surprising, as it is common in mainstream media, it is a sad realisation.

I also posed the question of whether or not the fat characters in the *Harry Potter* films are affected by the pre-existing stereotypes concerning fat people in mainstream popular culture. The answer to this question is undoubtedly “yes”, yet to varying degrees. The fat bully Dudley is a full-blown stereotype, bordering on a caricature. He gets neither a redemptive story arc nor treated as anything more than a two dimensional thug, and is not given the opportunity to challenge the stereotypes he is based on. There are, however, examples of stereotypes being challenged somewhat. This is particularly true in the case of Jacob Kowalski. Though he lives up to certain stereotypes concerning fat people, such as being the comic relief and connected with food, as he is a baker and is shown to have great appetite, he is the most developed out of all of the fat characters in the films and is therefore naturally the one to move furthest beyond stereotypes. He has agency of his own, as well as social skills, and is brave and confident, without needing to lose weight to become so. It will be interesting to see how this character develops as the *Fantastic Beasts* films continue. Another character that is definitely based in stereotypes yet challenges them somewhat, is Neville. Though he does lose weight in conjunction with becoming more confident and courageous, he does show signs of developing beyond the stereotype before this, and since the weight-loss has to do with the actor playing him growing up and growing out of his puffy cheeks, it is a difficult situation to analyse. It is not a regular case of a redemptive narrative arc of weight-loss, but rather something the film-makers could not foresee. There are problematic aspects connected to the character nonetheless, such as the use of a fat
suit, and the fact that he is such a stereotypical fat boy in the first few films. In summation, all of the fat characters in the Wizarding World franchises are to some degree affected by, and contributing to, the stereotypes that concern fat people.

The last question I set out to answer was whether there were any differences between the portrayal of fat men and fat women in these stories. Once again, the answer is “yes”. The most obvious difference is that there are without a doubt fewer fat women than there are fat men. Even including the people I have chosen not to analyse specifically for this paper, there are more fat men in roles that are significant, than there are women. Furthermore, there are no fat girls at all in any of the films, while there are several examples of fat boys. While it is true that representation by token characters, meaning including a marginalised group just in order to appear inclusive, but not actually paying attention as to how they are represented, is not ideal either, the marginalisation of fat girls is apparent. This has consequences, and seeing as girls are more affected by the idealization of thin bodies, even just seeing a fat girl on screen in a mainstream film could potentially have a big impact.

On the topic of fat women, it is noteworthy that both of the examples used here who are not mothers or motherly figures, are mean. While they have child surrogates, they are both alone, as they are unmarried and childless. Their meanness could even be interpreted as an outlet for their bitterness over the fact that they are without a significant other. This is in line with the stereotype of the “crazy” or bitter fat woman who is unable to find a man. It is a rather sad stereotype, that is not only demeaning for fat people, but is distinctly sexist as well. And while Molly's fatness, on the other hand, is portrayed as something she has earned through childbearing, and she is a caring and sweet character, she is hidden away in her home far out in the countryside, and therefore does not take part in society in the same way the younger, slim women or any of the men, fat or otherwise, do. Fat women in these stories are thereby either bitter or hidden away.

It is interesting to speculate as to why these differences between fat men and fat women exist. I would argue that it is an expression of the fact that we live in a patriarchal society, where women's bodies are under scrutiny as a form of
oppression. If women are reliant on men to survive, as men traditionally make more money, they are also reliant on the approval of men, and are therefore under more pressure to conform to societal standards of beauty. Because of this, it is more rare to see a fat woman on screen than a fat man, since fat women are far less respected. The fact that fat girls are completely absent from these stories might be due to the fact that fat girls are implicitly told that they are not pretty enough to be seen, and therefore do not apply for jobs such as acting. If this is indeed the case, it does not relieve mainstream media of responsibility however, as these ideas are often reinforced via films and television, as well as social media, creating a vicious circle.

In order for research topics such as gender and race to truly be intersectional, fatness should be taken into account. While I would have liked this paper to be truly intersectional, perspectives on race and LGBTQ+ are absent, because they are absent in the source material. While there is one character who is both fat and not white, he does not have a name, and is only featured briefly in the third film. It could be argued that his lack of a name is further proof of how different forms of oppression affect and support each other, as he is one of very few characters of colour and the only one of them who is fat. And despite the fact that Rowling announced that Dumbledore is gay after the books were all published, there are no examples of explicitly queer characters in these stories, and there are therefore no queer fat characters. This is why I use male and female pronouns in all of the examples, and why any aspects but fatness and gender are disregarded here. While it would have been interesting to see if race or sexuality had affected the fat characters, as there are no examples, this will have to be studied using other source material.

By bringing attention to how fatness plays a role in how characters are portrayed in the *Harry Potter* films, I hope to have contributed to a deeper understanding of how these stereotypes are perpetuated. The subject of fat studies used in conjunction with intersectional discussions of mainstream film can be further used to draw awareness to the prejudices commonly held against fat people, and can thereby assist in the dismantling of said prejudices, furthering the work of the body positive movement.
4 References

4.1 Articles and Book Chapters


Nudd, Tim. “Neville's Nerdiness Was – Gasp! - Fake, Says Matthew Lewis' Harry


Unsigned. “Matthew Lewis was under contract not to fix his teeth”. Daily Star.


4.2 Films

*Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (Chris Columbus, 2001)

*Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (Chris Columbus, 2002)


*Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (Mike Newell, 2005)

*Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (David Yates, 2007)

*Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* (David Yates, 2009)


*Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows Part 2* (David Yates, 2011)

*Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* (David Yates, 2016)


*Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* (Peter Jackson, 2001)
Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers (Peter Jackson, 2002)

Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King (Peter Jackson, 2003)

Young Frankenstein (Mel Brooks, 1974)

4.3 Novels


4.4 Other

Harry Potter: Hogwarts Mystery, mobile application game