Gender Stereotypes and Typical Gender Roles in J. K. Rowling's Books

Discussion

My question for my extended project qualification is “Does J.K Rowling support of discourage gender stereotypes and typical gender roles?”. To begin with I thought that this question would be quite one sided and that I would struggle to find research that opposed my point of view. However this wasn’t the case. When I began to research my question I found that there was in fact, a lot of debate on my topic and found many sources both opposing and supporting my point of view and others that directly either opposed or supported it. I started by looking into sources that would help me to build an argument on the two sides of my topic. I found a range of primary and secondary sources including; videos, articles, the Harry Potter Books by J.K Rowling herself, and dissertations on a related subject, to name a few. I followed that by looking into the very foundations of my topic, what were gender roles and traditional stereotypes? I found that a gender role was the role or behaviour learned by someone that was directly associated to their gender, it was also determined by cultural norms. Next, I found that traditional stereotypes were a “widely held but fixed and oversimplified image or idea of a particular type of person or thing.

I looked into the ethics behind my topic, I found out why there was so many sources and so much research and why it was important to so many people. This is what I took from it.

The abolishment of gender roles and stereotypes. Getting rid of traditional stereotypes and gender roles is a constructive move for society as it would mean that all genders wouldn’t feel constricted in which profession they choose or how they choose to behave dress or act. It would mean that children reading a literature that was stereotype free would feel empowered that they could become anything that appealed to them. They wouldn’t feel as if they had to conform to certain boxes that were intended for them and could express themselves in anyway they thought suited them. For example men could stay at home to look after children or a woman could be a builder. It could also mean that men wouldn’t be judged or feel as if they couldn’t do something such as wear makeup or skirts for example.This would be an example of virtue ethics as it is based on changing people's virtues and morals to incorporate the way people want to live and acceptance.

Now I am going to explore the female characters that J.K Rowling has created in her Harry Potter ‘universe’. The female character that is the most prominent in the Harry Potter books is named “Hermione Granger”, she, from the beginning both undermined and proved my point of view. She has shown conflicting qualities, some subverting the stereotypes and some expressing them. Hermione is shown as both strong and weak, smart yet clueless and confident but still shy. But is Hermione more stereotypical or untraditional? I think that Hermione is more untraditional than stereotypical because she shows subverted qualities such as bravery and mental strength. Hermione is also in the harry potter house of Bravery and courage called “gryffindor”. I believe that Hermione possesses many qualities that fit subverted stereotypes however there are sources that disagree one of these is the dissertation by Amy Mason. Mason depicts Hermione as weak when she presents a scene with Harry Potter, “‘whispered

frantically', and dances 'uncertainty on the spot'. She begs, too, to go for help, and Harry ignores her again. Furthermore, throughout the chapter, Hermione also gasps 'in a petrified whisper' and whispers 'in a terrified voice'." This shows that the dissertation disagrees to my point of view because it presents J.K Rowling's work as stereotypical; this is portrayed in the stereotypes Mason has linked to Hermione, such as the 'damsel in distress' stereotype. I however disagree with the dissertation because I believe that on many other instances Hermione has proved that she is not in fact a damsel in distress and mason has discounted those events. One of these events would be in the first book, when Hermione remembered the rhyme for Devil's Snare which saved not only her life but the lives of her two friends Harry and Ron as well.

A source that supports my views is a video interview of the author of the Harry Potter books J.K Rowling. This source is a primary source as it is the author of the Harry Potter books , J.K Rowling, herself speaking and answering questions about Harry Potter and the portrayal of the female characters. It really helps support my point of view as the author of the books shares my point of view. Rowling shows this by talking about the characters in Harry Potter as individuals and how they are when working as a team. Rowling focuses on the main female character, Hermione Granger. Rowling defends how she has portrayed each character as "feminist" in their own way and how they all show subverted stereotypes. Rowling goes into detail about the character Molly Weasley as she is the character that most people deem to be stereotypically unadvanced. Rowling has defended a stereotypical relationship and presented negative views as positive ones. Rowling turned a stereotype into a choice and justified the characters decisions as her own and not a result of pressure in society. J.K Rowling has attached a subverted stereotype to every stereotypes that she has presented in the books. This shows that she has equaled out the books and that in a way they don't present any harsh views and the clash of subverted stereotypes and typical ones are at an equilibrium.

When I looked further into the portrayal of the women in Harry Potter I discovered this source by Courtney Smith, she undermines my views on how Rowling presents women in the books. written by J.K Rowling, it contains valuable insight as to the roles that each character plays whether it be stereotypical or unconventional. For example, on slide five Smith introduces the "crazy stereotype" that links to the characters Moaning Myrtle and Luna Lovegood. This is useful insight because it gives evidence towards J.K Rowling using stereotypes to anthropomorphise her female characters. Further on in the presentation, Smith zooms in on J.K Rowling's character, Luna Lovegood, Smith emphasises that Luna is somewhat unconventional because of her "butterbeer cork jewellery" and "earrings made from Dirigible Plums". This is useful because it gives evidence that J.K Rowling also uses subverted stereotypes in her work. The presentation contains a slide called "caricatures and stereotypes", within this slide Smith comments on the character Molly Weasley as following the typical gender roles of doing all of the household chores such as cleaning and cooking. Also on this slide Smith points out that all of the male characters follow typical gender stereotypes and gender roles in some way if not all ways. Such as "Harry Potter is the hero", "most of the worker in the ministry of magic are male", "Voldemort the powerful villain". This is useful because it shows some of the gender roles that J.K Rowling has presented into the books. This source is partially reliable as it has quotes directly from the Harry Potter books, however the presentation has opinions and interpretations throughout it and therefore could be partially biased. The presentation highlights the different stereotypes that J.K Rowling has used throughout the books and films, the presentation also shows the gender roles and problems with the way J.K Rowling has written about some of the characters and how certain characters have been presented especially

badly. Smith has presented ideas that contradict my point of view, the points that she has made are valid and do make me question slightly my views on the portrayal of women in the books.

As there are sources that are making me consider the different sides of the discussion of whether J.K Rowling has supported or discouraged stereotypes and gender roles I decided to find some more evidence against my view to further add to the debate. I have found an article on a website called “womens web”. Women's Web is a website where 1000s of women share their points of views on certain topics and issues. There happened to be one presenting ideas about how J.K Rowling has presented a variety of her female characters in her work.It contains valuable insight of the gender roles and stereotypes used by Rowling for her characters, especially the female characters. Women’s web describe the character Lavender Brown as “someone who we just considered an airhead who has a crush on Ron.” This shows that Rowling has presented Lavender in a negative way and has used the female stereotype of “ditzy” to sum up her personality. This is useful as it shows that Rowling has used at least some gender stereotypes in her work. Women's web then goes on to explore “Fleur Delacour’s chatactarisation” in this part of the article women's web explores the personality and description of Fleur. Women's web uses a direct explanation of the type of character the Fleur is, “Arguably, one of the bravest witches in the books, Fleur’s good looks seem to shadow her skills and accomplishments in favor of the more ‘likeable’ female characters such as Hermione and Ginny”. This shows that although Rowling has used the subverted stereotype of a brave woman she has undermined that by connoting that is only her looks and academic accomplishments that make her “likeable”. This is useful because it shows that attempts that Rowling has made with subverted stereotypes have often been undermined so therefore there has been an effort made to go against the norms of gender stereotypes however she has not been continually successful. This article may not be completely reliable because the website’s focal point is women's voices which could mean that they have been biased towards some of the behaviour that they have mentioned. There could also be biased opinions. The fact that this article challenges certain characters and calls out J.K Rowling on some of the decisions she has made about the characters shows that this isn’t a heavily one-sided argument and that there are lots of different factors that come into play on this topic. I think that because there are so many characters and personalities that feature in the Harry Potter books there was always going to be some inconsistencies with regards to popular stereotypes and inequalities. I believe that Rowling has presented both typical and subverted stereotypes all through her books and that is why they are seen to be so controversial in the literature industry.

While the last few arguments have been very against my point of view I have found this evidence to support it. In this article written by Annelise Severtson, feminism is addressed as very well achieved by J.K Rowling. Severtson uses female characters such as Hermione Granger, Minerva McGonagall and Ginny Weasley to show how J.K Rowling has presented subverted stereotypes and feminism. Severtson also uses personal experiences in her article, therefore this is an opinionated discourse. This affects the validity of the article as there is no determination between fact and opinion however it gives valuable insight of the female characters in the Harry Potter series. In one part of the article when Severtson is discussing Hermione Granger, she enters into how Hermione presents subverted stereotypes in the books. Severtson also discusses how the following characters also follow the pattern of subverted stereotypes: Minerva McGonagall, Ginny Weasley, Luna Lovegood and Rubeus Hagrid. This article is helpful as it explores many characters and gives an opposing argument to the other sources I have discovered so far. This source conveys the subverted stereotypes that are littered in Rowling’s work. It also shows how feminism and empowerment are addressed as

well as the detailed accounts of how characters don’t conform to social norms and traditional stereotypes.

This is a piece of evidence that further supports my view in agreement of the previous source i have used. In this paper, written by Heather Sammons addresses the issues that occur throughout the books and the positive subverted stereotypes that J.K Rowling uses in her work, these include; the presence of a strong female role going against the traditional absence of one, the male stereotypical desire of women such as veelas and finally the equality of women and men in the books. The literary paper discusses the differences in the characters of the books and shows the positive aspects of the books that J.K Rowling has emphasised. This is helpful because it uses evidence from the books to back up any more opinionated points so therefore its validity is secure and also uses information from research that has been carried out on the topic so gives intuitive insight into the successes and failures of J.K Rowling work. This source illustrates the positive enforcement Rowling uses in most of her situations this shows that Rowling is setting a good example to younger children who are reading her books and are affected by them. This source also shows the subverted stereotypes that have been pointed out in previous sources.

This presentation is ideal for my discussion as it offers both sides of the argument. It is by Matthew Stormont. Within this presentation he explores the men and women in power in the harry potter books. He shows how there are significantly more men in power than women. This is helpful as it shows that while there are more men in power in general, there are still some women in power which shows an attempt to break traditional stereotypes by J.K Rowling. Stormont also explores the stereotype of ‘damsel in distress’, he portrays how Rowling has presented women as people who need saving. However what stomont didn’t mention was the numerous times the women saves the males in the books. This source supports my point of view because it illustrates that there are still women in higher power such as “Dolores Umbridge” and “Professor McGonagall”. It also conveys the attempt at breaking the stereotypes of females when they are in a position of higher power instead of men. However it does not show the females saving the men even though throughout the book this is a very prominent feature. The source also undermines my point of view through presenting the mant stereotypes that do appear in the seven books.

This is a brilliant source that supports my point of view perfectly and shows the determination Rowling had in making her work inspirational to the younger generations.This is is a secondary source, it is a prezi presentation written by Sanya Khera, in this presentation Khera explores the women and men who don’t conform to gender roles and stereotypes. This source is very helpful as it gives evidence to why some/most of the characters in Harry Potter perform subverted stereotypes rather that traditional ones. This source also has high validity as it uses videos and images from the films as well as quotes from the books. However there is still room for biased opinions. The exploration of subverted stereotypes really supports my view as it show that she is ethically trying to improve the society that we live in and become a role model for the people that read her books and watch the films. The fact that people don’t conform to traditional stereotypes every time something gets hard is truly inspiring to the younger generation and will help them to evolve to become better people for it.

This last source is a secondary source that undermines my point of view, I thought that it would be best to end on a source that wraps up the discussion and shows the negative side to the argument even though many positives have been found. This secondary source is written by

Ayesha Haq, in this presentation Haq explores the gender roles performed by characters such as Hermione Granger, Dumbledore and Harry Potter. The presentation has quite high validity as it uses clips from the movies of Harry Potter as well as quotes from the books. This is however a secondary source so there is room for bias and opinions. Haq explores the way that Hermione conforms to gender roles at the Yule Ball in the book “Harry Potter and the goblet of fire” as she waits for the males to ask her to the dance and doesn’t ask them herself. She is then upset when Ron Weasley doesn’t ask her soon enough. This is helpful because it shows how J.K Rowling has conformed to gender roles in both the movies and books, furthermore this shows how she has presented a character that she stated was meant to be a role model for young girls as weak and unable to go against the stereotype. This source undermines my point of view as is shows the main female character Hermione Granger portraying traditional gender roles and Showing J.K Rowling’s use of gender roles. It presents the main female character as weak and as a bad role model for the younger generations both boys and girls.