

# QUEERING HARRY POTTER

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#BPSUoNHP

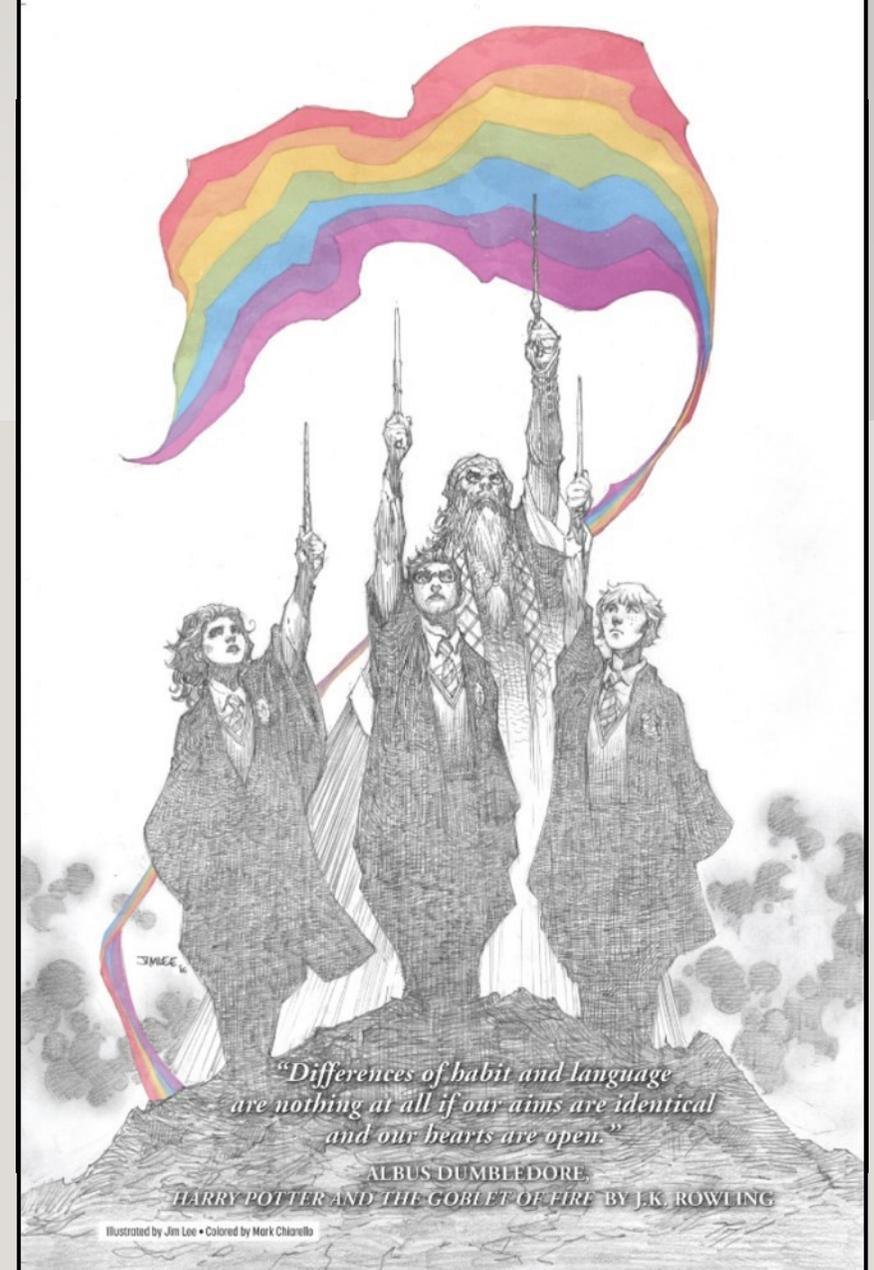
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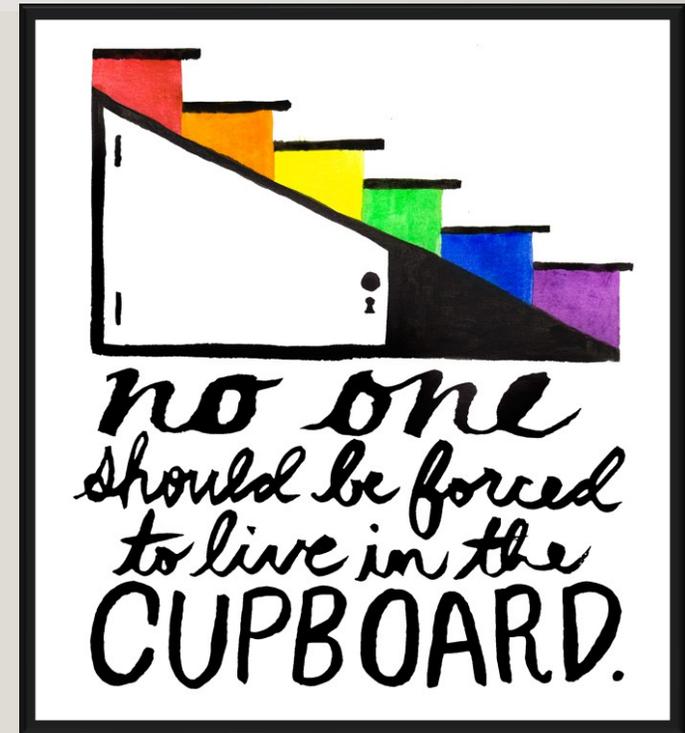
# OVERVIEW OF THE TALK

- Think about what queering, or reading queerly means.
- Muggle / Wizarding rules, and normativity.
- Queer spaces – The Room of Requirement.
- Visible queerness – passing as a Muggle.
- Dumbledore’s ‘coming out’.
- Snape as queer representation.



# READING QUEERLY...

- How does HP reinforce or disrupt traditional separations?  
e.g. good/evil, gay/straight
- How does HP reinforce or disrupt (presumed) heterosexuality?
- How does HP represent “Othering” – giving voice or primary position to certain characters while marginalising and silencing other characters?
- Note that JK has never stated, or implied that the series are a queer story, or have a hidden queer meaning... However...



# READING QUEERLY... (BRONSKI, 2003)



- Let's consider the way(s) in which Mr Dursley notes the colours of the witches and wizards robes in *Philosopher's Stone* – purple, violet, and green – all colours associated with homosexuality.
- The Dursleys refer to the magic community as “her crowd” (referring to Harry’s mother), or “their kind” – ways of speaking that often mirror homosexuality.
- As Harry discovers his difference, the Dursleys demand total silence, and complete concealment.
- **Harry literally comes out of the closet!**

# MUGGLE RULES AND WIZARDING RULES



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- Bronski (2003) argues that although the books are not in any sense “gay,” they are “profoundly queer in the broader sense of the word” because they “celebrate a revolt against accepted, conventional life—against the world of the Muggles, who slavishly follow societal rules without ever thinking about whether they are right or wrong, if they make sense or not. They are at heart an attack on the very idea of normalcy”.
  - But worth considering how/if the wizarding world reinforces some kind of normativity...
  - Tensions between pure and mud-bloods, Ministry of Magic, economy (goblins & Weasleys).

# NORMATIVITY (PUGH & WALLACE, 2006)



- Harry is an orphan, living with his aunt, uncle, and cousin.
- They all treat him poorly, and he is not valued there.
- Right from the start – Harry is ‘different’ to this world of ‘normal’ people.
  - Also a ‘difference’ in Ron and Hermione’s stories.
- It is clear that normativity is not something that the reader (or Harry) is intended to appreciate. *Think “Mr and Mrs Dursley... were proud to say they were perfectly normal”.*
- The books tell a boy’s story – a straight boy’s story. Heteronormative heroism.



# THE ROOM OF REQUIREMENT

- Blurs the line between private/public – open to all, if they need it, but also private space.
  - Dichotomies of open/closed, accessible/restricted.
- Queer space by nature – adapts to user's requirements.
  - Providing a space for **all** students.
  - Pushes the boundaries of what a space 'should be', of how spaces work in the world.
- As a space of resistance within Hogwarts (particularly for Dumbledore's Army, in the latter books).

# VISIBLE QUEERNESS

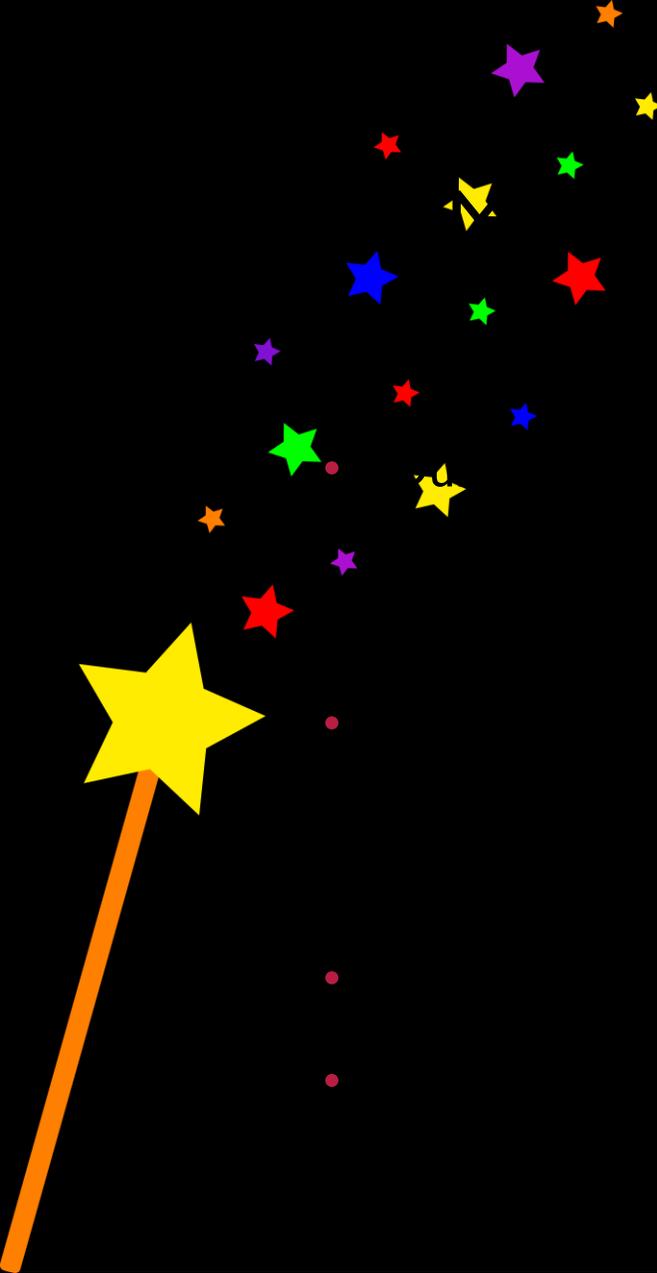


- Among the hundreds of major (and minor) characters in the series, no-one is visibly identified as queer.
- During the series, we see the students becoming sexual, yet there are no same-sex attractions, and no-one questions their identity.
- Of the parents that we learn about, during the series, none of them are non-heterosexual.
- *“In a setting of such inspiring fantasy, populated with wizards, unicorns, centaurs, and an extensive range of magical beings, Rowling nonetheless never ventures into the realm of non-normative sexualities.” (Pugh & Wallace, 2006).*

# PASSING AS A MUGGLE

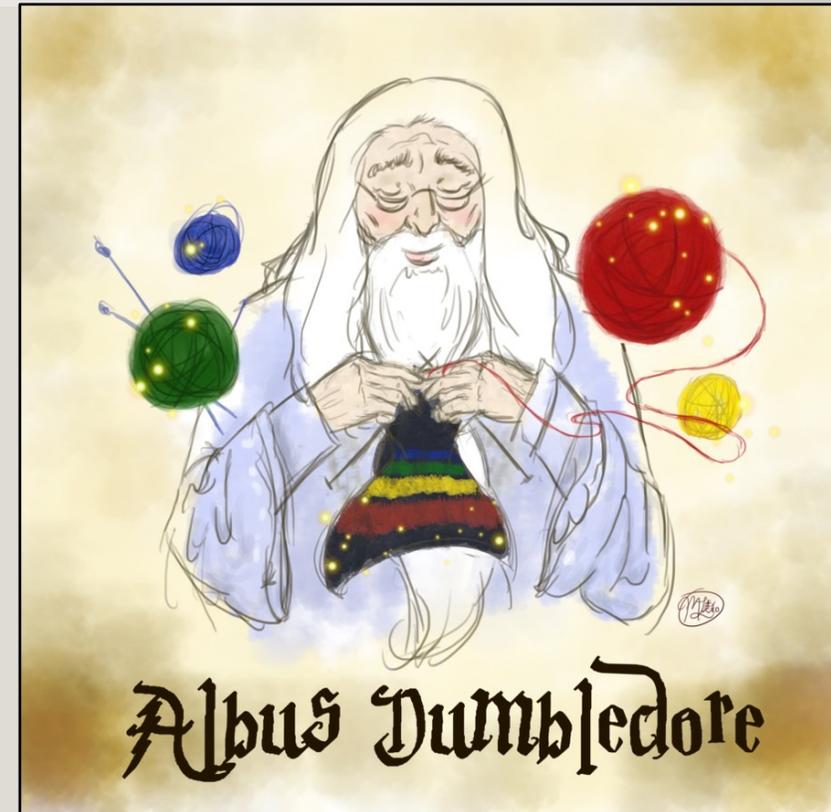


- Passing – appearing to be the opposite of who one is, in order to survive discrimination.
  - i.e. a gay person passing as straight, or a trans person passing as cis.
- Harry agrees to this passing performance (as a Muggle), to avoid various conflicts when at the Dursley's. *“I’ll act like a Muggle – like I’m normal and everything”*.
- This agreement, to deny his wizard identity, for familial peace parallels passing as a queer person in various heteronormative situations.
- In the end, wizards are only queer magically; they are never queer sexually.



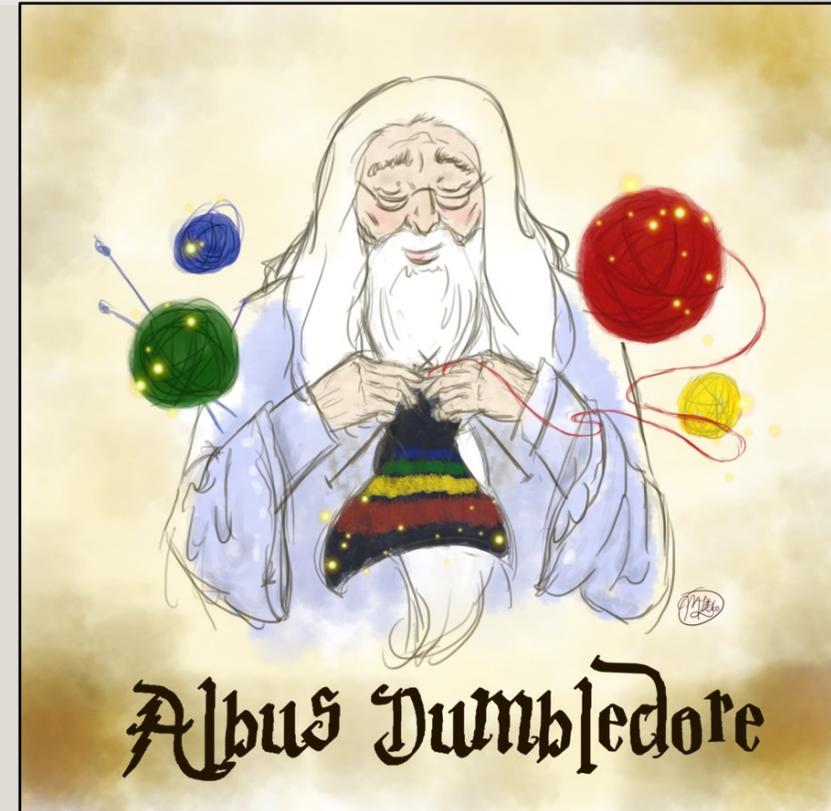
# DUMBLEDORE'S 'COMING OUT'

"He is gay," she said, adding he was  
rival Grindelwald, who he beat in a  
n good and bad wizards long ago.  
queer visibility. But how visible, given  
posed by JK after the books were  
dden within the series.  
ered bad – gay triumphed(?)



# DUMBLEDORE'S 'COMING OUT'

- Rowling said that she always thought of Dumbledore as being homosexual and that he had fallen in love with Gellert Grindelwald, which was Dumbledore's "great tragedy"; Rowling did not explicitly state whether Grindelwald returned his affections.
- His love = his 'great tragedy'.



# SNAPE AS QUEER REPRESENTATION

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- Snape troubles the good/evil distinction throughout the series.
- Ultimately revealed as not a villain.
- Troubles traditional masculinity.
  - Not a fighter, but a spy.
  - His expertise of legillimency and occulmency.
- Doe patronus



# FINAL THOUGHTS...

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- Popularity of the books provide a basis for readers to engage with the complicated functions of (hetero)normativity re. gender and sexuality in Western culture.
- The books 'celebrate' deviant, nonconformist, renegade identities... And invites queer readings.
  - Difficulties of reading Snape.
  - Problematic Dumbledore.
- Ultimately, the books aren't (overtly, explicitly) queer, but represent *some* queer thinking.

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- Thank you for listening!
  - For more things queer and psychological, please follow me on Twitter @LukeWrd

