

Ouachita Baptist University

Scholarly Commons @ Ouachita

Honors Theses

Carl Goodson Honors Program

4-16-2021

Attention Platform 9¾: The Hogwarts Express is Cancelled. Exploration in Cancel Culture, J.K. Rowling, and Beyond

Mallory Whitson

Ouachita Baptist University

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarlycommons.obu.edu/honors_theses



Part of the [Social Media Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Whitson, Mallory, "Attention Platform 9¾: The Hogwarts Express is Cancelled. Exploration in Cancel Culture, J.K. Rowling, and Beyond" (2021). *Honors Theses*. 795.

https://scholarlycommons.obu.edu/honors_theses/795

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Carl Goodson Honors Program at Scholarly Commons @ Ouachita. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Commons @ Ouachita. For more information, please contact mortensona@obu.edu.

Attention Platform 9 ¾: The Hogwarts Express is Cancelled.

Explorations in Cancel Culture, J.K. Rowling, and Beyond

“The spirit of cancel culture—holding people accountable for their actions—is lost when being cancelled means there is no opportunity for change nor space for growth. The practice is becoming more like activism as entertainment: where people join in because they find it fun, rather than because they believe it to be a worthy cause.”

— Alison Joubert

Mallory E. Whitson

Trigger Warning: The following paper discusses themes that include transphobia, homophobia, racism, domestic violence, sexual assault, offensive and mature language.

Introduction

What is Cancel Culture?

In the past decade, the general public's understanding of social media justice via the media has drastically changed the environment of the public sphere. This policing via the internet is known as 'cancel culture'. The ideology behind cancel culture is nothing new, but the moniker of cancel culture only entered public consciousness around 2017 (Greenspan). At this time, the #MeToo movement was taking Hollywood circles by storm, calling out several celebrities for deplorable behavior against women in the industry. #MeToo is a social movement against the sexual harassment or abuse of women which was brought to widespread public awareness after allegations of sex crimes within Hollywood in 2017. The movement created mass boycotting of, and criminal investigation into several high-ranking entertainment professionals, such as Harvey Weinstein who is a prominent example. The hashtag was to encourage survivors of sexual assault to speak out and to show solidarity with those who have also been victims of sex crimes (Burke). As the term 'cancel culture' grew in popularity, so did its spread into other spheres of social media. Specifically, cancel culture's headquarters have settled on the social media platform, Twitter. For every

celebrity—and J.K. Rowling in particular, which we will discuss later— the kindling of a cancel firestorm usually stems from tweets that spark controversy or are considered offensive to a particular group. For instance, in 2018, comedian Kevin Hart became the target of cancel culture after homophobic tweets, which he made over a period of three years, starting in 2009 and ending in 2011, were brought to light after the Academy revealed Hart as their host for the 2019 Oscars (Heller). The public response split between requiring Hart to apologize and demanding his removal from the position. The Academy mirrored that response by requiring an ultimatum: either Hart would need to issue a public apology or he would step down as host (Heller, Insider.com). Many assumed he would take the easy choice and apologize. To great shock, Hart stepped down from the role, and claimed that he had decided to “[pass] on the apology” (qtd. in Heller). As these tweets were something he had repeatedly addressed, Hart believed that it was time to move on and to leave it alone (Heller, Insider.com). After further public complaint, he did issue both a public apology and address on Twitter to the LGBTQ+ community and to the Academy. Hart’s experience is not unique. It has become common practice to use public figures’ pasts against them. As demonstrated by Hart’s situation, cancel culture originally meant to encourage accountability from public figures, but instead it declined drastically, transforming into an entity that is more brutal, more ‘toxic’, and in many cases, extreme.

In 2021, cancel culture is commonly defined as “a way of behaving in a society or group, especially on social media, in which it is common to completely reject and stop

supporting someone because they have said or done something that offends you” (Cambridge). However, this definition only covers the surface of cancel culture. Not only is the support of a public figure withdrawn by their fans, in more extreme cases, people demand that public figures be stripped of their livelihoods, and be completely blacklisted from their profession for the unforeseeable future. From controversial Alex Jones to seemingly unproblematic Jimmy Fallon, many entertainment figures have been subjected to the full intensity of internet mob justice. For example, in 2000, Jimmy Fallon was a guest on *Saturday Night Live*, colloquially known as SNL, where he impersonated Chris Rock for a skit. In this skit, he painted his skin and donned facial hair that resembled African American characteristics. Fallon’s ‘blackface’ resurfaced in 2020 and he became the target of cancel culture. Overnight, the hashtag #jimmyfallonisoverparty trended on Twitter, and there were rumors of lost endorsements and even job termination, which ultimately never came to fruition.

Many readers see Fallon’s transition from ‘unproblematic’ to ‘problematic’ and wonder what the criteria is that causes this change. While there are many definitions for the word ‘problematic’, within the scope of social media and cancel culture, this term usually refers to the person or company that has said or done something that has been deemed offensive. Conversely, ‘unproblematic’ individuals are those in the public sphere who have not been in any recent scandal or there have been no scandals uncovered. This strict dichotomy is problematic (pun intended) as it puts people on a pedestal and does

not allow room for error without fear of severe retribution or cancellation. Members of cancel culture pride themselves on bringing about a more tolerant society, but in reality, it is instigating a mob justice mentality that is increasingly less tolerant.

However, what varies greatly in these situations are the public responses to the target's own response to cancellation attempts. While Hart's situation created quite a stir, there are some entertainment figures who have handled cancel culture reasonably well. In contrast to Hart, entertainment figure and YouTuber, Jenna Marbles —whose real name is Jenna Mourey, and who I will refer to as going forward—was able to effectively control the narrative when she became an attempted target of cancel culture. Mourey, one of the 'OG YouTubers', was one of the first and longest popular figures on the platform since her channel started in February 2010. She held on to her popularity for nearly ten years due to her so-called 'unproblematic nature'. She quickly became one of the most subscribed women on the platform, which she maintained for a number of years. In June 2020, more than ten years after the creation of her channel, Mourey posted an apology video¹ addressing some older videos that she made in the earlier part of her career. In her eleven-minute-long apology, she addresses four specific videos as well as a series she made. The videos she addresses broach themes of blackface, racism by way of racial stereotypes, slut-

¹ Though Mourey has since deleted her apology off of her own channel, there are various re-uploads and reaction videos that can provide further information on this topic. For Mourey's apology in its entirety, see thisvideoisback's reupload of the video, www.youtube.com/watch?v=679d-SQfWLk.

shaming, and potential issues that surround gender identity. She also addresses concerns about those who are in her personal social circle who have been labeled problematic. So far, this video format seems like the standard apology that has become part of the formula for cancel culture targets. However, there are some aspects that set Mourey's apology apart from other internet celebrities, and that has seemingly made all of the difference in respect to the public response.

First of all, unlike other celebrities of her caliber, Mourey was not the target of a widespread social media outcry because of something she had done recently. In her apology video, she said that "[she] had been requested to address things [she] had done in [her] past..." but that she also wanted to hold herself accountable like she would anyone else whose content she consumes (Mourey). She uploaded this apology without aggressive prompting from her fans and handled the issues with calm demeanor and explanation without excuses. As she addresses each concern, Mourey shows the clip in question, discusses why it is problematic, explains her side of the issue, and apologizes for each video before going on to the next issue. This strategy differs from other *YouTube* content creators in similar situations as many of them come from a mindset of damage control and fear of consequence such as Shane Dawson¹ whereas Mourey comes from a place of intent and accountability. She expresses genuine regret for her past through her words by her willingness to admit when she's wrong, and demonstrates that she understands the consequences of her actions. To rectify the situation, Mourey made the offensive videos

private, issued public apologies for each instance versus a general apology, and at the end, declared that her accountability would take the form of an indefinite hiatus from media presence and her *YouTube* channel.

The public response after Mourey's apology also deviates from the normal cancel culture behavior. The overwhelming majority of people responded positively to Mourey's apology, and begged her not to leave the platform. Many understood her need for a break from social media presence, but greatly desired that she eventually would return to making content on her *YouTube* channel. Fans hoped that they would still be able see Mourey on gaming live-streams on her *Twitch* channel and her *YouTube* podcast, *The Jenna Julien Podcast*, of which she co-hosted with her now fiancé, Julien Solomita, a fellow content creator on the *YouTube* platform. However, much to the dismay of her audience, she also recused herself from these channels as well. Now as I write this, it is 2021, and Mourey has not given indication that she will return to any of her platforms. Unlike Hart and many other celebrities, Mourey is one of very few cancellations that still left the reputation of the target intact and where the public response was overwhelmingly positive.

What We Are Looking At

Cancel culture started out with seemingly good intentions: to bring awareness to and accountability for mistakes made by our public figures and to encourage tolerance of other groups that aren't the majority. However, that is not what we are seeing. Now, what predominates cancel culture is a mob psychology full of negativity, intolerance, and hostility.

Psychological sources define mob mentality as a collective behavior or psychological state of a group of people (Psychology Wiki). This can also be put into terms of 'group mentality' or 'crowd psychology'. Within the group mentality, the individual does not behave in the same manner that would be typical. Instead, their behavior begins to reflect the mentality of the group, regardless of the individual's beliefs. Furthermore, it is of note that within this group, members are more likely to exhibit behaviors or display actions the individual would typically never do alone. In cancel culture, the principle of group mentality manifests as hostility.

Rocco Chiou² details the neurological response that happens when individuals participate in this kind of activity. The particular setting of online mob justice activates the brain's valence system. This system is colloquially known as the reward center—typically controlling positive response, reward seeking, consummatory behavior, and habit learning ("Domain: Positive Valence Systems"). The desire for a reward leads to continuous participation, regardless if later events still align with the socio-political beliefs of the individual (Chiou 298). This pattern eventually devolves into a vigilantist behavior, a.k.a cancel culture. Behind the screen, members of the group do not face the same consequences for their attitudes as they would for exhibiting that same behavior face-to-face with their intended subject. This anonymity provides opportunity more drastic actions such as death threats and public

² For further information on the neurological aspect of cancel culture, see Rocco Chiou's article, "We Need Deeper Understanding About the Neurocognitive Mechanisms of Moral Righteousness in an Era on Online Vigilantism and Cancel Culture," *AJOB Neuroscience*, vol. 11, no. 4, Oct. 2020, pp. 297–299.

shaming rather than education. In this context, cancel culture utilizes social media to reach many individuals and herd them into a mentality of crowd justice. This gathering then adopts one stance and will then attack anyone whose stance differs. The targeted individual will see a significant drop in followers, receive hateful or threatening messages, and depending on their profession, will see pressure directed at their employers to drop them from their companies.

Cancel culture's cherry-picked tolerance and extreme social justice comes to a head in the case of J.K. Rowling. Over the course of her public career as the famous creator of the *Harry Potter* series and franchise, Rowling has repeatedly been in the unfortunate spotlight of cancel culture within the last year. She has been cancelled over a series of tweets, statements, and even a book that are seen to be transphobic. As a previously much beloved public figure, Rowling, and her subsequent actions inspired even more severe public outcry. Burning books, death threats, and demands for her support to be stripped from her are all examples of what cancel culture does to a target of cancellation. At this point, can we truly call cancel culture helpful? Are these the appropriate measures to be taken when we demand accountability in our public sphere? Or is cancel culture on a path that will become much more destructive? I posit that cancel culture within the context of J.K. Rowling is representative of the worst of what cancel culture has to offer and argue that the culture altogether is more harmful than good.

J.K Rowling

Background and History

Joanne Rowling, or better known as J.K. Rowling, was born in Yates, United Kingdom on July 31, 1965. She was born to Peter, an aircraft engineer, and Anne, a science technician in the chemistry department at Wyedean Comprehensive (jkrowling.com). In her schooling, Rowling did well, graduating from the University of Exeter with a Bachelor of Arts in French with Classics in 1986. Following her degree, she worked as a researcher at Amnesty International (jkrowling.com). Her focus was mainly around “[reading] hastily scribbled letters smuggled out of totalitarian regimes by men and women who were risking imprisonment to inform the outside world of what was happening to them,” but that is not where her humanitarianism ends (jkrowling.com). Through her adolescence and adulthood, she dreamed of being a writer, which came to fruition at the publication of the *Harry Potter* series. Many applauded her for her inclusivity and moral values instilled into her fantastical young adult fiction. Experiencing international literary acclaim, Rowling catapulted into the spotlight. As the spotlight landed on Rowling, however, it also illuminated her past. Her troubled past included her mother’s death from multiple sclerosis³ in 1990 and an abusive marriage with her first husband which is what inspired

³ For more information on Multiple Sclerosis, see the Mayo Clinic, www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/multiple-sclerosis/symptoms-causes/syc-20350269.

her contributions to her various charities such as the Multiple Sclerosis Society⁴ and Refuge⁵, a women's charity against domestic violence. While she made significant contributions to good causes and had a generally positive reputation, she has also had some confrontations with public opinion.

Why is J.K. Rowling a Target of Cancel Culture?

While Rowling has committed other social faux pas in her time as a public figure, for the purpose of this paper, I will focus on her most recent one—her alleged transphobia. What exactly happened that put Rowling back in the hot seat with the public at large? It all started with a tweet; however, it was not originally her own. On 2 September 2018, a tax specialist named Maya Forstater⁶ tweeted her disapproval of the U.K.'s Gender Recognition Act.⁷ In September of 2020, government officials hosted a

⁴ For more information about the Multiple Sclerosis Society, see their website, www.nationalmssociety.org/.

⁵ For more information on Refuge, see their website, www.refuge.org.uk/.

⁶ For more information on Maya Forstater, see *NBCNews* online: www.nbcnews.com/think/opinion/j-k-rowling-s-maya-forstater-tweets-support-hostile-work-ncna1105201.

⁷ The Gender Recognition Act of 2004 regulated the legal process for a person to change their gender on their birth certificate (Time.com). This process would affect how trans-people could legally become their preferred gender, how they marry, and even how they are buried (Time.com). For more information about the UK Gender Recognition Act, see *Time* online: time.com/5891598/gender-recognition-act-reform-uk/.

public consultation to discuss whether or not to broaden the mandate and regulations that affect that legal process of changing gender on legal documents (Ivy; Haynes). Before this public forum, the Gender Recognition Act stipulated that in order to legally change genders, a person must have a medical diagnosis of gender dysphoria⁸ and have been living a lifestyle that reflects their preferred gender for at least two years (Haynes). The issue with this stipulation is that people in the trans-community find these requirements invasive and that they have to “prove their gender to an independent panel of strangers” (Haynes).⁹ At the prospect of “radically expanding the legal definition of ‘women’” Forstater

⁸ According to the American Psychiatric Association, gender dysphoria is defined as clinically significant distress or impairment related to a strong desire to be of another gender, which may include desire to change primary and/or secondary sex characteristics. As a clinically recognized mental disorder, there are treatment avenues that include therapy, however, the well-known and controversial treatments are hormone therapy (taking estrogen, testosterone, or puberty blockers) or sex reassignment surgery (American Psychiatric Association). I think it’s important to note that on the survey that government officials used for the Gender Recognition Act 2004 reform consultation, one of the questions asked if the medical requirement (gender dysphoria diagnosis and the submission of documented treatment for dysphoria) should be removed. A large portion of the surveys acknowledge gender dysphoria as a mental disorder while other trans people claim that being trans is not a medical/mental health issue. Out of those people, thirty-five percent still believed that the medical requirement should be retained to protect those who are sincere in the application as opposed to people that would abuse the system if it changed the requirement only to self-identification (Gov.uk).

⁹ The phrase, “independent panel of strangers,” refers to the Gender Recognition Panel which is a tribunal in the UK that handles the issuing of Gender Recognition Certificates to transgender people (Haynes). Members are appointed by the Lord Chancellor after approval from the respective presidents of the Courts for England and Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland (Wikipedia). Medical practitioners, psychologists,

tweeted this commentary that changing the requirement of medical diagnosis in favor of self-identification will undermine the rights and protections of women:



Figure 1: Screenshot from Twitter, @MForstater (Maya Forstater), "UK gov consultation on reforming..." 2 Sept. 2018, taken by Mallory Whitson

Prior to these tweets that ultimately ended in her job termination, Forstater repeatedly referred to trans-women as male and intentionally misgendered¹⁰ Pips Bunce, a

and lawyers are the only professionals that can be appointed as members to the Gender Recognition Panel (Wikipedia).

¹⁰ Misgendering is most commonly defined as referring to someone using a word, usually a pronoun, that does not reflect the gender identity of that person. One example would be referring to a woman using he/him pronouns when that woman identifies with

trans-person, who identifies as gender fluid and who uses he/she and him/her pronouns (NBC News).¹¹ Forstater, who is a cis-gendered woman¹², referred to Bunce as “a man who likes to express himself part of the week by wearing a dress,” “a part-time cross dresser,” and other language that disregards Bunce’s gender identity and preferred pronouns (Ivy).¹³ Regarding Forstater’s tweets about Bunce, one commenter expressed concern that this type of language trivializes the discrimination that trans-people face and reduces their identity to clothing choices. Forstater claims that her phrasing of “a man who likes to express himself part of the week by wearing a dress” comes from a direct quote from Bunce where he/she tried to explain gender fluidity through the analogy of choosing

she/her pronouns. While sometimes unintentional and usually fixed with polite correction, for the purpose of this paper, further use of the term misgendering will indicate purposeful, malicious intent to undermine trans-identity.

¹¹ Gender fluid is a gender identity that fits under the umbrella of non-binary where a person moves between two or more gender identities.

¹² Cis-gendered is a term that refers to people whose gender identity corresponds with the biological sex that was assigned at birth.

¹³ As might be obvious, preferred gender pronouns are the third-person pronouns that someone of a particular gender identity use to reflect their identity. The most common are he/him, she/her, and they/them. However, there are iterations that are used by those in the non-binary community or otherwise that include he/they or she/they. It is also of note that this is not exclusive for people within the trans-community. Trans allies (people who support and advocate for equal treatment for trans-people) that are cis-gendered—people whose gender identity corresponds with their biological sex that was assigned at birth—will often also include their pronouns on social media platforms or elsewhere to normalize this practice.

clothes and that for Bunce specifically, gender fluidity is “synonymous to how a lady may choose to wear a dress, heels and makeup one day yet trousers, flats and no makeup another—[they] are internal preferences of how we choose to express at any given time” (Bunce). I, as other detractors, feel that Forstater’s language is transphobic as it misgenders him/her by denying a half of Bunce’s identity as gender fluid. What is a crucial fact to understand about Bunce’s quote is that while his/her gender fluidity is tied to clothing, that does not apply to all gender fluid people. While sex has worked within a binary since the creation of life itself, gender identity is a spectrum and the expression of it is just as vast. If Bunce ties the expression of femininity or womanhood to his/her identity through clothing as opposed to medical treatment like hormone therapy or surgeries, it does not negate or diminish his/her gender identity as gender fluid. What this all boils down to is Forstater’s belief that sex is a strict binary. Her belief is clearly shown in another tweet on 2 September 2018 where she states that “everyone’s equality and safety should be protected, but women and girls lose out on privacy, safety, and fairness if males are allowed into changing rooms, dormitories, prisons, [and] sports teams” (@MForstater). I, along with other commenters, feel that this is the definition of transphobic as it vilifies trans-women as predators.

While Rowling has been, and claims to be, a large proponent of free speech¹⁴, what she may not be taking into account is the context surrounding Forstater's work environment and previous behavior because, in December of 2019, Rowling tweeted her support for Forstater, which many saw as transphobic:



Figure 2: Screenshot from Twitter, @jk_rowling (J.K. Rowling), "Dress however you please..." 19 Dec. 2019, taken by Mallory Whitson.

Though many disagreed with Rowling's #IStandWithMaya tweet, the real firestorm exploded on June 6, 2020, when Rowling quote -tweeted¹⁵ an article from Devex.com titled, "Opinion: Creating a More Equal Post-COVID-19 World for People Who Menstruate." In her tweet included here, she takes issue with the phrase "people who menstruate," writing:

¹⁴ For further information about Rowling's views on free speech, see the open letter signed by Rowling published by *Harper's Magazine*, www.harpers.org/a-letter-on-justice-and-open-debate/

¹⁵ A retweet (a repost from another account) with added commentary from the person reposting the tweet.



Figure 3: Screenshot from Twitter, @jk_rowling (J.K. Rowling), " 'People who menstruate'..." 6 June 2020, taken by Mallory Whitson.

Rowling dismisses the inclusive phrase of "people who menstruate" and ridicules it by purposefully misspelling the word 'woman' as if to infer that only women menstruate.¹⁶ In a nearly 4,000-word blogpost titled, "J.K. Rowling Writes about Her Reasons for Speaking out on Sex and Gender Issues," which she posted four days after her initial tweet, Rowling goes into deeper explanation about why she takes issue with inclusive language concerning gender, specifically women.¹⁶

¹⁶ For Rowling's blogpost in its entirety, see www.jkrowling.com/opinions/j-k-rowling-writes-about-her-reasons-for-speaking-out-on-sex-and-gender-issues/.

But, as many women have said before me, 'woman' is not a costume. 'Woman' is not an idea in a man's head. 'Woman' is not a pink brain, a liking for Jimmy Choos or any of the other sexist ideas now somehow touted as progressive. Moreover, the 'inclusive' language that calls female people 'menstruators' and 'people with vulvas' strikes many women as dehumanising and demeaning. I understand why trans activists consider this language to be appropriate and kind, but for those of us who've had degrading slurs spat at us by violent men, it's not neutral, it's hostile and alienating. (Rowling, "On Sex and Gender")

Many readers may wonder why "people who menstruate" is an all-inclusive phrase that is preferable to "women who menstruate." It is preferable because it encompasses cis-gendered women, transgender men¹⁷, and non-binary¹⁸ persons, all of whom may still menstruate. In Rowling's perspective, this new addition to language does not help women's rights, but instead erases the concept of sex and women's rights.

Understandably, the LGBTQ+ community, of which the transgender community is a part,

¹⁷ Transgender is an umbrella term to refer to people whose gender-identity does not correspond with their biological sex assigned at birth.

¹⁸ Non-binary can be used as an umbrella term to refer to all gender identities outside of the binary. However, for the purpose of this paper, this term will be used for persons who do not identify with either male or female gender identity, regardless of biological sex assigned at birth.

took issue with Rowling's statement. However, Rowling continued her message by tweeting this thread of tweets on the same day:

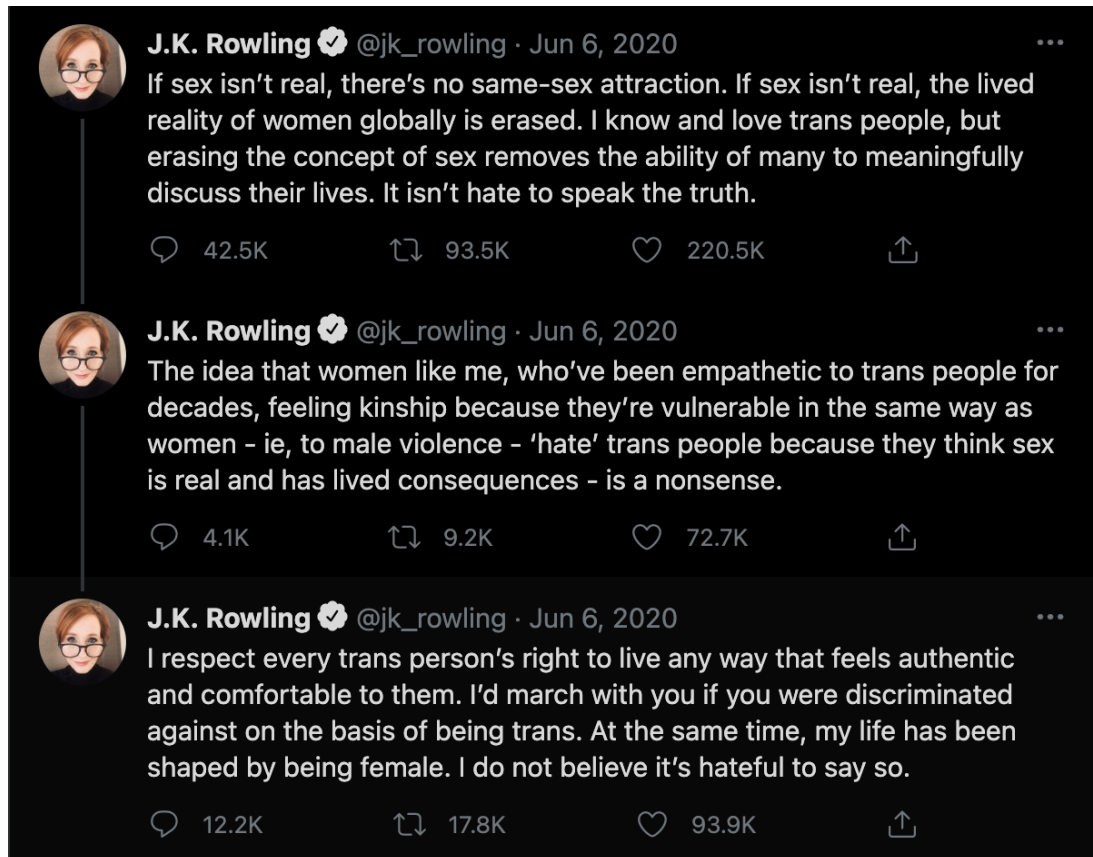


Figure 4: Screenshot from Twitter, @jk_rowling (J.K. Rowling), "If sex isn't real..." 6 June 2020, taken by Mallory Whitson.

This series of tweets only worsened the public perspective of her. After Rowling's first tweet, many were hoping for an apology from her, an admittance of perhaps too strong a wording, or an impulsive rant, but instead, she continued on her path creating an ever deeper divide between her and the millions of people who follow her. Whereas in Mourey's apology, Mourey saw where she went wrong and acknowledged what she needs to do to fix the hurt she caused, Rowling seems to dig her heels in and dig herself into a deeper hole—as we see with these tweets. While the overall message was the cause of

most of the offense, others took issue with Rowling's wording as it was just as divisive. In the first tweet, Rowling uses the phrase, "women like me" (@jk_rowling). Within the context of the sentence, she is referring to cis-gendered women who are "empathetic to trans people" but in that sentence alone, she makes a clear distinction between herself and trans-women (@jk_rowling). Further in the thread, Rowling claims that she'd "march with [trans-people] if [they] were discriminated against on the basis of being trans" (@jk_rowling). It could be chalked up to word choice, but I, along with many other people, feel that this statement and the use of the word 'if' dismisses and undermines the fact that trans-people are actively discriminated against on the basis of being trans. Rowling received major backlash. After her tweets went viral¹⁹, the hashtags #JKRowlingsOverParty and #RIPJKRowling trended on Twitter, meaning that thousands of people were tweeting with these particular hashtags. While #JKRowlingsOverParty could be viewed as satirical, like #jimmyfallonisoverparty, the second hashtag of #RIPJKRowling is much more serious. While R.I.P. is usually reserved for someone who has died, Twitter users used the hashtag to say that instead of Rowling herself, it was her career that died. In comparison to other figures, like Jenna Mourey, this is a vastly different response from her audience. After Mourey's apology and retirement from the *YouTube* platform, her channel saw a massive

¹⁹ Within the context of social media, for a post, tweet, comment, etc. to go viral means that it spreads rapidly through the platform or across platforms, either through sharing or reposting.

spike in views, subscribers, and positive feedback. To this day, her channel is still experiencing significant growth in views and interaction which demonstrates her success in effective accountability without toxic cancel culture (Social Blade). Conversely, Rowling—who to this day hasn't apologized for her words—saw significant loss of followers on social platforms; *Harry Potter* actors like Daniel Radcliffe and Emma Watson spoke out against her, and droves of hate messages and death threats flooded her social media inboxes. Four days after her first tweets about Forstater, Rowling published the post about her views on sex and gender. In the same blog post where she discusses the problem with inclusive language, she attempts to garner sympathy for her actions.

In her post, she attempts to provide background information that would better convey her motives for her recent actions. She begins with a timeline of her interactions within the transphobic sphere: her support for Maya Forstater for her own transphobic tweets and the resulting initial negative internet response. According to Rowling, her interest in transgender issues predated Forstater by two years. During this time, she researched through various avenues to better understand the subject for professional purposes—which includes her *Cormoran Strike* crime seriesⁱⁱⁱ, which I will discuss later—and personal purposes (Rowling, “On Sex and Gender”). Continuing in her understanding of events, after the Forstater tweets, she followed Magdalen Berns^{iv}, who she referred to as “a brave young feminist and lesbian…[who] was a great believer in the importance of biological sex, and didn't believe lesbians should be called bigots for not dating trans

women with penises, [as a result] dots were joined in the heads of twitter trans activists, and the level of social media abuse increased” (Rowling, “On Sex and Gender”). Rowling claimed that she followed Berns in order to get in contact with her as Berns was dying of an aggressive brain tumor (Rowling, “On Sex and Gender”). Though Rowling’s intent with her may seem innocuous enough, Berns was an aggressive and known TERF (Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminist)²⁰ who made many vulgar statements about trans-people and trans-women in particular.²¹ After the fallout with the Forstater tweets, to then follow a known TERF did nothing to help Rowling’s public image. I, amongst many people who considered themselves die-hard Potterheads²², didn’t know how to morally reconcile our love for our favorite fantasy books that spoke of inclusivity, with seeing its author be so outspokenly exclusive to an entire group of people. While Rowling acknowledges these events, she also expresses no remorse about her actions:

I mention all this only to explain that I knew perfectly well what was going to happen when I supported Maya. I must have been on my fourth or fifth

²⁰ Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminism is a subgroup of the feminist movement that believe that transgender women should be excluded from women’s rights and should fight for their own rights separate from the women’s movement. There are also some TERFs who believe that transgender women encroach upon cis-gendered women’s rights.

²¹ To read Bern’s tweets on this discussion, see @MagdalenBerns on Twitter, twitter.com/magdalenberns. Trigger Warning: the language of her tweets is too inappropriate for the tone of this paper, and so I have chosen not to include them here.

²² Term to refer to enthusiastic *Harry Potter* fans.

cancellation by then. I expected the threats of violence, to be told I was *literally killing trans people with my hate*, to be called cunt and bitch and, of course, for my books to be burned, although one particularly abusive man told me he'd composted them. (Rowling, "On Sex and Gender")

In other words, Rowling says that because she has been through cancellations before, she knew what to expect. What is concerning about this attitude is that she decided to move forward with these statements anyway, not caring about any repercussions.

Within the article, Rowling expresses five main concerns that motivated her to speak out in this blogpost:

1. Her various charities and trusts for women and children and the fear that erasing biological sex and replacing it with gender identity will significantly and negatively impact those causes
2. As an ex-teacher, her interest in "education and safeguarding" and concern about the degree of which "the effect the trans rights movement is having on both"
(Rowling)
3. Her freedom of speech

4. Personal concern for the influx of young women transitioning and the supposed significant statistic of people that are detransitioning²³
5. And finally, concern that trans activism will detract from the lived experiences of “natal girls and women” and make them less safe within the context of domestic abuse and sexual assault

One crucial point to understand that connects all of Rowling’s concerns is the geopolitical context surrounding her post. In the post, a significant point of contention for her is Scotland’s Gender Recognition Certification²⁴ and the proposed reform bill²⁵ brought to the Scottish Parliament in 2019. In accordance with the UK’s Gender Recognition Act 2004, Scotland’s Gender Recognition Certification currently requires a formal medical diagnosis of gender dysphoria, a minimum duration of two years or twenty-four months that one must

²³ Detransitioning is the process of transitioning back to the gender identity that aligns with the biological sex assigned at birth. For example, a trans-man detransitioning back into a woman.

²⁴ For more information on Scotland’s Gender Recognition Certificates, see the National Records of Scotland, www.nrscotland.gov.uk/registration/gender-recognition.

²⁵ To read the proposed bill to reform Scotland’s Gender Recognition Certification in its entirety, see Scotland’s Government website, www.gov.scot/publications/gender-recognition-reform-scotland-bill-consultation-scottish-government/.

live²⁶ in their new gender identity before applying for certification, and a tribunal²⁷ in front of the Gender Recognition Panel to receive a legal gender recognition certificate (Gov.scot).

However, in June 2019, Scottish Cabinet Secretary for Social Security and Older People, Shirley-Anne Somerville, addressed Scottish Parliament about a draft bill that would

reform some of the requirements of Scotland's Gender Recognition Certification

(Gov.scot). In the bill, Somerville proposed the following changes:

1. Remove the requirement for medical diagnosis
2. Shorten the two-year minimum to a three-month minimum before application with the addition of a three-month reflection period after application
3. Remove the Gender Recognition Panel in favor of giving certificate issuing power to the Registrar General²⁸

²⁶ The requirement of two years of living in the new gender stipulates that a person must provide documented evidence like driving licenses, passports, academic certificates, letters from official organizations, etc. that can verify the date of when the person adopted the new gender full-time (Gov.uk). For more information, the full application guideline forms are available on the UK's Government website, www.gov.uk/government/publications/apply-for-a-gender-recognition-certificate-form-t450.

²⁷ A special court chosen, especially by a government or governments, to examine a particular problem (Cambridge).

²⁸ In Scotland specifically, the Registrar General is the government official that handles legal registrations (births, deaths, marriages, etc.) and is responsible for the census. As a gender recognition certificate would grant legal alteration to legal documents—like changing the sex on a birth certificate to reflect the new acquired gender—it would be seen by the Registrar General anyway. The proposed change would essentially eliminate

4. Require the applicant to confirm that the new gender acquisition is a permanent, life-long commitment
5. Keep the requirement that applicants must submit statutory declarations made in front of a notary public or justice of the peace
6. Make it a criminal offense to make false gender recognition statutory declarations or false gender recognition applications

There are other changes proposed, but the ones listed are the most significant reforms compared to the UK Gender Recognition Act 2004. Out of these changes, Rowling takes the most issue with the removal of the medical diagnosis requirement. She writes that because of the new wave of explosive trans activism, “a man who intends to have no surgery and take no hormones may now secure himself a Gender Recognition Certificate and be a woman in the sight of the law” (Rowling, “On Sex and Gender”). What she misunderstands here is that hormone therapy or sex reassignment surgery is not a requirement for receiving a Gender Recognition Certificate, nor has it ever been. What has been medically required, as mentioned previously, is an official diagnosis of gender dysphoria. This misunderstanding that transgender people have to have these types of treatments to be considered transgender is not the only example of Rowling’s ignorance of the trans-community.

the middleman as well as diminish some of the invasiveness that transgender people feel by the tribunal.

J.K. Rowling published under her pseudonym, Robert Galbraith, another murder mystery in her *Cormoran Strike* series as I was writing my thesis. *Troubled Blood* was under fire even before it released based on speculation that Rowling was once again demonstrating her transphobia in her novel. The basis of the rumor was the serial killer in her novel. A cis-gendered man, Dennis Creed, a serial murderer in the 1970's, was someone who enjoyed cross-dressing as a lure to kill cis-gendered women. Before the release of the book, many suspected that this character trait would vilify the trans-community by creating a male character who disguised themselves as a woman to lure female victims. As this particular topic relates to my thesis, I felt it necessary to read the book in its entirety—all 934 pages—and determine for myself if it was indeed transphobic. The short answer is this: while the cross-dressing was probably meant to speak more upon Creed's psychotic nature than function as a thinly veiled transphobic social commentary, Rowling's inclusion of a cross-dressing serial killer was ignorant and insensitive at best. One trans reviewer pointed out not just the cruel juxtaposition of *Troubled Blood's* content but the hypocrisy of its author too. The reviewer says that "generally [trans people] are not perpetrators of violence, [but] victims" (Haynes, "More Fuel to the Fire"). Critics think it hypocritical of Rowling as a cis-gendered woman to publish this series under a male pseudonym. As someone who has very bluntly complained about men supposedly trying to benefit from being called a woman, Rowling has no qualms doing the opposite herself.

Thus, looking at Rowling's actions—her tweets, posts, and *Troubled Blood*—one question that I have had to contemplate is what do we do in situations like Rowling's? When an author of a beloved book series like *Harry Potter* comes out with statements that are exclusionary and harmful, can we still love the books in the same way and try to pretend that the author doesn't exist? Or is better to acknowledge that the nostalgia is now tainted and try to move on? As someone who grew up with the *Harry Potter* series and of which I owe my chosen vocation, this question has been especially hard for me to answer. So what can we do? Should Rowling be cancelled? Ultimately, I do not believe Rowling should be cancelled. Rowling should be held to account for her words. While she is free to say what she wants, that doesn't mean that she isn't free from the consequences (Breakey). However, accountability through cancel culture is not an effective or humane practice. It is harmful, and both sides attacking each other solves nothing.

Conclusion

Why Cancel Culture is Harmful

Through the course of this paper, I have shown numerous examples of how cancel culture has evolved from a mentality of accountability to a mob mentality of censorship, targeting, and harsh treatment of their targets. But how does cancel culture work within the different media platforms? The most common of course, is social media. On the various internet social platforms, cancel culture comes in the form of tweets, comments on photos, and direct messages with the added cover of anonymity. Some discuss the matter at hand,

while others employ ad hominem, attacking their person, their livelihood, and even their families. In my examples of Kevin Hart, Jenna Marbles, and J.K. Rowling, it all started with social media. However, in Rowling's case, it expanded beyond that. During the June 15, 2020 broadcast of the news show, *Good Morning Britain*, former news-anchor Piers Morgan discusses with his then co-anchor, Susanna Reid, the backlash surrounding Rowling's transphobic tweets. To have well-rounded discussion, they invited onto the show three guests: Professor Kathleen Stock, Nicole Gibson, and India Willoughby. Gibson and Willoughby are transgender, and Stock was there to provide counterpoints to Rowling's backlash. In this debate, the concern arises that Rowling's tweets about "people who menstruate" is a social commentary on how she believes that transgender rights are now encroaching on biological women's rights (*Good Morning Britain*). Concluding the debate, the transgender guests do, in fact, believe that Rowling is transphobic and by extension a Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminist (TERF). Willoughby theorized that much of Rowling's misinformation on transgender knowledge stems from a parenting organization that is known to be biased against the trans-community. Willoughby also surmised that Rowling failed to surround herself with people who would have accurate information regarding the issues that Rowling seems to detail in her blog post (*Good Morning Britain*).

On many media platforms, Rowling received much criticism for her actions and many people pushed—and are pushing—for her to be held accountable for her actions. While that pursuit in itself is noble, where is the line drawn? When does well-intentioned critique turn

into full-blown censorship? When does accountability turn into ruthless targeting? In the context of cancel culture, it is difficult to pinpoint when these concepts were no longer mutually exclusive.

What Do We Do?

Something to keep in mind is that the topic of cancel culture is constantly evolving and that new instances of this behavior occur on a daily basis. With that being said, there are limits to my research. This is a broad topic and for the purpose of this thesis, I narrowed down my thesis considerably to work within the scope of J.K. Rowling and a few select entertainment figures. To further flush out understanding, further research is required. Conversation about cancel culture is also continuously evolving. There are many questions that we must continue to ask ourselves when we contemplate what is happening with J.K. Rowling: if she gets cancelled, what happens? Will it actually matter? Will the ramifications affect her empire? Why or why not? Where does this leave her former fans? While what Rowling did justly garners criticism, and of which she should be held to account, she does not deserve the harsh ire that she received as a target of cancel culture. As has been apparent, even if she were to get cancelled, it would not work. She has been cancelled multiple times, and while the immediate response was significant, but the long-term ramifications have been minimal. Considering her *Harry Potter* empire that she has created, cancel culture as it is would not be effective, nor is it in any way an appropriate course of action as the toxic entity it is now. My contribution to this conversation is my belief that cancel culture itself should be

cancelled, and instead society needs to move towards accountability without targeting and censorship, but rather with education and tolerance.

Works Cited

"About the Society." *National Multiple Sclerosis Society*, 26 Mar. 2021,

www.nationalmssociety.org/About-the-Society. Accessed 14 Apr. 2021.

Breakey, Hugh. "Is Cancel Culture Silencing Open Debate? There Are Risks to Shutting Down Opinions We Disagree With." *Gale Opposing Viewpoints Online Collection*, Gale, 2021.

Gale In Context: Opposing Viewpoints, link.gale.com/apps/doc/UHTLJX266067129.

Accessed 26 Feb. 2021.

Bunce, Pips. "Transformed: The Credit Suisse Director Known as Pippa and Philip."

FNLondon, Financial News, 27 Sept. 2017,

www.fnlondon.com/articles/mistranslated-i-split-my-time-as-pippa-and-philip-20171002. Accessed 15 Apr. 2021.

Burke, Tarana. "Get To Know Us: History & Inception." *Me Too Movement*, 16 July 2020,

metoomvmt.org/get-to-know-us/history-inception/. Accessed 14 Apr. 2021.

“Cancel Culture”. *Cambridge English Dictionary*,

dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/cancel-culture. Accessed 14 Apr. 2021.

Chiou, Rocco. “We Need Deeper Understanding About the Neurocognitive Mechanisms of

Moral Righteousness in an Era of Online Vigilantism and Cancel Culture.” *AJOB*

Neuroscience, vol. 11, no. 4, Oct. 2020, pp. 297–299. *EBSCOhost*,

doi:10.1080/21507740.2020.1830872. Accessed 27 Feb. 2021.

Dodgson, Lindsay. “How Shane Dawson Went from 'King of YouTube' to the Biggest Fall

from Grace the Platform Has Ever Seen.” *Insider*, 2 July 2020,

www.insider.com/how-shane-dawson-went-from-king-of-youtube-to-canceled-2020-7. Accessed 14 Apr. 2021.

“Domain: Positive Valence Systems.” *National Institute of Mental Health*, U.S. Department

of Health and Human Services, www.nimh.nih.gov/research/research-funded-by-

nimh/rdoc/constructs/positive-valence-systems.shtml. Accessed 15 Mar. 2021.

@MForstater (Maya Forstater). “Bunce does not ‘masquerade as female’ he is a man…”

Twitter, 25 Sept. 2018, twitter.com/MForstater/status/1044596769978544128.

Accessed 14 Apr. 2021.

---. “I share the concerns of @fairplaywomen that radically expanding the legal definition

of ‘women’…” *Twitter*, 2 Sept. 2018,

twitter.com/MForstater/status/1036375232062337025. Accessed 14 Apr. 2021.

Galbraith, Robert. *Troubled Blood*. Mulholland Books/Little, Brown and Company, 2020.

“Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill: Consultation.” *Scottish Government*, 17 Dec.

2019, www.gov.scot/publications/gender-recognition-reform-scotland-bill-consultation-scottish-government/. Accessed 14 Apr. 2021.

“Gender Recognition Panel.” *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 17 Oct. 2020,

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gender_Recognition_Panel. Accessed 14 Apr. 2021.

GMB. “Is the JK Rowling Anti-Trans Backlash Fair? | Good Morning Britain.” *YouTube*, 15

June 2020, www.youtube.com/watch?v=QXKSVWnyOSM. Accessed 15 Mar. 2021.

Greenspan, Rachel E. “How ‘Cancel Culture’ Quickly Became One of the Buzziest and Most

Controversial Ideas on the Internet.” *Insider*, 6 Aug. 2020, www.insider.com/cancel-culture-meaning-history-origin-phrase-used-negatively-2020-7. Accessed 14 Apr. 2021.

Haynes, Suyin. “Gender Recognition Act: What’s Next for Trans Rights in UK.” *Time*

Magazine, 22 Sept. 2020, time.com/5891598/gender-recognition-act-reform-uk/. Accessed 14 Apr. 2021.

---. “‘More Fuel to the Fire.’ Trans and Non-Binary Authors Respond to Controversy Over

J.K. Rowling’s New Novel.” *Time Magazine*, 15 Sept. 2020,

<https://time.com/5888999/jk-rowling-troubled-blood-transphobia-authors/>.

Accessed 14 Apr. 2021.

Heller, Susanna. "Kevin Hart Says He's Definitely Not Going to Host the Oscars This Year. "

Insider, 9 Jan 2019, www.insider.com/kevin-hart-good-morning-america-not-hosting-oscars-2019-1. Accessed 15 Mar. 2021.

HM Courts & Tribunals Service. "Form T450: Apply for a Gender Recognition Certificate."

GOV.UK, 13 Jan. 2020, www.gov.uk/government/publications/apply-for-a-gender-recognition-certificate-form-t450. Accessed 13 Apr. 2021.

Ivy, Veronica. "J.K. Rowling's Maya Forstater Tweets Support Hostile Work Environments,

Not Free Speech." *NBCNews.com*, NBCUniversal News Group, 20 Dec. 2019, www.nbcnews.com/think/opinion/j-k-rowling-s-maya-forstater-tweets-support-hostile-work-ncna1105201. Accessed 14 Apr. 2021.

"Jenna Marbles Apology." *YouTube*, uploaded by thisvideoisback, 2 July 2020,

youtu.be/679d-SQfWLk. Accessed 15 March 2021.

"JennaMarbles's YouTube Stats (Summary Profile)." *SocialBlade*,

socialblade.com/youtube/user/jennamarbles. Accessed 14 Apr. 2021.

"J.K. Rowling's Twitter Stats Summary Profile (Social Blade Twitter Statistics)." *SocialBlade*,

socialblade.com/twitter/user/jk_rowling. Accessed 14 Apr. 2021.

@jk_rowling (J.K Rowling). "'People who menstruate.' I'm sure there used to be a word for

those people. Someone help me out. Wumben? Wimpund? Woomud? Opinion:

Creating a more equal post-COVID-19 world for people who menstruate." *Twitter*,

6 June 2020, twitter.com/jk_rowling/status/1269382518362509313. Accessed 14 Apr. 2021.

---. "If sex isn't real, there's no same-sex attraction..." *Twitter*, 6 June 2020, twitter.com/jk_rowling/status/1269389298664701952. Accessed 14 Apr. 2021.

Joubert, Alison M., and Jack Coffin. "Celebrities Can Be Cancelled. Fandoms Are Forever." *Gale Opposing Viewpoints Online Collection*, Gale, 2021. link.gale.com/apps/doc/UHXOQX894919510/OVIC?u=ar_a_obu&sid=OVIC&xid=b049f011. Accessed 26 Feb. 2021.

Karpinski, Monica. "What You Need To Know About The Intersectional Term 'Womxn'." *Daye, Daye*, 19 Aug. 2020, yourdaye.com/vitals/cultural-musings/what-is-the-meaning-of-womxn. Accessed 14 Apr. 2021.

"A Letter on Justice and Open Debate." *Harper's Magazine*, 21 Aug. 2020, harpers.org/a-letter-on-justice-and-open-debate/. Accessed 14 Apr. 2021.

@MagdalenBerns (Magalen Berns). *Twitter*, twitter.com/magdalenberns. Accessed 13 Apr. 2021.

"Magdalen Berns." *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 7 Apr. 2021, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magdalen_Berns. Accessed 14 Apr. 2021.

"Mob Psychology." *Psychology Wiki*, psychology.wikia.org/wiki/mob_psychology. Accessed 15 Mar. 2021.

“Multiple Sclerosis.” *Mayo Clinic*, Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research, 12 June 2020, www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/multiple-sclerosis/symptoms-causes/syc-20350269. Accessed 14 Apr. 2021.

National Records of Scotland Web Team. “Gender Recognition.” *National Records of Scotland*, 31 May 2013, www.nrscotland.gov.uk/registration/gender-recognition. Accessed 14 Apr. 2021.

“Our History.” *Refuge Charity - Domestic Violence Help*, Refuge Charity, 5 Jan. 2018, www.refuge.org.uk/our-story/our-history/. Accessed 14 Apr. 2021.

“Registrar General for Scotland.” *Registrar General for Scotland | Scotland's Census*, www.scotlandscensus.gov.uk/glossary/registrar-general-scotland. Accessed 14 Apr. 2021.

Rowling, J.K. *J.K. Rowling*, 7 Aug. 2018, www.jkrowling.com/. Accessed 14 Apr. 2021.

---. “J.K. Rowling Writes about Her Reasons for Speaking out on Sex and Gender Issues.” *J.K. Rowling*, 10 June 2020, www.jkrowling.com/opinions/j-k-rowling-writes-about-her-reasons-for-speaking-out-on-sex-and-gender-issues/. Accessed 14 Apr. 2021.

Turban, Jack. “What Is Gender Dysphoria?” *American Psychiatric Association*, Nov. 2020, www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/gender-dysphoria/what-is-gender-dysphoria. Accessed 14 Apr. 2021.

ⁱ Shane Dawson, like Jenna Mourey, is also a prominent entertainment figure who got their start on *YouTube* and is another OG YouTuber. However, his controversies are much larger than Mourey's. Over his twenty-three-year career on the platform, he has faced backlash for racism, blackface, inappropriate comments about minors, and other problematic behavior (Insider.com). In 2020, he was caught in the cross-fire of internet drama surrounding beauty influencers Jeffree Star, James Charles, and Tati Westbrook. In May 2019, at the urging of Star and Dawson, Westbrook uploaded a video to her *YouTube* channel titled "Bye Sister," of which she aired her grievances and allegations against her former mentee, James Charles. Her allegations were extremely concerning as it dealt with potential sexually predatory behavior from James Charles against male minors. Charles experienced major backlash after Westbrook's video. He experienced a dramatic drop in subscribers and sponsorships. A year after the video, Westbrook made another video where she explains her motives behind the "Bye Sister" video and revealed that Dawson had manipulated her into uploading the video despite her concerns for Charles' mental wellbeing. Dawson, who had been trying to separate himself from his problematic past, suddenly experienced significant negative public response. In an attempt to save himself and his brand, he uploaded an apology video in which he tried to mirror Mourey's apology video. However, it did not work. Viewers could see that the apology was not genuine based on his actions. Whereas Mourey took action and committed to it, Dawson said one thing and did another, leaving his credibility in shambles. As a last resort, Dawson took another page out of Mourey's apology by taking an internet hiatus, of which is still active.

ⁱⁱ What is also interesting about this development is the debate about the inclusion of the concept of 'womxn'. Its origins date back to the 1970s in the second wave of the feminist movement. The purpose was to find an alternate spelling that would emancipate womanhood from its association with men by removing it from the word (Karpinski). The proposed alternate spelling was 'womyn' but due to the social movements that have appeared in the last decade or so, the spelling of 'womxn' has grown in popularity. In comparison to 'womyn', which has now become more associated with trans-exclusionary radical feminism, the inclusion of 'x' now encompasses feminism that includes trans-women (Karpinski). The debate between using the womxn or woman all comes down to inclusivity. Many feminists believe that to use the alternate spelling is actually more divisive than inclusive. It singles out trans-women and women of color (WOC) rather than grouping together with all women. However, others point out that the 'x' is more inclusive than the traditional spelling because just as 'x' can represent the unknown in mathematics, it can also represent that womanhood can have many interpretations and is not defined by a single trait (Karpinski). To read Monica Karpinski's article about inclusive language in

women's rights, see yourdaye.com/vitals/cultural-musings/what-is-the-meaning-of-womxn

ⁱⁱⁱ In the fifth installment of the Strike series, Cormoran Strike, the private detective, is given the task of solving the forty-year-old disappearance case of Margaret Bamborough. At Bamborough's disappearance, many assumed it was the work of Creed, and Bamborough was another of his unfortunate victims, never to be seen again. Strike and his partner, Robin Ellacott, were given a year to find out what really happened. While juggling their own personal lives and increasing attraction to each other, the partners try to put an end to this unsolved mystery. Whilst trying to solve it, many obstacles inhibit their progress: family, personal relationships, and other cases. In the end however, they are able to put the case to rest and give the closure that everyone so desperately needed, including themselves.

As someone who has never read any other works by Rowling, other than the *Harry Potter* series, I was skeptical. Is she still the same writer that I remember, or was Harry Potter a one-hit wonder? However, after reading *Troubled Blood*, I am still not sure of what to think. The two strengths of the novel were the plot itself and the character growth of the protagonist and his partner. When I say plot, I mean the Bamborough case. This case was interesting. Up until the real culprit was revealed, I had no inkling into who the killer was. The plot twist hit as it should and I was left reeling from the truth. Also, the character development between Strike and Ellacott was well done. I could see the character growth between the two as the book progressed and the ending of the novel was a pleasing outcome. However, these were the only things I liked about the book.

On the other hand, there were many things about this book that I did not like. First off, the book was 934 pages long. This is significantly longer than most of her books in the *Harry Potter* series, and there isn't any reason for this particular book to be that long. I understand that much of that length consists of different plot lines that attempt to add to the character growth. However, these diverging plots are tangential at best. This story, focusing on one plot line (the Bamborough case) could have been succinctly wrapped up in five hundred pages or less and nothing would have been lost. The other plot lines with other cases were unnecessary and added no substantial meaning to the rest of the novel.

Secondly, there is the inclusion of Edmund Spenser. The novel is separated into seven parts and seventy-three chapters. On each page, whether that be the page that introduces the next part or the new chapter page, there is a quote from Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*. At best, the quotes contain a word or phrase that minutely connect with a general theme of a chapter, at worst the quotes serve no real purpose other than to make Rowling look more well-read. It got to a point in my reading that I no longer read the quotes because I knew that they contributed nothing to my understanding of the reading.

Thirdly, I take issue with Rowling's writing style. There are several dialogues that are meant to come across as dialectical. However, this makes the story harder to read and causes a break in focus. There are two specific instances. The first is a woman who is understood to have a heavy British accent. To demonstrate that, Rowling writes her dialogue with letters missing, abundant apostrophes, and slang that a non-Brit wouldn't understand immediately without outside research. However, in that instance, I don't particularly mind that. It is the second example that I take more issue with. The second instance involves a character with a lisp. To convey this, Rowling wrote their dialogue by replacing all of the 's' sounds in the words with 'th-'sounds. This broke my focus and I had to reread the dialogue to understand what was being said. I found these additions to be unnecessary.

In conclusion, if I had to give this book a rating, it would be a 2.5/5. The main plot was good and the two main characters were well developed but the book was too long, there were stylistic choices that should have never been included, and the cross-dressing added nothing to the story itself and only affected Rowling negatively.

^{iv} Magdalen Berns was a lesbian radical feminist who rose to prominence on *YouTube* (Wikipedia, "Magdalen Berns"). On her *YouTube* channel, she broached topics like gender identity, free speech, and lesbian politics in a vlog format (Wikipedia, "Magdalen Berns"). Within the feminism sphere, she was considered quite controversial for her views and Berns was often labeled a TERF (Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminist). One such action that Berns received backlash for was a group she co-founded called For Women Scotland, which fought to oppose change to the UK Gender Recognition Act 2004. Her most controversial views were expressed on Twitter, where she tweeted opinions that earned her the title of "one of the most hateful and aggressive anti-trans radical feminists on Twitter" by Phaylen Fairchild, a blogger (Wikipedia, "Magdalen Berns"). One of Berns' Twitter statements includes referring to trans-women as "men who get sexual kicks from being treated like women" (@MagdalenBerns). Berns was also a big proponent of biological sex, believing that biological organs are not assigned but are defining features of sex. As such, Berns believed that cis-gendered homosexual women should not be criticized or called transphobic for not engaging in romantic relationships with trans-women who still have male genitalia (Wikipedia).