

Children's Fan-Play, Folklore and Participatory Culture

Harry Potter Costumes, Role-Play and Spells

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Volume 38, Number 1-2, 2016

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1041596ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1041596ar>

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Publisher(s)

Association Canadienne d'Ethnologie et de Folklore

ISSN

1481-5974 (print)

1708-0401 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Small, C. (2016). Children's Fan-Play, Folklore and Participatory Culture: Harry Potter Costumes, Role-Play and Spells. *Ethnologies*, 38(1-2), 255–289. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1041596ar>

Article abstract

The study of children's play activities has not only been historically trivialized, but numerous widely held misconceptions about kids, their play, folklore and popular culture continue to persist today despite evidence to the contrary. For example, some adults believe that mass media and popular culture has contributed to the decline of kids' traditional play activities, while others argue that traditional play objects are being replaced by "media culture artifacts"; however, the child-centred fan-play research I present in this paper reveals that popular culture encourages and activates children's traditional and creative competences, rather than destroy them. The Harry Potter "phenomenon", as a contested site where youth struggle for visibility and power, serves as the case study for this paper. Based on ethnographic observation of several local events, surveys, and interviews with child and teenage fans of Harry Potter, I examine several emergent, participatory, fan-play activities (including costuming, role-playing, make-believe and spells) and discuss the many ways children manipulate, appropriate, adapt and combine popular culture and folklore, using both creativity and tradition as expression of their lives, identities and power struggles. I conclude by discussing the heart of contemporary children's culture and play – the conservative/creative nature of children, hybrid play forms and the activation of traditional and creative competencies in the face of popular culture influences.

CHILDREN'S FAN-PLAY, FOLKLORE AND PARTICIPATORY CULTURE

Harry Potter Costumes, Role-Play and Spells

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Introduction

Often considered to be “non-serious” and therefore unimportant, children’s play traditions have suffered a long history of trivialization and stigma (Sutton-Smith 1970, 6). In addition, numerous widely held misconceptions about kids, their play, play artifacts, folklore and popular culture continue to persist today (Factor 2001, 6). For example, some adults believe that mass media and popular culture has contributed to the decline of kids’ traditional play activities (Marsh 2001, 81), while others argue that traditional play objects are being replaced by “media culture artifacts” (Kellner 1997, 85). However, the child-centered¹ fan-play research I present in this paper reveals a different story – a story in which popular culture encourages and activates children’s traditional and creative competences, rather than destroying them. The Harry Potter “phenomenon” (Zipes 2001, 170-89), as a contested site where youth struggle for visibility and power, serves as the case study for this paper. Based on ethnographic observation of several local events (including book and movie launches), surveys, and interviews with child and teenage fans of Harry Potter,² I examine

1. Understanding how children conduct their lives from the perspective of children, rather than adults, is the key feature of the childist approach. This child-centered approach involves ethnographic fieldwork and interviews with children to assess their firsthand experiences (Clark 1995, 2). It gives the child a voice of authority, while honoring and respecting their opinions, values and thoughts. Rather than simply interviewing adults about their childhood memories, by using the childist approach, the child gets to speak for him/herself.
2. The names of youths have been withheld, and I have assigned first name pseudonyms to protect their identities. Adult informants including guardians,

several emergent, participatory, fan-play activities (including costuming, role-playing, make-believe and spells) and discuss the many ways children manipulate, appropriate, adapt and combine popular culture and folklore, using both creativity and tradition as expressions of their thoughts and opinions.

This paper explores what happens around mass-produced products, in this case Harry Potter books and films, focusing on how youths rework, re-cycle and re-produce products to meet their own needs as a form of participatory culture (Narváez 1992, 25). I therefore investigate participatory events and everyday expressions surrounding popular culture that have become meaningful to its participants. I define fan-play as the expressive, customary and co-creative play activities, events, materials and behaviors of fans. Fan-play refers to the traditional ways fans creatively engage with and celebrate their fandom, individually or in a group, to produce new expressive forms of emergent folk culture. Many of these fan-play forms combine traditional play genres and techniques (such as costuming, role-playing, acting, make-believe) with innovation and creativity. Fan-play activities also reflect children's lives and concerns, and reveal power struggles and identity expression. This paper will use illustrations of fan-play to dispel some of the most common and widely known adult misconceptions about children, their folklore, popular culture and play.

Popular Myth-Conceptions about Children's Culture and Play

Not only do a number of significantly biased beliefs about children's culture and play exist, but what is more astonishing is the fact that these beliefs continue to exist despite massive amounts of conflicting evidence (Factor 2001, 6). Peter and Iona Opie explain that these myths have become so ingrained in adult contemporary society that they have assumed the status of traditional beliefs in themselves: "Yet the belief that traditional games are dying out is itself traditional; it was received opinion even when those who now regret the passing of the games were themselves vigorously playing them" (1969, 14). What follows is a brief introduction of four major cultural misunderstandings that plague adult perspectives and views of children's culture and play, which I have termed "myth-conceptions."³

parents and family members, have also been given pseudonyms.

3. I coined this term in chapter 3 of my dissertation, "Co-Creating Harry Potter: Children's Fan-Play, Folklore and Participatory Culture" (PhD diss., Memorial University, 2015).

Although folklorists define “myths” as explanatory narratives about the origins of the world or “traditional prose narratives, which, in the society in which they are told, are considered to be truthful accounts of what happened in the remote past” (Brunvand 1998, 170), throughout modern society and interdisciplinary children’s culture research, the word “myth” is generally used by many to refer to the “misconceptions” held by adults that affect their views of children and childhood. In this sense, the word “myth” has become popularly or colloquially defined as a misconception, error or false assumption. I have therefore combined the terms “myth” and “misconception” to produce the term “myth-conception” defined as a popular cultural misconception in society that achieves legendary or belief status. In this case, I am referring to popular misconceptions about children, children’s culture (folklore and popular culture) and childhood that have become so ingrained and believed in society, that they enter into belief status despite evidence to the contrary. This paper therefore presents common myth-conceptions adults have regarding childlore, children’s play activities, play artifacts, and popular culture in an attempt to understand child and adult reactions to the Harry Potter phenomenon and the child-adult divide.

One of the biggest problems affecting the study of children is the unfortunate stigma of triviality. This first myth-conception is based on the view that children’s play culture is simple, insignificant, unimportant, worthless, and non-productive nonsense; in a word, trivial. The trivialization of children’s play has affected the study of children and even those who study children. “As we can define childlore partly in terms of its ‘triviality,’ it follows also that most serious persons will find it too trivial to study, that at this historical time there will be a ‘triviality barrier’ against its serious pursuit” (Sutton-Smith 1970, 4-5). Brian Sutton-Smith explains that folklorists study activities which have been historically viewed as “the nonserious areas of child life” including children’s group traditions (such as rhymes, jokes, superstitions, wit, nicknames, torments, parody, codes, gang lore, etc.), and activities that children perform individually (such as daydreaming, fantasies, solitary play, comic reading, dramatizations, mass media interests, stories, etc.) (1970, 1). He further explains that, because such activities are perceived as “fun,” it is not surprising that they would be devalued in a work-oriented society (Sutton-Smith 1970, 2). Most importantly, according to Sutton-Smith, the triviality barrier can act as a major means of suppressing children’s voices; therefore, addressing this issue is the first step in fully understanding children on their own terms.

It is commonly believed among adults, parents and educators that playlore is in decline, that “children-don’t-do-that-anymore,” and that children’s traditions are dying out (Factor 2001, 27-28). The Opies write, “It seems to be presumed that children today (unlike those in the past) have few diversions of their own, that they are incapable of self-organization, have become addicted to spectator amusements, and will languish if left to rely on their own resources” (1969, v). Eve Harwood explains that collections of published children’s lore provide “ample evidence of the continued existence of children’s folk repertoire despite easy access to popular music through electronic media and equipment” (1994, 189). In addition, Julia Bishop and Mavis Curtis (2001a) reference the continued widespread belief and popular perceptions among teachers that children have lost the art of playing games, children don’t know how to play any more, and traditional games are dying out. However, numerous collections, acknowledgements and discussions prove children’s games do indeed exist in a lively form: “the picture of children’s free play activities which emerges is predominantly one of vibrancy, creativity, continuity and variety, not one of decline” (Bishop and Curtis 2001a, 2). Dispelling this second myth-conception is critical because many educators ignore data of kids’ play in order to pursue their own agendas. Given that many popular myth-conceptions exist despite such collections, studies and evidence, it is even more important that adults (from parents to scholars) continue to examine and vocalize the reality of children’s lived experiences, play and culture.

Many common childhood myth-conceptions revolve around the belief that popular culture has a destructive, negative, detrimental, brain-rotting influence on children. Described as “societal rot” (Schechter 2001, xii), and the “pornography of childhood” (McDonnell 10, 1994), popular culture is also blamed for destroying children’s creativity and causing negative behaviors in children. Some parents do not understand or acknowledge popular culture’s value; rather they believe popular culture to have a degenerative quality, lowering their children’s creative minds and limiting their potential. Popular culture and technology is often accused of taking away a child’s capacity for play and traditional games, myth-conception number three. From this perspective, adults perceive children as helpless and passive before the onslaught of mass-mediated popular culture. Some adults believe that, because children are sponges, they will absorb the bad with the good. They believe popular culture will impede their intellect by either destroying their capacities for creativity and causing an inability to tell creative, original stories or by destroying their capacities for tradition

and play. Elizabeth Tucker explains that some adults also believe that media influence will destroy children's narrative tradition and narrative creativity (1992, 25).

A number of scholars have critiqued corporate construction of children's popular culture arguing that it destroys kid culture. Some argue that children's traditional artifacts are being replaced and manipulated by "media culture objects" (Kellner 1997, 85), thereby destroying their traditional play competencies and artifacts, myth-conception number four. Corporate saturation has even been cited as limiting children's creative and imaginative capacities (Turner-Vorbeck 2003, 19). From this perspective, it is believed that children consume uncritically, and passively obey dictated play and play behaviors. This myth-conception is often present in many adult criticisms of Harry Potter books and films.

All of these myth-conceptions (1. the trivialization of children's play; 2. the decline of playlore; 3. the destructive force of popular culture [destroying children's capacities for tradition and creativity]; and 4. the replacement of children's traditional artifacts by media culture objects [children consume mass media uncritically and passively]), affect how and why adults modify and/or interfere with children's play activities and games. For example, myth-conception one, the belief that playlore is trivial and insignificant, has caused many adults to ignore children's play. It is therefore important for scholars, when conducting child-centered research, to consider the effects of such beliefs on children's culture and play.

Harry Potter Case Study

Harry Potter has been referred to as "the biggest children's publishing and merchandising phenomenon of modern times" (Heilman 2003, 1). J.K. Rowling's books have prompted a massive commercial and cultural industry (Whited 2002, 2), known popularly as "Pottermania" (Turner-Vorbeck 2003, 14). Beyond the six-volume series, Harry Potter has inspired a huge variety of merchandising paraphernalia (Turner-Vorbeck 2003, 17). Spanning the world and dominating the market, the Harry Potter series and cross-platform industry has become a global phenomenon, one that children's literary critic and folklorist Jack Zipes describes as the "Harry Potter phenomenon" (2001, 170-189).⁴ The proliferation of

4. From the release of J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* in 1997 to 2014, Rowling's popular series sold approximately 450 million copies making it the best selling book series in history (*USA Today* 2014). There are seven books in the series, published over a period of ten years. The Harry

Potter commercial productions and mass marketing is, however, only a small part of the Pottermania story. Potter fans participate in a range of fan-play activities including Potter theme parties, book and movie launch parties, trivia games, fantasy and role-playing, Muggle Quidditch games,⁵ Internet fan clubs, fan fiction, rumours in anticipation of new volumes, media narraforms, parodies, spell performances, Wizard Rock music,⁶ fan art and homemade costumes.⁷ This paper focuses on fan-play examples involving costuming, role-playing, and spell casting.

“Participatory literacy” describes “the multiple ways readers take ownership of reading and writing to construct meaning situated within their own socio-cultural characteristics” (Bond & Michelson 2003, 119). Due to the intense corporate and adult interests in Pottermania, children have continually been treated in the scholarly literature as passive receptors of

Potter series has been translated into over seventy languages making her work one of the most translated in history (*Hypable* 2013). This fantasy series has received numerous awards and also broken several literary records; for example, in 1998, the first novel appeared on the *New York Times* bestseller list for 79 consecutive weeks, in the top three places on the list until the *Times* created a separate list for children’s books in 2000 (*Hypable* 2013); and books four to seven have consecutively set records as the fastest-selling books in history (Scholastic 2013). In addition, between 2001 and 2011, all seven books were made into eight feature films by Warner Brothers that also broke box office records (the final book was made into two movies *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 1* and *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows Part 2*.) As of 2014, the total revenue for the Harry Potter franchise (including global book sales, movie sales, DVD sales, rentals and toy sales) was almost \$25 billion dollars (*Statistic Brain* 2014) making Rowling the world’s first billionaire author.

5. Quidditch is a fictional sporting game created by J.K. Rowling. In the Potter Universe, Quidditch is a magical sport, governed by the Department of Magical Games and Sports, where members of opposing teams (keepers, beaters, chasers) fly in the air on broomsticks attempting to score a goal against their opposing team – in this case, by throwing a “quaffle” through the goal hoop. “Muggle Quidditch” or “Ground Quidditch,” on the other hand, is a game played by “muggles” (non-magical humans) including children, teenagers and adults.
6. Wizard Rock is a genre of music inspired by the Harry Potter Universe. Wizard Rockers write lyrics and perform music based on perspectives of the Harry Potter characters. In addition to an online encyclopedia devoted to celebrating the Wizard Rock genre (<wizrocklopedia.com>), there are hundreds of Wizard Rock bands (Vineyard 2007).
7. These fan-play activities are illustrated in my PhD dissertation (Memorial University, 2015).

the commercial construction of Harry Potter. Turner-Vorbeck, for example, asserts, "It is no longer safe to assume that children are able to generate purely their own reflections upon items of child culture such as literature for children" (2003, 19). As Peter Narváez writes, however, the fan "is not necessarily a helpless pawn or the victim of mass entertainment industries" (1987, 38). In fact, children develop their own ways of generating meaning from and celebrating the Potter series, which debunks all four myth-conceptions. Children's expressions of fandom differ substantially from adult or corporate mediated texts. Children wrestle the text away from the commercializers through their own vernacular construction of the characters, plot lines and magical worlds. Child-based fan-play, while sometimes compliant with, or complementary to, industry and adult management of the tradition, is also frequently resistant to corporate domination as my research illustrates. According to Henry Jenkins, fan fiction rebels against a culture owned by dispassionate corporations and attempts to restore a folk culture in which key stories and characters belong to everyone (1992). This rebellion, writes Amy Harmon, marks "a return to the folk tradition of participatory storytelling" (1997, 1).

Fan-Play and Costumes

The Harry Potter universe offers many fan-play opportunities for costuming and role-playing.⁸ Both children and teenagers enjoy crafting their costumes and wearing them during everyday local fan-play, online fan-play, at calendar custom parties such as Halloween and birthdays, or at special events. Children wear Potter costumes at public fan-play events such as book launches, fantasy conventions, Halloween events and movie showings. They also wear costumes in more informal settings and smaller social circles, such as in their family homes, in their local neighborhoods (outdoors), and while playing with children at home and in school.

Many children I interviewed wore Potter costumes that mostly consisted of homemade (rather than purchased) costume pieces such as school uniforms and school robes. The most generic Potter costume consisted of a robe, scarf, and wand (and if playing Harry, the addition of

8. Youth activities inspired by fantasy literature are not a new phenomenon. For example, in the 1960s, fans of J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* demonstrated similar play behaviors and customs (Ryan 1969). Recent examples include the *Twilight* saga (2005-2008) by Stephanie Meyer and *The Hunger Games* trilogy (2008-2010) by Suzanne Collins. Both series join the Potter novels as some of most challenged books in 21st century publishing history.

his characteristic round eyeglasses and lightning bolt scar). The fact that children and teens permit homemade items to be worn alongside store-bought items illustrates the conservative and innovative nature of their play. Their costumes illustrate that fan-play objects don't have to be "official" or mass produced to be used and enjoyed.

While it would be wrong to suggest that children are not receptive to the lure of advertised products, they do not always use products as prescribed. Instead, children often combine elements of merchandise with homemade "found" items. Amber as Hermione (Figure 1), wore a store-bought robe only, and said that she found her wand, a stick, out on the ground – literally a "found" object. "I'm wearing the robe and I have the wand. I found it outside on the ground, and don't know where it came from. And it's a bit broken right there" (Amber 2005). She states that she also wore her hair long and loose to imitate Hermione Granger. Amber isn't the only fan I interviewed who made their own homemade wand; teenage Zack also described how he made his wand, "I found like a perfectly straightened stick and I just painted it black *just like his* [Harry Potter]" (2007). The creation of homemade costumes and wands for fan-play ultimately dismisses myth-conception four, the replacement of children's traditional artifacts by media culture objects.



Figure 1. Eight-year-old Amber, a Potter fan, in her Hermione costume. Photograph by Contessa Small.

Scott as Harry Potter (Figure 2), had a store-bought robe, glasses and wand, but also wore an “invisibility cloak” that his mother elaborately made for him, as well as a cosmetically applied scar. However, Scott also wore manufactured items that his family purchased for him including a robe, glasses and wand.

— Scott: I like the robes and that. I have one of the robes and my mom made an invisibility cloak.

— Contessa: And you're wearing glasses too.

— Scott: I bought that with the robe and I bought the wand with them too. (2005)

As Harry Potter, Lucas's manufactured costume pieces included an official Hogwarts School robe and glasses merchandise (Figure 3). He made his own wand and painted on his own lightning bolt scar.



Figure 2. Eight-year-old Scott, a Potter fan, dressed as Harry Potter. Photograph by Contessa Small.



Figure 3. Eight-year-old Lucas, a Potter fan, dressed as Harry Potter. Photograph by Contessa Small.

Lyndsay, dressed as Hermione (Figure 4), describes her costume:

— Contessa: So, let's, you tell me about what you're wearing today.

— Lyndsay: Ahm, I don't know where I got this [holding out her robe] because my Aunt Krista wore it and so did my sister, and so did my mom. So, I don't really know where it came from. And I got my scarf because my uncle, I think he went to Brother Rice or some other school where this was part of their uniform, so he let me borrow it.

— Contessa: Oh, cool, it looks just like the colours of Gryffindor right?

— Lyndsay: It is. (2005)

Out of the whole school group Lyndsay was the self-proclaimed “biggest fan” having read the books many times over, and taking her Potter fandom



Figure 4. Eight-year-old Lyndsay, a Potter fan, dressed as Hermione. Photograph by Contessa Small.

very seriously. However, she explains that her dress was handed down to her from her mom, aunt and sister. As well, her uncle also passed the scarf on to her. In this example, clothing is passed on in a traditional, vernacular manner, by vertical transmission from one generation to the next, in order to meet a particular costume ideal. Lyndsay, as the biggest fan, had no problem wearing “unofficial” homemade costume pieces; rather it is her attention to detail and knowledge of the Harry Potter universe with which she is most concerned. For example, besides actively correcting the other children on their Potter facts, she also carried a voice of authority throughout the group interview. As well, although her costume was largely homemade, Lyndsay’s wand was not. Her comments also demonstrate an element of pride regarding how she acquired her store-bought wand, like a badge of honor for staying up late and wading through the crowds at midnight in order to get a copy of the first released books: “I got that at Chapters when the new one, when the new book was coming out. I was one of the first

ones there to get the new book at midnight, except I went to Coles instead” (2005). Teenage Janey also illustrates her costume accomplishment as a source of pride:

— Contessa: Did you ever make anything?

— Janey: Oh, yeah. We home-made our costumes. We never store-bought anything, except for maybe our glasses, for role-playing Harry Potter. ...I, I always take more pride in the homemade stuff than store-bought because, you know, you feel special making stuff like that. (2008)

From homemade wands, costumes and scars, the Harry Potter universe provides ample opportunities for children to use their creativity and be proud of themselves for doing so.

Not only do youth fans themselves make their own costumes, but they also co-create costumes with their families. In the following interview excerpt, two twelve-year-old girls, Madeline and Molly (Figure 5), explain how their costumes were made with the help of their family members, and how their costumes were made by combining homemade and manufactured items (what Molly refers to as “mish-mashed”) (2011). The girls wore their costumes at the midnight movie showing of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 2*.



Figure 5. Madeline and Molly dressed in costume at a Potter midnight movie showing. Photograph by Contessa Small.

— Molly: My grandma made my little grey skirt and she also made my robes, cause they're not, you can see a patch that's there? And my mom knit the sweater. And the rest of it, I bought.

— Contessa: Oh wow. So you really combined a lot of homemade stuff with bought stuff.

— Molly: Yeah. Yeah.

— Contessa: So do you need a homemade costume, or a bought costume to be a Harry Potter fan or can you have them mixed up?

— Molly: No, not really, cause mine's sort of mish-mashed – like my shirt is bought and my tie is bought. And, like, everything else is bought, but, uh, when I was little for, I think it was for the seventh book launch, my grandma made me the stuff, because we were in Saskatoon, with family, and we went to the book launch and we all got dressed up. It was really cool. It was lots of fun.

— Contessa: Tell me about your costume.

— Madeline: Well, I got my robes from my cousin. And [Molly's] mother extended them for me and made them bigger so they fit. [Laughing] I got my shirt from my mother's closet, and my tie from eBay, and the rest of the stuff I just bought. And I have my wand that my friend bought me from Florida from Harry Potter World. (2011)

Molly's mother, Mrs. Christine Collins, further explains her involvement and family participation in costume making.

I'm a knitter so I had a pattern, I could just put the stripes in it, kind of thing. And my mother, who made the skirt and the robes, I'm not certain if she had a pattern or not, but she's a seamstress, she was just able to make them. And she made them for my sister and my nephew, and kind of, she made lots. She made an owl costume for my infant nephew for the last book launch. (Collins 2011)

Molly's family members were also involved by dressing up and attending a book launch in Saskatoon, where even the infant child of the family appeared in costume as Harry's owl, Hedwig. The Collins family illustrates how many families are involved and supportive of their children on numerous levels of their popular culture experiences including reading with them, making costumes with them, and attending events with them. Mrs. Collins also supported her daughter by wearing her Harry Potter "Snape" character costume at the movie launch, posing for photos with the girls (Figure 6). Without doubt, Mrs. Collins is demonstrating her own interest

in the Harry Potter phenomenon; however, whatever her motives, she is supportive of her child's interests and decision to participate in this form of popular culture literary phenomenon. In the excerpt below, Mrs. Collins explains how she and her daughter developed a connection through their Potter fan participation:

She had always been a reader and I had always read to her, but I think it made a connection with us, like it's always been our thing, to do Harry Potter, all of the Harry Potter stuff, it's been our thing; the searching on the eBay, the crazy licence plate thing that I have, that says "Hogwarts Faculty" on it, and you know that sort of stuff; so it's always been our kind of thing. (2011)



Figure 6. Mrs. Collins poses as Snape with her daughter and her daughter's friend at the Potter movie. Photograph by Contessa Small.

Because I interviewed seven-year-old Nicholas in his family home with his family present, I was able to get a better impression of costume making in terms of family contribution. Only Nicholas's signature Potter eyeglasses were purchased, while everything else was handmade by this parents. This being his third Halloween dressing up as Harry Potter, Nicholas owns two

homemade robes – a blue Hogwarts School robe which his mother said he had long outgrown (Figure 7) and a Quidditch robe both made by his mother (Figure 8). His mother also made a Hogwarts scarf. “He’s [father] in the wand department and I’m in the costume department,” (Sherry Turner 2005). To make the crest of the robe, Nicholas and his mother used a Hogwarts school magnet that came in a package of Harry Potter Valentines. As for the Quidditch robes, mother, brother and aunt contributed in some fashion.

— Nicholas: She just copied this, and put red material; then Ned told her how to do the gold material around the [edge].

— Contessa: How did you know how to make it Mom?

— Mrs. Turner: You know this red material, my aunt, she had this bag of it given to her, so I said, “That’d make a good Quidditch robe. Just the right material for this.” (2005)

As well, Nicholas’s twin sister Annie (who often participates in imaginative Potter fan-play with her brother) drew his scar on his forehead with a lip-liner pencil, and his father made a contribution by making a finely crafted wand from woodwork (see Figure 7). “I’m after making so many now, I don’t need a picture” (Jim Turner 2005). This wasn’t the first handcrafted toy inspired by popular culture that Mr. Turner made for his children; some years ago he managed to carve all but one of the characters from the *Toy Story* movie made by Pixar/Disney in 1995: “[Christopher], the oldest one, *Toy Story* was it? I made all the characters of *Toy Story* out of wood. The only one left is the pig” (Jim Turner 2005). The act of reproducing popular culture toys using woodcarving techniques had become a family tradition in the Turner household.

While some children benefit from parental help with constructing their costumes, they rarely need help deciding what character to choose. For some kids, the choice of costume is based on the character they most identify with, or feel emotionally or psychologically connected to. For example, many girls who wore Hermione costumes, like Amber and Lyndsay, identified with and/or admired the character’s intelligence and studious qualities:

— Contessa: You both said that you like Hermione the best. Why do you like Hermione the most?

— Amber: Uhm, cause she’s a girl and she knows a lot. And, I like her. She’s my favorite character.

— Contessa: Why do you like Hermione best?

— Lyndsay: She's kind of like me, because I'm a real book worm so... like all I do is read. (2005)

For Molly, her favourite character is Hermione for both her physical similarities (her signature long, wildish hair) and her intellect.

— Molly: And my favorite's Hermione because that's who I am, and last Halloween I was Hermione and we went together, and we did the coordinated costumes.

— Contessa: So, what is it that you like about Hermione?

— Molly: Ah, I can do the hair quite well. And there's no work for the hair. She's just this smart know-it-all brainiac like me. (2011)

Many children and teens I interviewed, like those above, explained that they were either attracted to a character's heroism or intelligence. Many kids gravitate toward stories and play opportunities, like Harry Potter, where the hero



Figure 7. Eight-year-old Nicholas holding a handcrafted wand, and wearing a bathrobe as a Hogwarts robe. Photograph by Contessa Small.



Figure 8. Eight-year-old Nicholas wearing his Quidditch robe and scarf which were handmade by his mother. Photograph by Contessa Small.

(youth) is empowered with magic and can wield that power over other humans (adults). Roni Natov explains that Harry embodies this power relationship and the “state of injustice frequently experienced by children,” in the adult world (2002, 127). Through costuming and role-playing, and identifying with the main character, children are able to vicariously live out their desires and, at least imaginatively, achieve their ends. Teenage Zack explains that he wore his Harry Potter costume daily when he was in high school, just for the fun of it, while fantasizing himself as Harry Potter.

— Zack: To tell you the truth, I wish I was him.

— Contessa: Why?

— Zack: I don’t know, he’s a cool kid. It’s like, every time Harry Potter

goes into, you know, as soon as he goes into Hogwarts something bad happens to him, *only him*, and like, Ron was jealous of him. Like every year something happens to Harry Potter and Ron just wishes it was him. (2007)

Zack's costume, which was made by his grandmother, allowed him to "act" like Harry Potter, "I used to act like him a bit. It was fun" (2007). Costumes often allow children and teenagers opportunities to express their fandom, and explore power roles they would not otherwise get to experience. Fan-play and costuming examples such as these also help dispel myth-conception two, the decline of children's play activities.

Fan-Play and the Imagination

Role-Playing, Acting and Make-Believe

Not only are costumes created, but with a little imagination, everyday household items become play toys and imaginary objects. Ellen Seiter writes that children "are creative in their appropriation of consumer goods and media, and the meanings they make with these materials are not necessarily and not completely in line with a materialist ethos" (1993, 10). Here, corporations take a backseat to the child's imagination. For example, when playing Harry Potter dress-up with his friend Bradley, Nicholas adapts to their local surroundings by using a bathrobe for Bradley's Hogwarts robe, and blankets for invisibility cloaks. And for three-year-old Randy, his parents' clothing (mother's black outdoor jacket used a robe), toy eyeglasses (taken from his play doctor's kit), his mom's eyeliner (used for the lightning bolt scar), and chopstick (used as a wand), are more than enough to play dress-up and act as Harry Potter (Figure 9). In fact, none of Randy's costume pieces he wore playing that day were official Potter merchandise illustrating once again how children do not need official merchandise, or even toy merchandise, to enjoy their fan-play.

Many of the children I spoke with participate in some form of Harry Potter imitation, performance, role-play and/or mimicry. For Nicholas, who possesses very little consumer merchandise but a wealth of imagination, his bed becomes the Weasley's flying car, the living-room couch becomes the Hogwarts Express, and the Turner family stairwell becomes Hogwarts grand moving staircase. Ordinary, everyday items become extraordinary magical objects, providing the props Nicholas and his friends can play with. Their everyday, home environment becomes a stage where the children act out scenes from the movies as well as creating their own scenarios. For many

children like Nicholas, the Harry Potter series becomes a springboard for his/her own particular interests and creations. Such dramatic Potter fan-play illustrates that children "... have forged their own paths through the mire, finding ways to link their experiences with the characters and situations from the series in a format that allows them to also connect with other readers of *Harry Potter*" (Bond and Michelson 2003, 113).

Scott describes one of his particular fan-play make-believe scenarios: "Me and my friend who lives across the street, we use my cloaks, my robes, and we put them on and pretend we're chasing after Dementors and werewolves, and pretend we're using spells on them.... We just make it up in our own mind" (2005). Scott even refers to his Harry Potter creation as a "play":

— Scott: When I'm at home I pretend I'm Harry Potter and just make up a little play.

— Contessa: So you create your own little story?

— Scott: Yes.

— Contessa: Do you write it down or act it out?

— Scott: Act it out.

— Contessa: What do you act out?

— Scott: I act out like when Harry Potter is learning Defense Against the Dark Arts, broomstick practice or Quidditch, or doing something like that. (2005)

Amber also describes how she and her friends play Harry Potter. "My friends, we play Harry Potter, and one of my friends [is] Professor McGonagall, and I'm Hermione, and she's asking me questions to see if I know them. And I really like doing that. It's fun" (2005). This is not just the activity of children; teenagers alike eagerly enjoy and participate in role-playing, costuming and acting, as Ariel explains, "We were in Grade Nine and we got in groups of three or four and had to act out a part of the book. It was the first book" (2008).

When using their imaginations to engage in fantasy fan-play, children demonstrate their power to understand, interpret and appropriate. Rather than passively purchasing "official items" and playing with them in a dictated fashion, children selectively



Figure 9. This three-year-old Potter fan plays dress-up by using everyday items found around the house. Photograph by Contessa Small.

manipulate, devise and create their own Harry Potter world. For example, Nicholas's mother, Mrs. Sherry Turner, describes Nicholas's magic potions.

— Mrs. Turner: He does experiments. Concoctions, toothpaste, water, shampoo. Harry Potter potions.

— Contessa: Tell me about your Harry Potter potions?

— Nicholas: I usually make them to clean the carpet. [Laughter] (2005)

Mrs. Turner provides further detail:

I had a bottle, some garlic oil came in it, when we used to buy garlic oil. It's a nice little, like a potion bottle. And I go up there, and there's toothpaste and shampoo. My expensive shampoo! Squeezing in there, with toothpaste and water. And a few days later you'd find these bottles tucked away under the bed and stuff, right? "That's my potions, don't pour them out, that's my potions!" (2005)

The use of everyday objects (such as blankets, towels, chopsticks, toothpaste, garlic oil bottle, and shampoo) illustrate the child's ability to co-op, appropriate, re-work and transform everyday objects into fantasy objects that enhance the imaginative fan-play experience.

Spells as Performance and Power

Many child Potter fans cannot resist the impulse to cast a spell, whether they are role-playing or performing, which involves a collaborative performance of a popular culture text. Child scholars often observe and document this combination of popular culture and folk performance, and the ease with which popular culture and mass media is absorbed into play (Grurgeon 2001, 100). One group of children performed a very complex form of imitation and re-enactment that I recorded (2005). This happened in groups of two, Lyndsay and Lucas, and then followed by Amber and Scott. Each child performed a spell on the other, while the other responded to the spell. For example, when Amber recited her spell, Scott gave a bodily response to it (either with an imaginary jolt to his body, leaping backwards, jumping into the air, or writhing on the floor). What was interesting about this performance was the collaborative effort involved in perception, response and execution. Like a form of dance, the children demonstrate their understanding of what the spells mean, and illustrate their skill in responding to the spell cast on them by their partner. Amber and Scott were particularly excited to show me their display as they said they had practiced for the school talent show but were unable to perform on stage. The children requested to perform the spell demonstration as a part of an upcoming school assembly, but were not given permission. The children were disappointed to have their popular culture interests ignored and excluded from the school event. The incident provides an illustration of myth-conception one, the trivialization of children's play by adults, and the suppression of children's voices as a result.

Instead of a performance that takes place in front of an audience, children also perform spells to demonstrate a hidden agenda and a desire for power. A good example of spell performance occurred when I challenged the group of children with issues of good versus evil, stating that I liked Snape (a Hogwarts professor known to torment Harry). At the time of the interview in 2005, the children were unaware of Snape's true "good" intentions and honorable motives, as the final book was not yet released. They took great pleasure in punishing me for my comment, and while I was distracted and talking to one particular child, they orchestrated a group

magic spell on me. This took place while they were doing impressions and talking about their favorite character.

— Contessa: And is Ron your favorite character?

— Lucas: No, I like Harry, ahm, most of the Defense against the Dark Arts, ahm, Dumbledore, Harry.

— Britney: You already said Harry.

— Lucas: Yeah, I know. Pretty much all of them except Snape. Pretty much, but, yeah, yeah.

— Contessa: I like Snape.

— Scott: No! He's, he's evil.

— Lyndsay: [To Contessa] Oh, you never!

— Contessa: I do!

— Lucas: He's mean to Neville, he's mean to Neville.

— Scott: He helps Voldemort.

[While talking over each other, as Lyndsay quietly tells everyone to put their wands up]

— Lyndsay: [To the others] Okay, wands up.

— Contessa: So, why did you put your wands up?

[Lyndsay laughs loudly]

— Lucas: He's baddddd! [Laughter]

— Contessa: Okay, I just have to ask one more question first... why did you put your wands up though?

— Lyndsay: To kill you.

— Britney: Because you like Snape!

— Contessa: Well maybe I do, maybe I don't.

— Lucas: Snape's evil and he's mean to most of the Gryffindors.

— Lyndsay: Snape's ugly that's why I don't like him.

— Lucas: He's mean to most of them. (2005)

This interview excerpt further illustrates their motivation for casting spells. Because I challenged them with thinking I liked Snape, they acted out their difference of opinion through their fantasy play by casting magical spells with their wands. Planning, reciting and casting spells give children an outlet to express their frustration and dissatisfaction in an imaginary attempt to exert power over their victim. This is illustrated a second time with another spell cast on me; this time they express a combination of mockery (of my adult interview), and want. While talking with one child, several of the other children grew restless and pointed their wands at me, shouting their demands – firstly, they wanted candy (it was Halloween) and secondly, they wanted to mock me interviewing them.

— Contessa: [All kids pointing their wands at me.] Okay, what are you guys doing to me? I feel threatened!

— Britney: Give us candy!

— Lucas: We want to interview you! I want to interview you! (2005)

Much to my amusement, I was cursed a third time in the same interview. While discussing curses, one little girl decides to orchestrate a killing curse and casts it my way.

— All Kids: [Chanting spell together] [*Avada Kedavra!*]

— Contessa: So what happened to me then? What happened?

— Lucas: You died!

— Scott: It was the killing curse.

— Contessa: The killing curse?!

— Lucas: One of them.

— Lyndsay: I decided to make it so I would pass it on. (2005).

Many children explained to me how they use their magic spells on their friends, pesky brothers and sisters, even parents whom they are frustrated with. When someone bothers them, children select a spell to demonstrate their annoyance with those around them (including me). Scott illustrates

this fact quite clearly in the following quote: “Whenever I put on my costume I feel like fighting Voldemort because my sister, she be’s mean to me, she starts being mean to me so I pretend she’s the Death Eater and I chase after her around the house with my wand!” (2005). Eight-year-old Britney also told me that she sometimes cast spells against her little brother, “Ahm, well, sometimes I use them on my brother, my little [brother]...” (2005). However, for Nicholas, spells are directed “Usually at the monsters [that] are hiding” (2005). Therefore, not only do children playfully perform and direct their spells at particular individuals, but spells can also be cast defensively as an imaginary means of warding off potential evil lurking in frightening spaces. This is also illustrated with several other children in the following interview excerpt.

— Contessa: So, do you ever do these spells to people in real life, just playing and stuff?

— All Kids: Yeah.

— Contessa: Like, when would you do it?

— Amber: When we’re outside.

— Scott: I do it on my friends and my sister.

— Contessa: When you’re angry at them or what?

— Scott: Yeah. Sometimes when Dad says he’s in Slytherin.

— Lucas: On the computer, ahm, like I play this little game and I pretend I’m killing Snape. Cause, like, Harry has his wand and he’s going all around trying to get these thingies. And then, ahm, when somebody shows up, I pretend to sleep and I try to kill them.

— Contessa: And how about you? When do you do these spells?

— Lyndsay: When I get really mad at my sister and she annoys me very much, I use the killing curse. (2005)

The following interview excerpt with Molly and Madeline, illustrates the wand as a source of play and power, and also illustrates how children are empowered through their play. Because the adult viewed them strangely when he saw them in their costumes, they decide to cast a spell on him and “stupefy” him when he wasn’t looking. “Stupefy” is one of Rowling’s spells featured in the storyline which, when cast, makes its victims stupid.

- Contessa: Oh, wow. These are specialty wands aren't they?
- Madeline: Yeah. [proudly]
- Contessa: I guess, do you take special pride in the wand?
- Madeline: Oh yeah, no one touches it.
- Molly: [Interrupting and over talking] Yeah! No one touches the wands!
- Madeline: It's up on my shelf. No one touches it.
- Contessa: Oh wow. And do you do spells with your wands?
- Molly: Yeahhhhh. My mom, she has one too. She has Snape's.
- Contessa: Really? Do you do spells back and forth?
- Molly: Yeah, me and [Madeline].
- Madeline: Sometimes when we were younger we used to go around the streets with our wands and our robes...
- Molly: [interrupting and over talking] I know...
- Madeline: ...and we used to be like "Wah-hoo!"
- Molly: And we'd get such weird looks; oh my god, it was hilarious. Remember that time we went down to the park and we were like jumping around...
- Madeline: ...with our hoods up...
- Molly: and then like some dude, ah, like, some guy just came along and just like, stared at us...
- Madeline: Yeah.
- Molly: ...and walked by, and we were like, "Doodity-doo..."
- Madeline: You know!
- Contessa: And did you throw a spell at him after?
- Madeline: Yeah! You know!

— Molly: Yeah! He wasn't looking.

— Madeline: We stupefied him.

— Molly: Yeah, after he wasn't looking, when he walked away. (2011)

The theme of power runs through children's folklore because children compose a subordinate group in relation to adults; they also try to raise their own power and subordinate other younger children. Simon Bronner notes, "Folklore is frequently a medium for the exercise of power by older children over younger children" (1988, 32). In this case, we see popular culture combined with the folk performance and used in the same manner. It is therefore not surprising that children use their imaginative fan-play to express their frustrations with their positions in society and with adults.

One of the reasons why children are not totally overwhelmed by or fully manipulated by the media is their power to appropriate. They can reshape and transform popular culture items for their own purposes. Children appropriate, deviate from and co-opt popular culture and mass media. The nature of children's play, their appetite for constant change and creative release, and their ability to use, manipulate and appropriate makes popular culture and youth complementary companions. "It is this 'formidable ability' to transform reality through play which is the reason the onslaught of manufactured playthings is not catastrophic: children recast and transfigure the new material for their own purposes" (Factor 2001, 31). The ability to recast and transfigure to suit one's purposes is a creative form of empowerment, and debunks myth-conception three, that popular culture is a destructive force and that children are incapable of evading the intent of corporations, manufacturers and parents. This ability to mix and match, as well as recreate art, is one of the reasons why children's relationship with mass media is not one-directional, as many adults believe.

On the other hand, however, is the argument that the media do not seem to have the adverse effects upon children's folk cultures that the media critics predict. Put differently, the cultural 'hegemony' the mass media are supposed to inflict upon our society, wiping out 'local cultures' of all sorts, does not seem to be happening among children. Children's folk cultures turn out to be very resilient, according to this perspective, entering into a dialectic with mass media and appropriating for their own uses its materials and forms. (Mechling 1986, 110)

Children therefore use popular culture to suit their own needs through appropriation. "In their 'dialectic with the media' children have learned to reappropriate their own material from adult-produced written and audio-

visual sources" (Marsh 2001, 91). If adults were to remember this dialectic relationship between youth and the media, many myth-conceptions could be tamed. "This ability to accommodate and create change enables children to ensure that their play traditions will continue to flourish, despite the dire predictions of adults to the contrary" (Marsh 2001, 94).

Tradition, Creativity and Youth Fan-Play

Due to easy access to mass media and entertainment, it is not surprising that childhood today is influenced by popular culture. However, while kid culture is shaped by popular culture, it is also shaped by tradition. My research illustrates that youths are influenced by popular culture (ironically often based on traditional storytelling motifs) yielding activities that combine both creative elements with traditional play. I believe this is what is at the core of children's culture today, and the key to understanding the true nature and "power" of children's culture, as well as the reason why so many adults maintain so many simplified myth-conceptions. It is much too easy to break up children's culture into two neatly divided influences – pop and folk. It is also too simple to separate children's play into two neatly divided forms – conservative and creative. Children absorb, adapt, rework, co-create and transmit both popular and folklore traditions at the same time. Therefore, in this conclusion, I highlight the heart of contemporary children's culture – the conservative/creative hybrid nature of children's play and their tendency to activate their traditional competencies in the face of popular culture influences. Viewing children's culture from this perspective, rather than in black and white terms of good vs. bad, popular vs. folk, or conservative vs. creative, helps explain the true nature of children's play and culture.

The examples of fan-play presented in this paper have demonstrated the conservative and creative nature of children's play, a concept Gary Alan Fine referred to as "Newell's paradox" (1980). Zumwalt reminds us to be cautious over this "arbitrary division" between inventiveness and conservatism. She writes:

While Newell posits a division between these two types of play, children do not – for is it not possible to play a traditional game with innovation, to chant rhymes centuries old with fantasy of the moment? Thus even these two forces in children's folklore twine together in complex interplay. As one individual in her reading of my work has pointed out, 'Innovation has also survived the test of time.' Just as children share in traditional games, so they share in fantasy play. In this sense, innovation

has the same depth in children's folklore as tradition. It was present in the past, it adds intricacies to the traditional games of the moment, and it will remain a force in the culture of childhood. (Zumwalt 1995, 44)

In other words, innovation is traditional. Sutton-Smith also questions Newell's paradox and "how is it that children can have such a reputation as creatures of tradition, as conservers of child culture, and at the same time be known for their innovative fantasies and novel behaviors" (1995, 21). The problem is that all too often researchers have opted to focus on one or the other – the traditional, original, universal and constant (such as the continuity of historical materials) or the specific, inventive, local, creative and emergent. I argue this has been detrimental to the study of children's culture because it separates a process into two separate strands that are in reality intricately woven together. In fact, much research has pointed to the fact that in child's play there really is no distinguishable line between the traditional (folk) and the emergent (popular). For example, research conducted by folklorist Elizabeth Grugeon provides "evidence that new traditions of media-inspired play activities may be performed side by side with older game forms, with no sense of incongruity for the children" (Bishop and Curtis 2001b, 60).

Much of children's play is, in fact, hybrid play such as seen the fantasy fan-play and costuming examples presented here. Because hybrid play cannot be traditionally classified or categorized, it tends to be ignored by scholars. The dismissal of hybrid play by adults may help explain why myth-conception two, the decline of children's play, continues to exist in modern society. June Factor points out that children's culture, with its hybrid play forms, is analogous to a double helix; one strand representing the universal/traditional, and the other representing the local/immediate context of the situation (2001, 29). Factor explains the double helix:

[Y]oungsters are masters of an array of cultural forms and modes of social interaction overlapping but often quite distinct from the adult culture. These subcultures create what I have called a double helix, 'one strand representing the universal, ubiquitous features of childlore, the other the particular manifestations of children's play lives which result from specific circumstances' (Factor 1988:xiv). (2001, 29)

This double helix structure is demonstrated time and time again in children's play. Every fan-play activity is made up of a combination of the universal (traditional acts, behaviors, practices or motifs) with the immediate and emergent (localized creative responses) often creating new

or hybridized expressive forms. The analogy of the double helix to children's culture and fan-play offers a new perspective and approach to studying children. Rethinking our views as well as our definition of children's culture and transmission is therefore critical to future childlore research.

Because of the conservative and creative nature of children's play, John H. McDowell (1995) argues that scholars need a definition of children's folklore and transmission that allows for both the preservation of traditional models and the creation of new models out of traditional materials (1995, 57). Although children demonstrate conservative tendencies, they also create new play forms based on traditional materials, new forms that are local, unique, known only to a few people, and only in existence for a short time. According to McDowell, the notion of tradition must be reconsidered.

In the realm of children's folklore, then, we must rethink the notion of tradition, a concept much used but perhaps not fully understood in folkloristic discourse. In the first place, tradition must be conceived of as persistence through time and space, without any a priori constraints on the *duration* of the time involved, or on the *extension* of this physical space. (1995, 59-60)

McDowell explains that, while some folklorists may not think of mass media-generated folklore as traditional (as such material is often considered to disappear quickly), it is certainly traditional to those who create and utilize it (1995, 60). Therefore, to allow for this paradox and the creation of folklore influenced by mass media, McDowell offers a theory of traditional competencies. He explains that, if we are to change the construction of tradition in the definition of folklore, we may think of traditional competency rather than a set of particular traditional items. "What persists through time and space, in these instances, is the capacity to formulate appropriate folkloric items, as much as the traditional items themselves" (McDowell 1995, 60). McDowell therefore argues the theory of "activation" as an alternative to transmission:

These considerations lead to the suggestion of a neutral term, perhaps *activation* of children's folklore, to refer to the processes set in motion as traditional competencies enter into finite communicative settings among children. Within this constellation, transmission intact or in recognizable variants would remain as one possible outcome, but the folklorist would be alert to the creative, transformative potential of all such encounters. A theory regarding the activation of folklore is necessarily grounded in particular instances of situated human intercourse, and retains an essential bias toward emergence as its central paradigm. (1995, 62; emphasis in original)

This theory places the child in a more active, less passive, light and provides a better approach to understanding how children take control of and feel powerful over adults and adult institutions such as mass media. Rather than being viewed as passive transmitters of traditional materials over time and space, children are viewed as active receivers of information with the ability to respond to current, immediate, emergent, localized environments in traditional capacities.

Factor's double helix analogy and McDowell's theory of traditional competencies and activation allow for the fact that children often respond to popular culture with conventional patterns and behaviors. McDowell's theory also helps in understanding the dialectic relationship children have with the media, how they resist some cultural content, welcome some cultural innovations, and also create and introduce new cultural practices. Kids select, reject and adapt cultural content and vary their play traditions to suit their needs and desires. This process allows children to "update" their culture in ways they see as relevant to their contemporary lives" (Bishop and Curtis 2001, 60).

This is exactly what Harry Potter youth fans accomplish in their fan-play activities. They have all read the books and acknowledge the immediate text, which "fosters a sense of a shared special culture" (Bishop and Curtis 2001, 60). This unites them as a folk group. And, as they create new activities (based on their immediate needs and desires), they develop a strong sense of power, ownership, creativity, pride and mastery of knowledge, thus providing them with critical social, cultural, developmental and psychological experiences. The very nature or process of children's culture and play guarantees a response (play activity) that suits their immediate needs and desires in meaningful ways.

Children, when playing, combine different genres and motifs, and co-create new forms based on the ones provided in popular culture and tradition. Kids are not playing with their toys as prescribed. This was made particularly obvious by the kids who engaged in fantasy play. My research demonstrates that kids don't just copy popular culture; they use it in their own ways. Discussing how children combine popular culture with folklore when playing, Kathleen McDonnell notes:

And they're just as likely to draw from sources other than pop culture for inspiration – fairy tales, well-known works of children's literature, and bits and pieces they know of classical mythology. I've been continually fascinated by the ingenious ways children mix and match elements from

wildly different sources to graft together sometimes startlingly original concoctions. Like true writers everywhere, they create their own synthesis – sending Ninja Turtles into battle against Minotaurs, and fairy queens shopping at the local mall. (1994,18)

And this goes both ways – children using traditional games with popular culture references and using popular culture in traditional ways. The result is a combination of new elements with old patterns much like Rowling's books.⁹ This is exactly what fans do when they make a costume or engage in fantasy play; they take the elements from Rowling – some folklore patterns, some innovation – and combine them in new ways which interest them. In many regards, the process comes full circle. Rowling uses traditional folktale structure and motifs to write popular culture (with new elements), and the books become a source from which children can take either new styles or old conventions and create anew. I therefore encourage those studying youth fan-play to take this participatory, co-creative process into consideration when exploring issues of identity and the interweaving of original and new meanings.

In conclusion, evidence of children's local costuming and imaginative fan-play presented in this paper illustrates how youths are active participants in creating their culture, developing their own ways of generating meaning from and celebrating the series. My research illustrates how youths craft their own homemade costumes, appropriate everyday objects as play objects, and engage in fantasy play and make-believe, all the while combining popular culture influences with their traditional play activities. My exploration of Harry Potter participatory culture provides an image of the child fan as active, creative, critically engaged and capable of resisting, appropriating, and re-circulating materials inspired by the original. It is only by accepting children's play as something of value that can empower children, by rethinking the definitions of children's culture and transmission, and by understanding how popular culture can activate children's traditional competencies that we can as adults better position ourselves for supporting children's full participation in the creation of their own culture.

9. The story structure of Harry Potter is best described as a traditional folktale exhibiting many characteristic plot, motif, character and structural devices, as identified by V. Propp (1968). As well, Harry Potter's life as "the boy who lived" exhibits the characteristics of a mythic hero, as identified by Otto Rank (1909).

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