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## **Black girl magic: the (re)imagining of Hermione Granger: an analysis and autoethnography**

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Black Girl Magic: The (re)Imagining of Hermione Granger  
An Analysis and Autoethnography

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## INTRODUCTION

*I'd very much like to say that I've always loved to read, but that would be patently false. At the age of 6, when I was in the first grade, the grade where Americans generally learn to read, I absolutely hated it. My teacher, Mrs. Johnson, would call on students to stand up and read passages to the class. I would stare in awe as other kids would read their sentences flawlessly, even as butterflies rattled in my stomach, as I waited in dread for her to call on either myself or my twin sister. We were very aware that we couldn't read, and we did not want to broadcast that fact in front of our entire class. When my mother found out, she was appalled. After all, she not only had started reading around the age of two, something my grandmother still proudly boasts of, but she worked as a 6th-grade teacher.*

*And so, we learned. We spent night after night after dinner painstakingly going over words with our mother. And, slowly, the letters and sounds started making sense. They became words which became stories which became adventures. I fell in love. Reading opened the world to me. I got to visit places, meet people, both real and imaginary, and experience things that I never would've dreamed. I usually read books that featured female protagonists. After all, why wouldn't I want to read about all the adventures that a girl could go on?*

*Throughout my childhood, we lived in the south suburbs of Chicago: Calumet City, East Hazel Crest, and Dolton. Dolton is where I spent most of my childhood. My house sat on the corner lot of a tree-lined street and was the neighborhood kids' designated hangout spot. My neighborhood was relatively well-mixed racially, though as far as I was concerned, not in the way that truly mattered. My twin sister and I were two of three girls on the block, but we didn't let that stop us from doing whatever the boys were doing. Though my neighborhood was well-mixed, I attended a predominantly Black elementary school. Reading was always something that our teachers actively encouraged, so it was never strange when one decided to read to us, even when we were "big" kids. When I was in the 4th-grade, my teacher, Mrs. Purnell, would read to us every Tuesday and Thursday after lunch. She gave students the option of listening to her or silently reading a different book of their choice. To be honest, the third option was to take a nap, though Mrs. Purnell didn't look very kindly at that choice. I usually opted to read my own book, but one day, something Mrs. Purnell said caught my attention.*

*She was struggling over the name "Hermione." None of us had ever seen or heard of the name before, and it was interesting to me that she struggled with it. After all, she was a "Teacher," one of those mystical beings who were supposed to know "Everything," and we were in a school full of what other people termed "difficult-to-pronounce names." By that point in life, I had shared a classroom with a Bushon "boo-shawn," a Veriunique "very-unique," a Cashelle "cas-shell," a Casherelle "cash-er-elle," and a Cashmira "cash-meer-a" (none of whom were related). The sound that interrupted my own reading was her sounding out the name. "Her-me-on?" She glanced at us in question, checking to see if perhaps, one of us had heard or seen the word before. Maybe it was the name of someone's cousin. When those of us who were paying attention to her stared back at her blankly, she shrugged and moved on. On that wintery afternoon, I was introduced to a passion that would be a constant for the rest of my life, all because of a difficult-to-pronounce name.*

Reading led me to a variety of interests, including the world of Harry Potter and the world of the *Harry Potter* fandom. The *Harry Potter* fandom has long been known as an extensive community that is extremely accepting of its members. After all, in a world of magic, anything and *anyone* is possible. Numerous members of the LGBTQ+ community have chosen to come out to their fandom peers before coming out to their own families and friends. Men and women all over the world connect, both in-person and online, through stories, reviews, social media groups, conventions, etc., and feel the automatic acceptance of knowing that they are surrounded and embraced by other Potterheads.

However, there has been a slowly filling void. Where are the characters of color in *Harry Potter*? Automatically, the list includes Cho Chang, who is presumably Asian and is portrayed by an actor of Chinese descent in the films; Dean Thomas, who, in the American version of the book, is described as appearing to be of African descent; the Patel twins, who are of South Asian descent, a fact of which is only denoted by their surname in the book; Angelina Johnson who is described as tall, pretty, and having dark skin and hair that was often braided; and Blaise Zabini, who is described as a tall Black boy (Harry Potter Wiki). That is notably six students in the entirety of a massive boarding school with students aged 11 – 18, many of whom hail from London. According to the 2001 London Census, a few years after the first book was published, 12.5% of the population was ethnically diverse (BBC). This means that logically speaking, more than seven students in the entirety of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, which, according to J.K. Rowling, has 1000 students attending, should identify as students of color. However, in the books, the films, and the fandom, the vast majority of characters still identify as white, especially the central characters. However, this is slowly changing as more and more fans

start to picture their main characters differently. Harry Potter is of South Asian descent. Pansy Parkinson is Chinese. Sirius Black is Latino. And Hermione Granger is Black.

A Black Hermione Granger has been a point of hope, jubilation, and relief for many in the fandom. She has also been a point of contention, disbelief, and scorn. This paper, and [the video](#) accompanying it, seek to explore how and why the reimagining of a Black Hermione Granger came to be and why she is important, particularly to the Black community.

## **BIPOC FANDOM SPACES**

*I entered the online fandom community around the same time that I entered the Harry Potter fandom. I honestly can't even tell you how I stumbled upon it, as I had never encountered or experienced anything like it before.*

*Like most suburban households, we had a computer set up in our living room for the family to use. My sister, brother, and I mostly played games. We especially liked Solitaire and the Pinball Machine game. My mother became obsessed with The Sims. My older cousin, who spent the nights at our house because my Aunt was a police officer who worked nights, kept her diary in a Word document that I used to sneak and read every week, like the pesky little sister I basically was. And like most everyone, we had AOL. The whirring long beeps and lost access to phone lines are a cherished (albeit irritating) memory. It was on that computer that I somehow stumbled onto HarryPotterFanFiction.com, and my life has never been the same since. Over the many years since I've been exposed to online fandoms, I've picked up a few fandoms and ships along the way. For a while, I was really into Sailor Moon, Card Captor Sakura, and Inuyasha fanfiction. Throughout high school and most of college, I devoured Twilight fanfiction like it would end (it did, I can no longer stomach Twilight fanfiction for personal reasons), but I always came back to the world of Harry Potter. I never stopped being a fan.*

The question is: who gets to belong to a fandom? Ideally, the answer should be absolutely anyone, but that hasn't always been the case. In their editorial, "Race and ethnicity in fandom," Sarah Gatson and Robin Reid state, "Like any other group identity, one's membership in fandom may have more or less salience given a particular situation. Although one might assume that a fandom identity takes the ultimately salient position in a fandom space, especially an online fandom space created specifically for the development of a particular fandom, what exactly

might that fandom identity entail? Who is to determine the salience of a fan’s other identities in that fan-expressive space? Not to speak about race, gender, class, sexuality—or being pressured not to speak—in a fandom space ends up creating the image of a ‘generic’ or ‘normalized’ fan. Such a fan identity is not free of race, class, gender, or sexuality, but rather is assumed to be the default.”

The collective of BIPOC creators in the digital fandom has been present since the inception of the digital fandom. George Lipsitz comments that “African American battles for resources, rights, and recognition have not only *taken place*, in the figurative term that historians use to describe how events happen, but they have also required blacks literally to *take places*” (17). This not only holds true for the vast majority of members of the African Diaspora when speaking of physical space or even political space but for digital space as well.

One of the most notable examples is that of “Remember Us” (originally written as “Remember Us?”). Created by someone known in the fandom world only as Te, who has been a well-known and relatively prolific member of various fandoms since the late 1990s, “Remember Us” is a fanwork archive geared specifically to fans that were looking for fanworks featuring main characters of color (whether canon<sup>1</sup> or racebent<sup>2</sup>). The URL of “Remember Us” is quite literal in the taking of its space and is written as “dreaming-in-color.net.” The iconic homepage for the site reads:

“do not adjust your monitors [sic]. The color is just fine. *Color* is just fine—and if you don’t believe that by the time you’re through with the stories in this archive? There’s no help for you. Remember Us is an archive dedicated to bringing you fan fiction about characters of

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<sup>1</sup> Canon is the work as created by the original author.

<sup>2</sup> Racebending is switching a character’s “accepted” race/ethnicity to a different race/ethnicity

color....Does that mean ‘no White characters allowed?’ Not quite! It means: *in this archive, the stories will either \*focus\* on characters of color, or characters of color will be a significant part of a given story’s ensemble cast.* We’ve brought the stories here. Your job? Reading it and feeding the authors.”

Remember Us<sup>3</sup> was launched in 2002 after fandom giants such as Fanfiction.net<sup>4</sup>, LiveJournal<sup>5</sup>, and DeviantArt<sup>6</sup>, but unlike those websites, Remember Us is now basically defunct. It has been under construction since 2009. Other websites, like Black Girls Create<sup>7</sup> (founded in 2015 by cousins Bayana Davis and Robyn Jordan), have cropped up to help fill the void, but for the most part, Black and other creators within the BIPOC community have instead chosen to create space for themselves on “mixed” websites by utilizing a tagging system that notes, points out, and keeps track of characters of color (as long as the author makes sure to categorize their stories as such). Two of the most evident examples of this system are from Archive of Our Own<sup>8</sup> (A03) and Tumblr<sup>9</sup>.

Tumblr thrives differently from A03 partly because it truly allows fandom members to insert themselves into fanfictions through reader insert tales. This allows BIPOC creators to not only generate their own content but to embed themselves (specifically their looks, cultures, race/ethnicity) into the stories. This has caused the Black creator fan space to explode, perhaps in a way other websites do not have the bandwidth or capacity to do. With the abundant use of tags (hashtags that allow fans and curious onlookers to locate the content they are searching for) and

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<sup>3</sup> [www.dreaming-in-color.net](http://www.dreaming-in-color.net)

<sup>4</sup> [www.fanfiction.net](http://www.fanfiction.net)

<sup>5</sup> [www.livejournal.com](http://www.livejournal.com)

<sup>6</sup> [www.deviantart.com](http://www.deviantart.com)

<sup>7</sup> <https://blackgirlscreate.org>

<sup>8</sup> <https://archiveofourown.org/>

<sup>9</sup> [www.tumblr.com](http://www.tumblr.com)

with the variety of pages dedicated to specific hashtags, the community of Blackness within fandom is growing and very accepted. However, for all the acceptance available on the website, the creation of such a community of these digital spaces is not without negativity and backlash. For every creator that features a Black character who either is racebent or a non-canon Black character who is romantically involved with a white main character, on average, they get at least one message from a white audience member, demanding that they write their character as white instead. One creator on Tumblr, Sami, who goes by Evansweaters, wrote in a frustrated post:

“Fandom in general, and fic in particular, has alienated black [sic], and poc [sic] overall, readers since day one and for all the posts about diversity in fanfic that circulate on here, I never see anons [anonymous readers] holding their faves [sic] who write white readers accountable for more diversity. Instead, you accost black writers making a space for themselves to make room for *you*. You, who can suspend all [belief] to read about readers who are assassins and mutants, but can’t change or ignore features in a poc [sic] reader fic so you don’t feel ‘uncomfortable’....Coming into black/poc [sic] writers’ spaces to tell them they can’t include themselves in the fanfic world is racist point blank.”

So even though there are digital spaces that exist that are geared specifically for BIPOC creators, there is no way to keep out those who don’t see the necessity of such spaces. Which, though not fine, is unfortunately typical in the world we live in, so POC creators have tried to bridge the gap by bringing racebending a bit further into the mainstream. Enter Hermione Granger.

## **THE INFINITE BIRTHS OF HERMIONE GRANGER**

*Like many others, I was beyond excited to see Emma Watson cast in the role of Hermione Granger. We were the same age, and she was plucked out of the great unknown to be cast as a*

*witch! It seemed, for lack of a better term, magical. At the age of 11 or 12, when that first movie came out, I didn't care that Hermione wasn't Black and didn't look like what I had imagined her to look like all that time; I cared that I was going to see the magic of the Wizarding world on screen.*

*However, though I didn't realize it in my eager excitement and acceptance of Emma Watson as Hermione Granger, something fundamental in my life happened with her casting. I immediately "realized" I was mistaken about who Hermione Granger was. She wasn't a Black girl at all! Just an English one (at the time, due to movies, books, and general ignorance, it never occurred to me that there were people of color in England). Of course, she wouldn't be Black. After all, why would she be? It wasn't often that people like me were reflected in the books I wanted to read, which were mostly fantasy and romance novels by that point. Black girls didn't fall in love (unless it was with someone from the Hood), and Black girls most definitely didn't get to have magical adventures.*



Hermione Granger was first created by J.K. Rowling on a train from Manchester to London's King Cross in 1990. In the books, Hermione was born on September 19<sup>th</sup>, 1979, making her one of the oldest students in her year, as school started on September 1<sup>st</sup> every year, and students weren't permitted until they turned 11. In *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, Hermione is described as having "a bossy sort of voice, lots of bushy brown hair, and rather large front teeth" (Rowling 105). She is the brains that make up the Golden Trio and is always ready with a plan to keep Harry (and her other friends) from certain death. In 2001, the "beautiful waifish pixie that is Emma Watson" (Bell 10) was cast into the role. Emma, at the age of 10, had never before been cast in such a production. She was plucked from obscurity to star in this role, thus becoming the face of Hermione Granger. Whereas Emma grew up to be quite contemporarily beautiful, the character of Hermione Granger was meant to be the "every girl"--

that stereotypical girl within Western society, in particular, who grew up tomboyish and as “one of the boys.” She wasn’t the pretty, popular girl and was never meant to be noticed for her looks (unless a makeover sequence happened for a dance or party of some sort, a la many American teenage movies of the 90s). The everygirl was just there. Plain, friendly, and only noticeable when she became relevant to the main characters when they needed something. She was simply the girl in the background working to make things happen for the main characters---to save them from themselves. Hermione Granger is the every girl, as she is not beautiful but bookish; not sexy, but smart.

In 2015, Noma Dumezweni was cast into the role of an older Hermione Granger in the stage play *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*. This caused quite a bit of furor <sup>10</sup>as Dumezweni is Afro-British and, therefore, quite aesthetically different from Emma Watson.

Sometime between and beyond 1997 and now, there have been infinitely more births of Hermione Granger. These Hermiones differ in outward appearance, race, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, ability, personality—these are the births of fandom Hermione. The element that most of these Hermiones have in common (other than her name, though that too, can change) is her feminism and what she represents.

Hermione derives from the Greek God Hermes and means earthly messenger. Hermione was the daughter of Helen of Troy, the Saint of Ephesus in 117 A.D. in the Bible, and the Queen of Sicily in *The Winter’s Tale* by Shakespeare. In his introduction to *Hermione Granger Saves the World: Essays on the Feminist Heroine of Hogwarts*, author Christopher Bell states, “The

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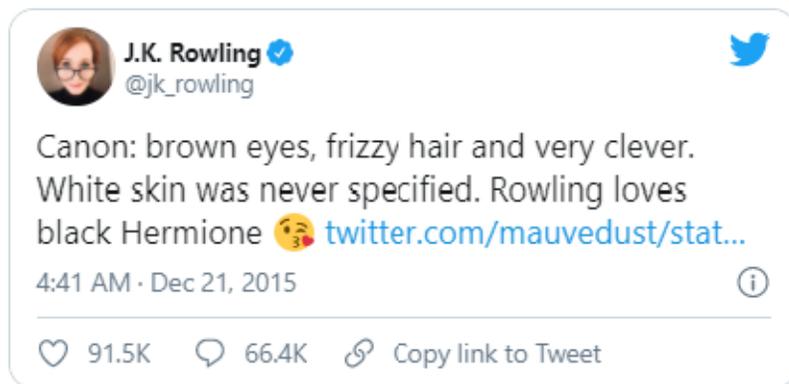
<sup>10</sup> Dumezweni alluded to racist vitriol in multiple interviews, as did J.K. Rowling and John Tiffany, the director of *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*. There are also still various fan comments on articles from either defending or attacking the casting decision based on Dumezweni’s race.

tenacity of the Greek Hermiones, the ability to see the connections of the future of Saint Hermione of Ephesus, and the intelligence of Queen Hermione of Sicily seem to have been passed down to Rowling's Ms. Granger" (5). The Hermione of today is bossy and tenacious, logical, smart, and beautiful in her own way.

Hermione Granger has become a global feminist icon. Equality, one of the principles of which Hermione has always stood for, is also the founding principle of feminism. The earliest forms of feminism gain momentum in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century with the women's suffrage movement. Hermione showcases her own struggles and fights for equality as a Muggle-Born, where she has to fight to be seen and heard as just as good, if not rightfully, better at magic than those born into the magical world. Hermione also fights for the equality of magical creatures, most notably that of house-elves who are treated like servants at best, and slaves at worst, and who have no rights of their own as sentient creatures. The question becomes, is Hermione Granger fighting for equality in this magical world because she has never been treated as a second-class citizen based on race before, or is she fighting because this particular fight for her is actually never-ending? She's just stepped into a slightly different position, where her place isn't inferior based on skin tone but based on who her parents are. No matter which question is the right one, a Black Hermione gives more depth to the answer.

## **RACEBENDING HERMIONE GRANGER**

Because of Noma Dumezweni's portrayal of a Black Hermione Granger, racebending the character has "opened some people's eyes to the lack of diversity in the series and has given them a spark to change that through racebending or creating OCs [original characters] of color" (Diamond, Survey Participant).



According to a tweet sent out by J.K. Rowling in late 2015, after the casting of Noma Dumezweni as Hermione in *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*, she never specified Hermione’s race. Therefore she had intentionally left it open to reader interpretation. However, I, and many other fans, believe that Hermione was initially a white character, despite the lack of racial identity assigned to her description. This is not because Hermione was described as white or anything else, but rather that she wasn’t described as anything. With any of the other six characters of color that were noted above, Rowling placed some sort of marker to indicate that they were characters of color, either by stating it directly as with Dean Thomas, Angelina Johnson, or Blaise Zabini, or with their names as with Cho Chang and the Patel twins. In the Western world, we are conditioned that white is the standard, and everything outside of whiteness is extraordinary, out-of-the-ordinary, and must be noted and commented upon. Because canon Hermione doesn’t exhibit either a spoken identity trait or a name that signifies her Otherness, we know that she is written as white. However, she hasn’t stayed that way.

Fanwork allows audiences to negotiate original works on their own terms, to reflect themselves, their communities, and their own belief systems. As Whitney Phillips states, “audience members are able to adapt, alter, and augment their favorite texts, and layer onto them

new interpretations and personal meanings. Through this process, audience members make something unique, something that's *theirs*" (133). There have been a variety of studies on identity and fandom, as theorists and scholars<sup>11</sup> grapple with how to connect ever-changing

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<sup>11</sup> Gatson, Sarah N., and Robin Anne Reid. "Editorial: Race and Ethnicity in Fandom." *Transformative Works and Cultures*, vol. 8, 2011, doi:10.3983/twc.2011.0392.

Golub, Adam, and Ashley Loup. "Engaging Fan Cultures: What Students Learn When They Study Fans." *Journal of Audience & Reception Studies*, vol. 16, no. 2, 2019, pp. 23–37.

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Stanfill, Mel. "The Unbearable Whiteness of Fandom and Fan Studies." *A Companion to Media Fandom and Fan Studies*, edited by Paul Booth, Wiley Blackwell, 2018, pp. 305–317.

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character identities, as fans have the option to change character's gender, sexual orientation, romantic partners, race, backstory, literally everything about them, while overall, fandom audiences are still majorly white, and tell their stories from a Western lens, which therefore colors the lens of how they build their worlds.

Whiteness as a construct is invisible, in an ironic twist, as whiteness is the most seen construct from a cultural/literature standpoint. Existing not only as the distinct absence of color (for people of color are always noted by their skin tones or "exotic" last names), they (white people), as Peggy McIntosh states in her Ted Talk, "How Studying Privilege Systems Can Strengthen Compassion", "don't see their white privilege, which acts like 'an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, assurances, tools, maps, guides, codebooks, passports, visas, clothes, compass, emergency gear and blank checks'". Because whiteness is the default, it is perhaps not as surprising that Rowling didn't include main characters of color in her writing of the series, as the racial/ethnic breakdown of 1990s London would have us believe. Though I can't say for certain, it is also entirely possible that whiteness as the default in literature is not the only reason that Rowling only included white main characters. As Ellen Pompeo alludes to in her *Red Table Talk* on Race, it is quite possible that Rowling just doesn't "have anyone around her that is a person of color" and therefore just did not include people she does not see. This is a trap or issue that fandoms, in general, fall into as well.

As Mel Stanfill states, "[Most fandoms] engage in structural whiteness through participation in mainstream American culture's default to whiteness and through engagement

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with default-white media....few people even realize that Black women take part in fandom at all.” (306)



Fans of color, at least within the *Harry Potter* fandom, have combated this ‘structural whiteness’ by making Hermione Granger Black. “In making her Black, she gains the ability to have a rich history, culture, and practices that can shine through while still maintaining true to Harry Potter canon. I’ve seen this done beautifully in fanfiction and fanart.” (Elle, Survey Participant) So why is it important that Hermione is Black?

## **BLACK GIRL MAGIC**

“Black Girl Magic is a rallying call of recognition. Embedded in the everyday is a magnificence that is so easy to miss because we’re so mired in the struggle and what society says we are.” – Ava DuVernay (Essence.com)

The phrase “Black Girl Magic” was coined in 2013 by CaShawn Thompson and quickly took over the world. It has been seen on shirts and in magazines. Regular women and celebrities alike have uttered the phrase. And while it is completely meant as an affirming statement, it is also a polarizing one. While many see it as a statement that amplifies the wonder, strength, intelligence, and perseverance of Black women, others see it as othering Black women even further by proclaiming them as magical and not simply human.

I fall into the first category. I choose to see the phrase as proclaiming that there is something recognizably special about Black women—we’re not your average human; we are extraordinary. Hermione Granger is the epitome of Black Girl Magic because she, too, is extraordinary. She walked into a world that wasn’t her own, where she was looked down upon due to the circumstances of her birth, and went on not only to become the “Brightest Witch of her Age” but one of the saviors of the world. If she did all of this as a Black woman, it is doubly incredible because she would’ve had to face all of those mentioned obstacles of the magical world while still facing the very real prejudices and barriers that exist in the real one—ours.

## **INTERVIEWING BLACK CREATORS OF BLACK HERMIONE**

*I didn’t join my first Harry Potter-centered Facebook group until 2017, almost ten years after joining Facebook and nearly 20 years after I first became a Harry Potter fan. After a long hiatus from the Harry Potter world, I joined that first group, and it was like rediscovering an old, much-loved friend. However, things didn’t fit quite the way they used to. I still loved Hermione Granger, and I still shipped (meaning I supported or rooted for a relationship*

*between) Dramione (Draco + Hermione), a relationship that I've loved since I was ten years old. At the age of 26, I figured that it was long past due that I start exploring other ships. Only Hermione remained a constant. I branched out just a little and started reading Hermione paired with other Slytherins, and eventually, Hermione paired with Harry Potter himself. But it still wasn't enough. And I wasn't sure why that was. It wasn't until I had gone to my first ever in-real-life fan event, a Harry Potter-themed dinner, also in 2017, that I realized what had happened.*

*I had grown up, had graduated from a prominent HBCU (Historically Black College or University), and I was literally working within the field of Diversity & Inclusion. It was as I looked around at this event and noticed that my twin sister and I, as well as our friend, Michael\*, were the only black people at this sold-out event, that, for the first time, I wondered, "why are the vast majority of these characters White?"*

*From there, I made it my mission to search out iterations of a Black Hermione Granger in the fanfiction I was reading. It wasn't my only requirement, and I don't only read Black Hermione Granger, but I was purposeful in my search, and that's how I stumbled upon BadLuckVixen13, Black Girls Create, and Eliyannah Yisrael's "Hermione Granger & The Quarter-Life Crisis."*

While the stereotype of women in fandom generally precludes women of color as participants and producers of content, it is nevertheless true that Black and Brown female bodies do exist in fan communities. Producing content is a necessary act of agency for women of color who strive for visibility in a landscape that favors a more normative (read: white) fan identity that often dismisses and diminishes the desires of its diverse body to see themselves equally represented not only on screen but in the fan community at large. (Warner 34)

Ellise Brooks is the girl behind the penname of the "1 Million for Black Hermione"<sup>12</sup> phenomenon. She introduced me to my first Black fanfiction Hermione. The series was started on November 3rd, 2016, and currently boasts 611,043 words and 48 different works. BadLuckVixen13 covers various topics, including a focus on mental health and healthy relationships (familial, platonic, and romantic). Of course, every single story centers around a Black Hermione Granger. When asked about why she undertook such a task, Brooks stated, "Drawing a color marker on Emma Watson isn't what the point is of Black Hermione. I wanted to explore what it actually means to be a Black woman in the wizarding world coming out of the

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<sup>12</sup> <https://archiveofourown.org/series/579316>

muggle world...[I chose 1 million words] because it's an enormous number of words. When you think of an impactful amount of words, 10,000 just doesn't cut it."

Though she hasn't made it to 1 million words quite yet, she has made an impact. Her works have been interacted with over 144,000 times<sup>13</sup>, as evidenced by how many "hits" each story has had (how many times a work has been accessed). Overall, she states her audience reception has been positive because her characterization of Hermione feels so real. This is not just because she writes a Black Hermione Granger, but because she makes sure to bring a "consideration of all her other characteristics" (BadLuckVixen13, Interview with Author 2021) to her writing. Her Hermione isn't just about her Blackness—she's about everything that her humanness encompasses, including her Blackness.

On January 2nd, 2017, Eliyannah Yisrael released a 52-second video to YouTube. The video entitled *Hermione Granger and the Quarter-Life Crisis*<sup>14</sup> immediately started garnering notice. Yisrael, the creator of Sunshine Moxie Entertainment, a production company "at the intersection of race, gender, and damn good storytelling," has been a Potterhead since the early 2000s when her younger brother wanted to read *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* after watching the first two movies. She agreed on behalf of her mother to screen the book to make sure that it wouldn't corrupt his good, Christian upbringing. She brought it with her to college and spent the day reading it instead of attending her classes. She's been hooked ever since. Fast-

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<sup>13</sup> As of May 20, 2021

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gIC4u47HykE>

forward a decade or so, and Yisrael wanted to delve into a character that was more like her—not just Black but lost.

Yisrael was struggling with what she was supposed to do with her life. She had grown up with a love of books that spurred her own creative efforts. She had gone to school for filmmaking but still wasn't making films. She felt rudderless (Yisrael, Interview with Author 2021) and began



Petty Winslow  
@hedon\_thoughts

Hermione Granger  
#BlackHogwarts



Amanda Stenberg

to wonder if Hermione ever felt the same way.

“Throughout the course of the books, [Hermione’s] personal life outside of Harry and Ron and the fight just disappears....She saved the world, and then everybody just moved on. And somehow, she just married this guy and became a wife. And I was just kind of sitting there and was like, this is just wrong. And so then I thought, if I do a show, it has to be about her finding a way to reclaim herself” (Yisrael, Interview with Author 2021).

So, in 2015, she moved forward with creating her version of Hermione—a lost Black young woman who just wanted to figure out who she was and who she was meant to be.

It was a hit. It has accumulated over 226,000 views and has been mentioned on numerous websites and publications. People from all around the world were connecting with this Hermione and her quarter-life crisis.

In January 2018, #BlackHogwarts began trending on Twitter. The hashtag blew up when comedian Milverton Saint (aka Petty Winslow, @hedon\_thoughts on Twitter) put together his dream cast of #BlackHogwarts and shared it on social media. And it just so happened that in February of 2018, the creators of Black Girls Create (BGC) were launching their first Black

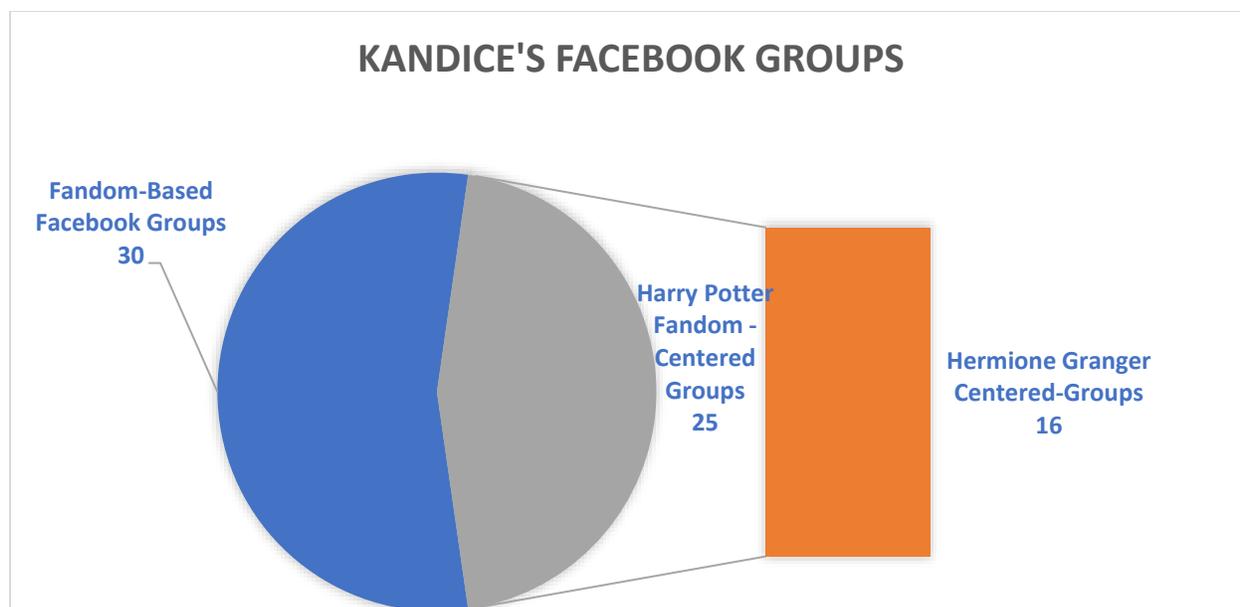
Wizard History month. A month where every day would be dedicated to a Black witch or wizard or black history fact of the wizarding world. The incoming popularity also allowed newcomers to discover the Hogwarts Black Student Union, a space that Bayana and Robyn had created for “Black Potterheads to imagine what it’s like to be Black in the Wizarding World [and] read stories of Black students at Hogwarts, Black businesses in the Potterverse, and Black Wizard History”(blackgirlscreate.org). Before that point, BGC “didn’t even have 1,000 followers and in doing Black Wizard History month right after #BlackHogwarts started trending, [they] were able to retain a lot of that audience and continue to grow it” (Davis).

Black Hermione Granger has been thrust into the spotlight via a myriad of avenues, not the least of which include the media listed above.

## **SURVEYING THE HARRY POTTER ONLINE FANDOM**

*When preparing my survey questions about this study, I was extremely anxious. While the Harry Potter fandom had been relatively welcoming to me for many years, and I had heard of them welcoming certain others, most notably from the LGBTQ+ community (though there’s still a distinct lack of trans-related stories), I was going to do something that wasn’t quite done—I was going to talk about color. It’s not that color is banned from being talked about in these circles; it just isn’t publicized quite so loudly.*

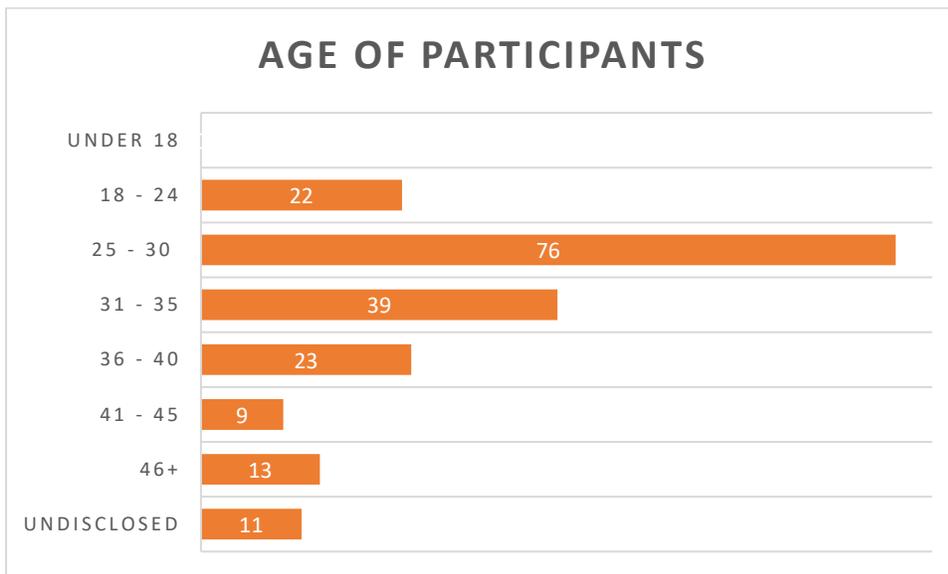
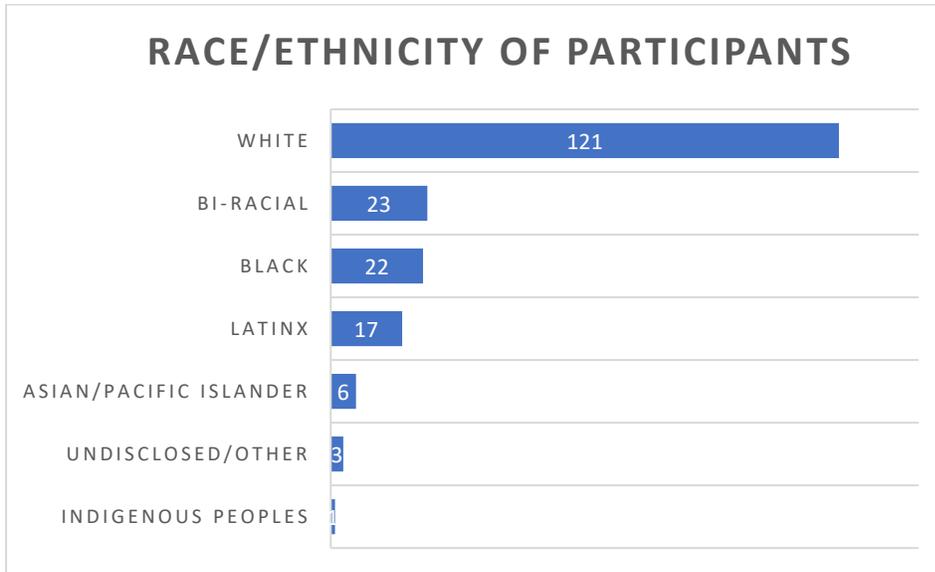
*I found out, through this research, that I am part of 30 different fan groups on Facebook (see Appendix 1), which would talk about the world of Harry Potter in some way, shape, or form. And, I knew that the vast majority of the members of these groups were White. I expected quite a bit of backlash when posting my request to the public, especially while we were in the political climate that we were in. With the social unrest caused in part by an American President who spewed hate throughout his campaign (Trump) and multiple murders of Black bodies by police that were witnessed and garnered a great deal of global attention since we were still amid a worldwide pandemic. Therefore, the world was forced to stand still and watch as people died unnecessarily. I gathered my courage, took a deep breath, and pressed “post” anyway.*

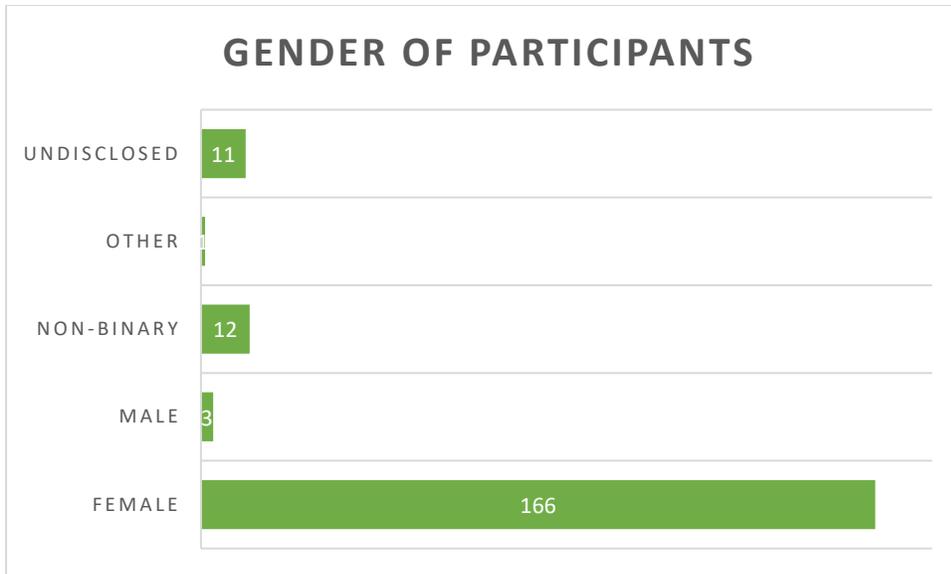


Black fans are vastly outnumbered when it comes to fandom, but specifically, the *Harry Potter* fandom, and in many areas, are still not as tolerated or seen as legitimate fans due only to their color. This fact is both evident and subtle within the world of the *Harry Potter* fandom.

When posting my invitation to fans to participate in my survey, I had a series of expectations. I expected that I would encounter some angry fans that questioned why it mattered if Hermione was Black or White—I expected to receive some hate. I also expected that since I was asking about interaction with a Black Hermione Granger, that the majority of my responses would come from those who also identified as Black females. I was surprised when most of my assumptions proved incorrect. I sent my survey out on the evening of January 8th, 2021, and closed it on March 27th, 2021. Within those 11 weeks, the survey received 941 views; was started 641 times; had 258 click-throughs, and was completed either via Typeform or Zoom 193 times. Of those who wrote answers, only one or two of them spewed hate. Only 11% of

participants identified as Black (with an additional 7% identifying as Mixed/Bi-Racial of African descent). Only 86% identified as female (rather than the 100% that I was expecting).





The vast majority of participants were excited that I was exploring the ins and outs of a Black Hermione Granger. For those who didn't identify as people of color, it served one of two purposes. A Black Hermione either allowed them to share *Harry Potter* with their loved ones of color, allowing them to see a reflection and representation of themselves in the world-renown tale or, it allowed them to interact with a culture not their own in a safe and relatively unintrusive way. For those who identified as Black or even as other People of Color, it lent validation.

Alfred L. Martin Jr. states that “part of the hierarchy for black fans with respect to their fan objects is rooted in FOMO: fear of missing out” (748). Interestingly enough, while that is certainly true as Martin discusses it in terms of the movie *The Black Panther*, I've found that something similar could be said of many of the White fans I surveyed, whether they realized it or not—only, instead of FOMO, this more showcased a desire to be considered “accepting,” or even “woke” (a word used in an interview) especially after the series of Black deaths caused by police during the spring and summer of 2020 in America.

For Black fans, they seemed to lean into the dual fandom, as characterized by Warner (253-4) “that intertwines love for the fan object and hunger for visibility. For black fans, images cease to

necessarily “just” be reduced to their “positive” or “negative” attributes; rather, fan objects are chosen based upon their fitness as a role model” (Martin 746)

For Black fans, having the “Brightest Witch of her Age,” one-third of the “Golden Trio” and savior of the Wizarding World identify as Black lent validation. In claiming Hermione, we claim that we can be these things too. Many times throughout my conversations with Black fans about a Black Hermione Granger, the word “representation” continuously came up, as this anonymous respondent had to say:

“Representation matters. Big ass period. Let people look their biases in the face. Let people see black women in different roles other than the stereotypical ones you always see them in. Let little black girls see a smart and passionate character look like them. Let little black boys see smart and passionate characters that look like their sister. Let little white kids see smart and passionate characters that happen to be black. It changes things. It changes perspective.”

We, as Black fans, are delighted to have a bright, strong, and courageous heroine and willingly ignore or say very little about Hermione’s negative traits. As characterized in the books, Hermione Granger is a bossy know-it-all. When speaking with fans, the term was said with a smile—it was a good thing. Bossy is taken for leadership; know-it-all is just said in conjunction with how much Hermione likes to read. However, Hermione Granger is also ruthless. This is the same girl who set a professor on fire in her first year, kept a woman in a jar, and tricked a woman into the Forbidden Forest to be carried off by centaurs. Does her ruthlessness negate her capability to be a role model? No. When asked about the importance of the portrayal of a Black Hermione Granger, one of the most common responses was something along the lines of what another anonymous respondent had to say, “We need more portrayal of different types of black women so we can imagine ourselves beyond what we think to be true, socially, politically, personally. Black HG is currently the most powerful version of that because of the size of the HP fandom.” I agree and believe these portrayals should continue to highlight

the positive traits of these characters while not ignoring the negative ones. As Stuart Hall so eloquently put it:

“Moreover, we tend to privilege experience itself, as if black life is lived experience outside of representation. We have only, as it were, to express what we already know we are. Instead, it is only through the way in which we represent and imagine ourselves that we come to know how we are constituted and who we are. (111)

Hermione’s characterization speaks not only to how Black people, but specifically Black women, have the option of being good, courageous, and the smartest people in the room, but also speaks to how even those so-called negative traits that are attributed to us, like “loud” and “aggressive” can be flipped on their heads so that they mean confidence and assurance instead. Hermione is ruthless, yes, but this ruthlessness belied loyalty, perseverance, and a willingness to get things done, whatever the cost.

## **CONCLUSION**

Though I’ve been highly passionate about this project, I still struggled to put into words the answer to my research question. Why does a Black Hermione Granger matter? She matters because pop culture matters. “Pop culture is a collection of ideas that permeate the lives of a society and has a significant impact on the way we view the world around us” (Vega and Miller). Black pop culture matters. Historically, Black people have been at the forefront of what has become trendy, especially in the Western world. The most obvious tie to this is music. From jazz to rock to hip-hop and rap, Black people have cultivated a cool persona that have unfortunately left them out of other interests like those of fandoms and fan cultures. We are

more than a monolith and deserve to be seen more than as just a people who are musically inclined, who juke, gamble, and smoke, which is still one of the most prominent preconceptions that I and others have to combat when stepping outside of our communities. Never is the preconception that I have intellectual pursuits. A Black Hermione Granger changes that.

A black Hermione Granger matters because representation matters. However, in a time where “representation matters” has become an overused buzzword of a rallying cry, as evidenced in many ways, especially with the Penguin Random House/Barnes & Noble “Diverse Editions” debacle<sup>15</sup>, it is no longer enough.

Of course, representation does still matter. The phrase has become supremely popular (albeit overused) over the past decade because people need to see and hear stories about people who look, live, and sound like them, not just because it affects how they see themselves, but it affects how others see them, and therefore how society might portray them moving forward. However, now, in 2021, we should be ushering in a new era. We should be moving past representation and deeper into inclusion. The spaces discussed above, the ones that are or were meant just for us, or even just for us and our allies, are important and should be honored and cherished. But, with the growing popularity and saturation of a Black Hermione Granger that is being introduced into fanworks, even by non-Black/non-POC authors, we see something different. Black Hermione is coming out of the shadows and into the light. After all, we aren't monsters<sup>16</sup> to be hidden. A Black Hermione Granger indicates that we no longer have to remain

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<sup>15</sup> The publishing company/book seller, in a misguided attempt to honor Black History Month by calling out that certain classic texts held no basis for believing that the main characters were White (as with Hermione, their races weren't specified), changed the covers of 12 classic texts including *Frankenstein*, *The Wizard of Oz*, and *Romeo and Juliet* to show main characters of color instead of just introducing more books with actual diverse characters.

<sup>16</sup> “You guys know about vampires? ... You know, vampires have no reflections in a mirror? There's this idea that monsters don't have reflections in a mirror. And what I've always thought isn't that monsters don't have reflections in a mirror. It's that if you want to make a human being into a

as the “cool thing,” though hip-hop is trendier than ever and that now we can be the “everyday thing.” I think Alanna Bennett said it best:

Hermione will always be an icon, no matter what color her skin. The least we can do is provide her with more room to be that icon. Maybe along the way more people will be able to see themselves reflected back at them. – What a Racebent Hermione Really Represents

My hope is that one day, we’ll see a Black Hermione, or an Asian Hermione, or a Latinx Hermione and that no one will think to comment on it or point it out because it is so commonplace. I hope that one day when someone inevitably does bring up and question why this particular Hermione Granger is Black, that the reader will look up and say, “What? Of course, she is.”

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monster, deny them, at the cultural level, any reflection of themselves. And growing up, I felt like a monster in some ways. I didn’t see myself reflected at all. I was like, “Yo, is something wrong with me? That the whole society seems to think that people like me don’t exist?” And part of what inspired me, was this deep desire that before I died, I would make a couple of mirrors. That I would make some mirrors so that kids like me see themselves reflected back and might not feel so monstrous for it.” – Junot Diaz

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## APPENDIX 1

The artists of the art featured above.

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## APPENDIX 2

A list of Facebook groups I reached out to when searching for survey participants/interviews.

[A Witch and Her Marauders](#)

[Book Girl Magic](#)

[Chicago POC Cosplayers](#)

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[Harmony & Co. \(18+\)](#)

[Harry Potter Fanfiction](#)

[Hermione's Haven \(18+\)](#)

[Hermione's Nook](#)

[Ladies of Howard University](#)

[Ravenclaw Common Room](#)

[Restricted Section: Multi + Triads Only \(18+\)](#)

[Shrieking Shack Society](#)

[Strictly Dramione](#)

[Strictly Sirmione](#)

[The Death Eater Express](#)

[The Extraordinary Journey of a Black Nerd: Backup Group](#)

[The Fairest of the Rare](#)

[The Severus Snape Appreciation Guild](#)

[The Vanishing Cabinet](#)

[The Wolf's Lair](#)

[Tomione Fanfics](#)

[Weasleys, Witches, & Writers](#)

We Simp Weasley 18+ (no link available, as this particular group changes its name once a month or so)

### APPENDIX 3

The survey that was available through Typeform. The questions that were asked in the interviews are in bold.

#### **Black Girl Magic: The (re)Making of Hermione Granger – Survey Questions**

**Disclaimer 1:** This survey is particularly looking at a “racebent” Black-girl Hermione Granger. If you don’t interact with that portrayal of her character, please do not participate in this survey. \*Racebending is when the description of a character’s regularly perceived race is changed. In this case, Hermione Granger is assumed to be white primarily due to Emma Watson’s portrayal of the character. –No shade to Emma!

**Disclaimer 2:** You do not have to identify as of African descent to take part in this survey.

#### **Demographics:**

1. Which of the following are you? You can choose more than one!
  - a. Writer
  - b. Reader
  - c. Artist
  - d. Cosplayer
  - e. Other
2. What is your national identity?
3. What is your racial/ethnic identity?
4. What is your age range?
  - a. 18-24
  - b. 25-30
  - c. 31-35
  - d. 36-40
  - e. 41-45
  - f. 46+
5. Would you be willing to do a video interview instead of this survey?

#### **The Harry Potter Franchise:**

6. Which of the following have you interacted with? You can choose more than one.
  - a. Some, Most, or All of the *Harry Potter* books
  - b. Some, Most, or All of the *Harry Potter* movies
  - c. *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* play
  - d. *Harry Potter* Fanfiction
  - e. *Harry Potter* Fanart
  - f. *Harry Potter* cosplay
  - g. Other
7. If you chose “other” please describe.
8. **When did you first get involved in the *Harry Potter* fandom? Why?**

**9. What does it mean, to you, to be part of the fandom?**

**Hermione Granger**

**10. In your own words, who is Hermione Granger? Why do you love her?**

11. Why are you or were you drawn to Hermione Granger?

12. When you read *Harry Potter*, or interact with the *Harry Potter* franchise, do you read or imagine Hermione Granger as Black (or possibly biracial, with part of her identity as Black)?

**13. Why do you interact with the portrayal of a Black Hermione Granger? Please be as detailed as possible.**

**14. Why and when did you first start reading or imagining Hermione Granger as Black?**

15. If you are a creator, what has the audience reception been to your work when you portray a Black Hermione Granger?

**16. Have you noticed an increase in the number of works that have portrayed Hermione Granger as Black?**

**17. How have you reacted to the increase in the number of works that have portrayed Hermione Granger as Black?**

18. After the protests about George Floyd in the States, there has been an increase in the amount of representation of Black Hermione Granger, similar to what happened after the casting of Noma Dumezweni in *Harry Potter & the Cursed Child*.

a. Do you agree with the above statement?

b. Do you think that momentum will continue its upward trend or do you think it will trickle out? Why?

**Black Girl Magic:**

\*\*Questions only asked to participants of African descent

**19. What does it mean to identify as Black, or African descent, or as part of the African diaspora? What attributes, customs, struggles, and opportunities exist because of it?**

**20. Why is the portrayal of a Black Hermione Granger important?**

**21. What has “racebending” Hermione Granger done to and for the *Harry Potter* fandom?**

**Fanwork:**

22. Are you comfortable sharing your name in my research?

23. Are you comfortable sharing your email address with me?

24. Do I have your permission to share your work in my research either in the video or the paper itself?

25. Please enter your website(s) and/or fanvideo(s) so I can check out your work. You can also email me at [krose21@depaul.edu](mailto:krose21@depaul.edu)

Thank you for participating in my survey! It is much appreciated!