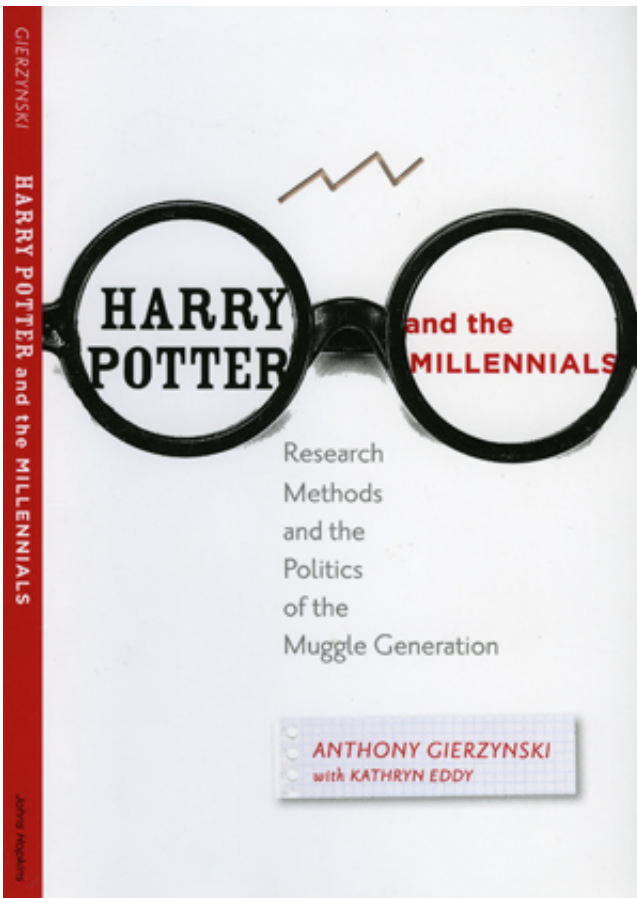


New book reveals political impact of 'Harry Potter' series on millennials

June 14 2013, by Jon C. Reidel



(Phys.org) —To what extent do stories we read and watch for fun have an impact on our political views and thinking? A new book by a political science professor at the University of Vermont, based on a national

survey of college students, suggests that the influence of the *Harry Potter* series on the Millennial Generation (1982-2002) may extend far beyond the fantasy world of Hogwarts and wizardry.

Harry Potter and the Millennials: Research Methods and the Politics of the Muggle Generation (John Hopkins University Press, 2013) reveals that readers of the seven-book series and viewers of the movie franchise tend to be more open to diversity; politically tolerant; less authoritarian; less likely to support the use of deadly force or torture; more politically active; and are more likely to have a negative view of the Bush administration. About 60 percent of those who read all of the books said they voted for Obama in 2008, and 83 percent of the full-series readers said they viewed the Bush Administration unfavorably.

"Whether the book provided new perspectives or reinforced those already in their world, the deep immersion in the story and identification with the characters almost guaranteed an alignment of fans' perspectives with those of the wizarding world, perspectives that would differentiate them from their nonfan peers," says author Anthony Gierzynski, author of four books, including *Saving American Elections: A Diagnosis and Prescription for a Healthier Democracy* (Cambria Press, 2011).

Gierzynski and students in his "Film, TV and Public Opinion" course collected qualitative data via interviews, essays and an [anonymous survey](#) of 1,100 college students from 2009 to 2011. An extensive questionnaire determined levels of *Harry Potter* fandom on a scale of one through five based on a quiz and readership levels. About 30 percent self-reported as being "very much into *Harry Potter*" with 35 percent having read all seven books in the series and two-thirds at least some of the books. A total of 45 percent had seen all of the movies and 86 percent at least some of them.

The majority of the 1,100 students who took the survey were the same

age as the characters in the series (about 11) when the first book was released in 1997. They were enrolled at the University of Vermont, University of Mississippi, Mississippi State University, Adirondack Community College, California Polytechnic State University, Iowa State and Pacific Lutheran University.

Respondents were then asked a series of questions designed to measure the effects of the series' main lessons on readers. To test whether the acceptance of diversity by Harry and his friends mirrored that of readers, for example, respondents were asked how they felt about groups who have been subject to discrimination in the United States including Muslims, African Americans, undocumented immigrants and homosexuals. Respondents were asked to rate their feelings on a four-point "feeling thermometer" with zero being "very cold or unfavorable feeling" and four representing "100 degrees, very warm or favorable feeling." After adding up each respondent's total feeling scores toward all of the groups and comparing the results to non-fans, Gierzynski found that readers of all the books, as compared to the rest of the sample, evinced statistically significant warmer feelings toward the different groups.

The finding that fans of the boy wizard participate more in political activities than nonfans, "perhaps reflects the story's lesson on the need to act, and efficacy of doing something to fight what is 'wrong' in the world," posits Gierzynski, who used political socialization theory and the effects of learning to determine a set of 10 hypotheses. Other results found that *Harry Potter* fans (compared to nonfans) value equality more; are less likely to exhibit an authoritarian predisposition (tendency to show obedience to authorities, conform to rules and norms, and to disdain those not part of the in-group); and evince a greater level of skepticism and a lower level of cynicism.

While Gierzynski acknowledges correlation does not prove causation, he

writes that "there is abundant evidence that [Harry Potter](#) fans are different from nonfans on the very subjects that were covered in the lessons of the series." He likens the impact of *Harry Potter* on Millennials to that of *Star Wars* on Generation X, the Beatles on Boomers, and *Casablanca* on the GI Generation.

"It is, ultimately, impossible to prove that the *Harry Potter* phenomenon caused fans to view politics in ways that reflect the lessons of the books," concludes Gierzynski, who took an interdisciplinary approach to the book, pulling from the fields of communications, politics, English literature and psychology, among others. "But the results of the more rigorous statistical tests that we report on, as well as the words of Millennials themselves on this issue, leave us confident that the story of the struggles of the wizarding world against Voldemort did indeed play an important role in the political development of many Millennials."

Provided by University of Vermont

Citation: New book reveals political impact of 'Harry Potter' series on millennials (2013, June 14) retrieved 17 May 2024 from

<https://phys.org/news/2013-06-reveals-political-impact-harry-potter.html>

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