

Research Article

Flying Feminism: Quidditch as a Site of Female Empowerment in The Harry Potter Narrative

Renu

Research Scholar, Department of English, Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Gorakhpur University, Uttar Pradesh, India;
renu96626@gmail.com

Dr. Shikha Singh

Professor, Department of English, Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Gorakhpur University, Uttar Pradesh, India;
drshikhasingh303@gmail.com

Accepted version published on 5 December 2025

DOI <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17831014>

Abstract: This paper examines how Quidditch, the magical sport in J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter series, empowers women and challenges gender norms in a fantasy world often shaped by patriarchy. While Quidditch is usually seen as a setting for adventure and teamwork, it also gives female characters a chance to defy stereotypes. The paper examines the physical and mental strengths of female players, showing that women in co-ed sports can perform as well as, and sometimes better than, their male teammates. By focusing on Ginny Weasley, Angelina Johnson, and Cho Chang, the paper argues that Rowling uses Quidditch to show female empowerment through action. It also discusses how the co-ed nature of Quidditch breaks down gender barriers, letting female players compete in a fair environment with fewer traditional limits. Overall, the analysis sees Quidditch as a metaphor for feminist progress, showing how movement, visibility, and skill can expand what women can do in the Wizarding World.

Keywords: sports; magic; quidditch; Hogwarts



Introduction

Gender parity in sports is a constant challenge, as most athletic competitions are still organized along gendered lines, following the stereotypical notion regarding females in sports. On the other hand, some mixed-gender sports, such as tennis, table tennis, and badminton, permit both men and women to play together; yet these typically take the form of paired events rather than whole team participation. Pure mixed-gender team sports are exceptionally rare in the real world. However, in J.K. Rowling's world-famous *Harry Potter* series, the magical sport of Quidditch offers a striking fictional substitute and made history by portraying influential female players in a mixed-gender team. In this realm, both male and female players compete side by side under the same rules and expectations. Within the wizarding world, Rowling builds a sporting environment that, unlike many of its real-world counterparts, implicitly promotes gender balance and equity.

The *Harry Potter* series, renowned for its global cultural impact, mirrors many real-world social structures and inequalities—ranging from class divisions and racial hierarchies to institutional politics. Nevertheless, through Quidditch, Rowling introduces a sporting context that subtly subverts patriarchal conventions. The presence of female characters such as Madam Hooch, the Quidditch coach and referee at Hogwarts, exemplifies women's potential for leadership in athletic spaces. Though her role receives minor narrative attention, Madam Hooch occupies a position of authority that contrasts with wider social tendencies to undervalue women's leadership in sports. As Adrienne N. Milner and Jomills Henry Braddock observe in *Women in Sports: Breaking Barriers, Facing Obstacles*, women coaches and leaders are often perceived as possessing "different 'essential skills' compared to men," with those skills "less respected and less authoritative than leadership skills associated with male coaches and masculinity" (4). Rowling's depiction of Madam Hooch, therefore, stands as a quiet challenge to such gendered hierarchies.

Quidditch itself is a coeducational team sport, composed of seven players—three Chasers, two Beaters, one Keeper, and one Seeker—without any restrictions based on gender. Teams are formed not by gender identity but by individual talent, courage, and strategic acumen. Although male players such as Harry Potter and Viktor Krum receive fame for their achievements as Seekers, female players are portrayed as equally skilled, competitive, and influential. Female characters like Ginny Weasley, Angelina Johnson, and Cho Chang exemplify the athletic and mental capabilities of women who excel within a mixed-gender framework, proving that strength and skill are not confined to masculinity. Through these characters, Rowling reimagines a sporting culture in which performance, rather than gender, determines success.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative, textual analysis of J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series to explore how Quidditch functions as a site of gender equality and female empowerment. The research focuses primarily on close readings of key passages involving female Quidditch players—specifically Ginny Weasley, Angelina Johnson, and



Cho Chang—as well as the character of Madam Hooch, who represents female leadership within the sport. Through examining descriptions of Quidditch rules, selection process, players, co-ed competitions, and the flying metaphor, the study identifies how Rowling constructs athletic competence, leadership, and confidence in relation to gender.

Ginny Weasley: Rewriting the Tomboy Trope

Ginny Weasley's time playing Quidditch helps her become more confident and she challenges traditional gender roles in the *Harry Potter* series. As the youngest and only girl in the Weasley family, Ginny starts out in the background and appears to need protection. But Quidditch changes that. When she succeeds as both a Chaser and later a Seeker, Ginny shows skill, intelligence, and toughness. These are qualities associated with leadership and courage, not passivity or a need for help. Quidditch allows Ginny to build her own identity, apart from her family's reputation. She shows that being a girl in a male-dominated sport and magical world does not hold her back. Playing Quidditch makes Ginny more confident and independent. This new confidence shows up later when she takes an active role in Dumbledore's Army and shows bravery during the final battle against Voldemort. This analysis highlights a broader idea about gender and empowerment: participating in sports and competition can help people grow and support fairness. Ginny's story shows that joining challenging activities can break down stereotypes about what it means to be strong and female. In the end, she proves that determination and passion can change how people view strong female characters, both in Quidditch and beyond.

Angelina Johnson: Leadership and Racialized Femininity

Angelina Johnson stands for both gender and racial empowerment in the *Harry Potter* series. As Gryffindor's Quidditch captain, Angelina leads in a place where men usually have the most power. Her spot on the team is not just about being good at sports, but also about what it means to be a Black woman in a world where people like her are not often seen. Angelina's character is an example of Cathy J. Cohen's ideas about Black women's leadership and action. Cohen's quote—"There have always been radical Black women or radical women engaged in mobilization, organizing, and leadership"—shows that Black women have always played a big part in making change, even when their work is ignored by history and popular culture. This connection places Angelina among many Black women leaders who fight to be seen and change what leadership means.

In the Wizarding World, Angelina's character embodies this history of strength and visibility. Her hard work, intelligence, and skills make her a respected captain, and her focus on working together and fairness show what good leadership is. By doing well in a sport for both boys and girls, she challenges ideas about what people of different races and genders can do, showing that anyone can succeed. Also, her flying skills and smart planning inspire both boys and girls on the team, showing that talent and hard work belong to everyone. Angelina's place on the team is not just about her own strength but also a quiet way to push back against the usual ideas about who gets to



lead, win, and be noticed. Angelina Johnson is a win for many groups in stories: she shows how women of color can be leaders, strong, and confident in places where they are often left out. Her character reminds readers that seeing different kinds of people in powerful roles is important, and that having diversity in leadership makes both stories and real life better.

Cho Chang: Emotionality, Stereotypes, and Sporting Identity

Cho Chang also challenges gender stereotypes through her role in Quidditch. At first, Cho is shown as gentle, quiet, and open with her feelings, fitting the “delicate Asian female” stereotype, which often describes Asian women as shy and reserved. But as Seeker for Ravenclaw’s Quidditch team, she goes against this idea. The Seeker role requires speed, focus, and accuracy, qualities often seen as more common among boys in sports. By doing well, Cho shows that strength and determination can go hand in hand with kindness and gentleness, broadening how femininity and Asian identity are depicted in books. After Cedric Diggory’s death, Cho’s sadness and openness become central to her story. Some fans and even characters in the series criticize her for showing her feelings, seeing them as a weakness or being too emotional. This reaction shows a double standard often put on women: they are expected to share their feelings, but are judged when they show too much. Cho’s experience shows how society limits how women can express their feelings, especially women of color, who often face extra stereotypes about how they should act. Even though people judge her, Cho’s athletic skill is never doubted. Her strong performance in Quidditch proves her ability and toughness. The difference between her emotional struggles and her steady athletic talent makes her character feel more real and layered, so readers see her as more than just a symbol or stereotype. She becomes a well-rounded character –a young woman who faces love, loss, and pressure while still excelling in a demanding sport.

Cho Chang’s story in the *Harry Potter* series offers a careful look at female strength, showing that it encompasses both emotional and physical aspects. Her journey encourages readers to reconsider what it means to be strong, especially for women and people from groups that are often underrepresented. As a Seeker and a grieving young woman, Cho shows that being open and being strong can go together and are both important parts of being human.

Co-ed Competition and the Erasure of Binary Boundaries

Quidditch, the well-known sport in the Wizarding World, stands out in J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series because men and women play together on the same teams. This approach challenges the usual gender segregation in many real-world sports, where men and women are often kept apart. By highlighting skill, bravery, and teamwork rather than gender, Quidditch becomes a place where talent and effort count. This sense of fairness encourages readers to value ability over old beliefs about strength or traditional roles. Sexism still exists in the wizard world, shown through small, unfair attitudes and characters that refuse to change. But Quidditch is a place where these limits are left behind. Female players like Ginny Weasley, Angelina Johnson, and Cho Chang are known for their speed, leadership, and strong desire to win. Their success is



seen as normal and expected, not strange or just for show. In this way, the sport shows a kind of equality that feels real and inspiring.

For young readers, especially girls, this example sends a strong message of support. Quidditch shows that confidence and skill can overcome unfairness and that gender need not hold anyone back. Rowling's picture of teams with both boys and girls helps readers imagine a world where fairness and respect open doors. Through Quidditch, the series changes what it means to play, lead, and win, showing that real strength comes from talent and hard work, not gender.

Flying as Feminist Metaphor

Flying in *Harry Potter* is not just exciting but also stands for freedom, independence, and being seen. In Quidditch, this meaning is especially important for female characters like Ginny Weasley, Angelina Johnson, Cho Chang and even Hermione Granger, though she does not play the sport as much. When these women fly, they rise above the limits that have often been put on them, both in the Wizarding World and in stories from real life. The picture of a woman flying on a broomstick has often had mixed meanings: in many old stories, it means danger, breaking the rules, or even being evil. But in Rowling's world, flying changes that old idea into something that gives women strength.

This new way of looking at things connects to bigger changes in how witches are shown. Stories like the Japanese anime *Magical Do-Re-Mi* also show witches using their powers to help others, suggesting that the broomstick, once a symbol of fear, can now represent independence and doing what is right. In Harry Potter, the broom is something women can choose to use, giving them both real and symbolic power. Madam Hooch, who teaches flying and serves as the Quidditch referee at Hogwarts, shows how skill, leadership, and female strength can go hand in hand. She teaches students to fly safely and with confidence, showing that flying can set you free rather than put you in danger.

Through Quidditch, Rowling makes flying a symbol for breaking limits. It becomes a place where women can show courage, independence, and control, a space where they are truly free. Looking from a liberal feminist perspective, the sport of Quidditch in *Harry Potter* embodies equal rights, fairness, and respect for talent. Both witches and wizards play together on the same team, and anyone can be a Seeker, Chaser, or Keeper, which matches liberal feminism's focus on giving everyone the same chance. Female players like Ginny Weasley, Angelina Johnson, and Cho Chang earn their spots through skill and hard work, challenging old ideas about gender. Still, some gender bias persists, as male players like Harry Potter and Viktor Krum receive more fame and attention, just as in real-world sports. Overall, Quidditch moves toward gender equality, but it is not perfect. It fits liberal feminism's goal to include everyone in the current system. In real life, fans of the Harry Potter series created Quadball, a mixed-gender sport inspired by the Series, emphasizing gender equality and inclusivity. With few modifications to the rules to suit non-magical conditions, such as flying on a broomstick, Quadball adapted some elements from other sports (rugby and dodgeball),



which suit the players. Its rules, such as the “four maximum” limit on same-gender players, ensure equal participation of women and men. Female athletes can compete alongside men in all positions, highlighting merit-based recognition and challenging stereotypical traditional gender norms in sports. Quadball thus serves as a real-world example of feminist principles in action, promoting visibility, opportunity, and empowerment for women in athletics.

Conclusion

Quidditch is more than just a sport in Harry Potter; it becomes a powerful way to show feminist ideas and change old views. In the magical world of Hogwarts, Quidditch stands for equality in sports, something that is still rare in real life. Through the achievements of Ginny Weasley, Angelina Johnson, and Cho Chang, Rowling creates a world where women not only take part but often lead in a space usually seen as male. The mixed-gender teams, the meaning of flying, and the focus on female athletes all help make Quidditch a place where old gender roles are put aside. When the women of the *Harry Potter* series take to the air, they do more than play—they change the game.

Author Contributions: All authors have contributed equally to this work. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: The data sharing policy does not apply to this article.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

Works cited

“Liberal Feminism.” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta, Fall 2024 ed., Stanford University, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminism-liberal/>.

Cohen, Cathy J., and Sarah J. Jackson. “Ask a Feminist: A Conversation with Cathy J. Cohen on Black Lives Matter, Feminism, and Contemporary Activism.” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol. 41, no. 4, Summer 2016, pp. 775-792.

Garland-Thomson, Rosemarie. *Feminist Disability Studies*. *Signs*, vol. 30, no. 2, 2005, pp. 1557-1587



Heilman, Elizabeth E., and Trevor Donaldson. "From Sexist to (sort-of) Feminist: Representations of Gender in the *Harry Potter* Series." *Critical Perspectives on Harry Potter*, edited by Elizabeth E. Heilman, Routledge, 2003.

Jenkins, Henry. *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*. Routledge, 1992.

Magical Do-Re-Mi. Directed by Junichi Sato, Toei Animation, 1999–2003.

Rowling, J. K. *Quidditch Through the Ages*. Illustrated by Tomislav Tomic, Arthur A. Levine Books, 2017.

Rowling, J.K. *Harry Potter* series. Bloomsbury, 1997–2007.

Whited, Lana A., ed. *The Ivory Tower and Harry Potter: Perspectives on a Literary Phenomenon*. University of Missouri Press, 2002.

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The statements, opinions, and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of Magnus Publishing and/or the editor(s). Magnus Publishing and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions, or products referred to in the content.