

What Does It Mean To Be A Woman? Pictorial Explanations For Children

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Abstract

Children's literature functions to socialize children. In the case of picture books, images can extend the written word to communicate culturally normative practices. This analysis explored the cultural construct of gender as depicted in three popular picture books from different time periods: *Madeline* (1939) by Ludewig Bemelmans, *Yertle the Turtle and Other Stories* (1950) by Dr. Seuss, and *Jumanji* (1988) by Chris Van Allsberg (1988). The historical context of each book was examined and it was found that these picture books contained images that reified hegemonic gender role expectations for women. Issues of female representation, role, and characteristics are explored.

Keywords

gender, children's literature, gender roles, Dr. Seuss, Bemelmans, Van Allsburg, *Jumanji*, *Madeline*, *Yertle the Turtle and Other Stories*

Introduction

What Does It Mean To Be A Woman? Pictorial Explanations For Children

The reinforcement of traditional gender assumptions is one particularly important aspect of the colonizing work of children's literature – so much so that a defining characteristic of children's literature is that it intends to teach what it means for girls to be girls and boys to be boys.

— Perry Nodelmen, *The Hidden Adult*

This quote from Perry Nodelman's *The Hidden Adult* (2008) highlights one of the hidden curriculums of children's books: Reifying the hegemony. Whether in novels or picture books, children's literature socializes children to accept specific roles, especially when it comes to gender. For the most part, texts aimed at girls focus on "domestic settings and relationship intrigues" whereas texts for boys focus on "strenuous adventures in the larger world" (Nodelman, 2008, p.173). These messages are typically transmitted through text, but in picture books, visual media becomes another means through which to communicate culturally normative practices. '

As noted by Nodelman, in *The Pleasures of Children's Literature* (1991), "Picture books are the most characteristic of children's literature" (p.130). As a result, it is essential to examine how messages related to reinforcing gender roles are incorporated into visual format. Unlike works of art that can be examined independently, an effective analysis of pictures from picture books requires that one "think about how they relate to the accompanying works, and also to the pictures preceding and following them" (p.133). Nodelman suggests we consider factors like format, first impressions, mood, atmosphere, style as well as the meaning of objects and pictorial dynamics. Of particular interest to this analysis is the meaning of objects because it incorporates an exploration of codes and gestures, which are by necessity interpreted in the context of culture. For example, we recognize villains by the use of dark colors, body posturing, and even facial features like a narrow face or this mustache. In short, "Children will not understand pictures until they develop some understanding of the culture" (p.131).

Beyond acknowledging the role of illustrations in transmitting meaning, one must also consider how that meaning is achieved. In their work, *How Picturebooks Work*, Maria Nikolajeva and Carole Scott (2006) propose that illustrations create meaning with the text through symmetrical or enhancing interaction. When the words and images tell the same story, that is considered symmetrical interactions; whereas when the image provides a fuller meaning of the text or adds explanation or detail, that is considered enhancing interaction (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2006, p.226).

Joseph Schwarcz, in his book, *Ways of the Illustrator* (1982), proposed two similar categories, known as congruent and deviation, respectively. When pictures deviate from the text to enhance or extend it, they may do so in a number of ways. For instance, according to literary critic Seth Sicoff (1973), in his article “Prickles Under the Frock,” illustrations may not be chronologically “limited to the scene described in the text,” they may introduce details before they are mentioned in text, they can be “necessary to explain the text,” and they can “allow the reader a more accurate perception of what is going on” (p.108). The relationship between text and image may be made even more complex if the author and illustrator are not the same person – multiple ideological perspectives may emerge. Acknowledging that picture books can convey information not included in the text allows us to also acknowledge the presence of culturally normative messages about gender in pictures.

Gender, unlike biological sex, is a cultural construct. Whether intentionally or unconsciously, men and women align themselves with the behaviors that society has designated feminine or masculine (Bressler, 2011). The same is true for children. Researchers studying gender in picture books have found meaningful discrepancies between how women and men are portrayed. As indicated by Nodelman, children’s literature aimed at little girls, presents them with images of domestic life (home, private space, and relationships (romances, conversations, nurturing), but the differences between how females and males are depicted are more than just differences, they are stereotypes.

One set of researchers, who analyzed gender stereotypes in picture books (specifically, Caldecott award winners from the 1930s-1960s) found that female characters are more likely to be portrayed as “more dependent, cooperative, submissive, imitative, nurturant, emotional, and passive” whereas male characters are more likely to be portrayed as “independent, competitive, directive, persistent, explorative, creative, aggressive, and active” (Clark, Guilmain, Saucier, and Tavarez, 2003, p.441). These differences matter. Researchers Hamilton, Anderson, Broaddus, and Young (2006) noted that in their work on sex-roles in children’s books, that “stereotyped portrayals of the sexes and under-

representation of female characters contribute negatively to children's development, limit their career aspirations, frame their attitudes about their future roles as parents, and even influence their personality characteristics" (p.757). They also noted that even when analyzing more recent Caldecott award-winning books, sexism is still prevalent. According to their research, female characters were illustrated less frequently, were more likely to engage in nurturing behaviors, were more likely to appear indoors, and were less likely to be depicted as having an occupation (Hamilton, Anderson, Broaddus, & Young, 2006). This last finding is surprising in that many would argue that there have been meaningful changes in hegemonic female gender roles over that last 100 years.

To that end, I will analyze three popular picture books from different time periods and explore how the images extend the story to show children the hidden curriculum: Hegemonic expectations for women. Specifically, I will analyze *Madeline* (1939) by Ludwig Bemelmans, *Yertle the Turtle and Other Stories* (1950) by Dr. Seuss, (see Figure 1) and *Jumanji* (1988) by Chris Van Allsberg (1988) and pay special attention to female representation, role, and characteristics. Prior to beginning this analysis, it is important to acknowledge that these three books are not representative of the authors' entire body of works, nor can they be said to represent all of the books of that decade. However, as they are all considered popular classics, read well beyond the time period in which they were written, their content is worth analyzing.

***Madeline*: Cultural Context**

Bemelmans' *Madeline* was published in 1939, amid the Great Depression which is "associated with a degradation in women's relative status in the public sphere" (Clark, Guilmain, Saucier, and Taravaez, 2003, p.440). It depicted men and women in traditional roles (Clark, Guilmain, Saucier, and Taravaez, 2003). This change is described as a backlash resulting from the increased opportunities for life outside of the home women saw in the 1900s-1920s (Lewis, 2020). To better understand this reaction, it is important to consider some of the monumental changes that occurred within 30 short years.

World War I created opportunities for women to join the workforce, become more financially independent and opened doors to careers previously off limits for women (Lewis, 2020). In 1920, women earned the right to vote and, in doing so, won political freedoms and increased agency (Lewis, 2020). By the later part of the decade, some women had even gained entry into elite professional circles (like aviation) (Lewis, 2020). During this time, women also gained more sexual freedom through the advent of contraceptives (Lewis, 2020).

Some researchers have even linked these changing gender roles to visual changes in women's clothing. For example, prior to World War I, the ideal woman was the "Gibson Girl" (Cummins, 2000). The Gibson Girl was characterized by a body forced into a very unnatural and restricted shape: "A greatly extended, forward-thrusting bust and large, backward-thrusting bottom, pushing the body into an S shape" (Cummins, 2000, p.250). Whereas, after WWI, in the 1920s, women's clothing was "much less restrictive, allowing girls and women more freedom of movement and access to physical activities, such as sports, previously considered the domain of men and boys" (Cummins, 2000, p.250). When the stock market crashed at the end of the 1920s, it brought with it a significant change for women.

In the 1930s, at the start of the Great Depression, there were fewer jobs available, and employers preferred to hire men over women. While some jobs in emerging fields were still available to women, the larger cultural messaging was that "a woman's place was in the home" (Lewis, 2020). As a result, "domesticity, motherhood, and homemaking once again became regarded as the only truly proper and fulfilling roles for women" (Lewis, 2020).

***Madeline*: Plot Summary**

Madeline is the story of a small girl named *Madeline*. She attends a school with 11 other little girls, under the watchful eye of a nun named Ms. Clavel. *Madeline* stands out from her peers; she isn't afraid of things other little girls fear and she is the smallest. One day she falls ill and is rushed to the hospital for an emergency appendectomy. In recovery, she is visited by her school friends, who all play happily with gifts *Madeline's*

father has sent her. That night, at the school, Ms. Clavel is disturbed by the sound of the 11 little girls crying, all jealous of *Madeline's* new toys. She quiets them, puts them to bed, and the story ends.

***Madeline*: Illustration Style**

Bemelmans' illustrations utilize both thin and thick line in addition to watercolor painting. The colors are primarily black and yellow (used to save on printing costs) with several full-color spreads. The illustrations are not textured; they were originally done on smooth paper. The style is Naïve, focused on simplistic expression of emotion, with little attention to perspective. The shapes depicted are unnatural, but male and female figures are recognizable. .

***Madeline*: Generated Imagery**

Both the protagonist (*Madeline*) and most of the characters are female in this text. Of the 48 illustrations, 41 contain images of female and 14 contain images of males. There are three characters of significance (i.e., they are given names): *Madeline*, pictured 20 times, Miss Clavel, pictured 44 times and Dr. Cohn, pictured three times. Using visual frequency as an indicator of significance, it would seem that *Madeline*, is centrally focused on the lives of women. It is also worthy of note that men and women are only seen interacting in two illustrations; and with the exception of Mr. Cohn, men remain on the periphery of the drawings. The perspective of the images is also worth consideration. While the majority of illustrations are from the perspective of a third person narrator, four illustrations appear to be from *Madeline's* perspective (depicting the flowers by her hospital bed, the nurse at her bedside, "a crack on her ceiling that had a habit of sometimes looking like a rabbit," and the "birds, trees, and sky" visible from the window of her room in the hospital). While Miss Clavel appears more frequently in the text, this shift of perspectives emphasizes the importance of *Madeline's* view: It's a story for little girls.

The illustrations extend the text by telling little girls about a woman's place in society by showing the reader where women are seen and what they are doing. Women and girls appear outdoors in 13 illustrations and

indoors for 28. Of the indoor illustrations, the majority are domestic, displaying females at a dining table, in a bedroom, in a kitchen, a hallway, in a parlor, or a stairwell. Several of these images are repeated, resulting in an emphasis on the domestic settings. This is in stark contrast to the depictions of males, all but three of which are outdoors. Further, the toys the little girls play with in *Madeline's* hospital room tell us about women's roles in society. Most of the toys presented are indoor toys and several directly relate to childrearing and domestic duties (a doll, a doll house, a baby carriage with a doll inside). These caretaking toys speak volumes about what women are expected to be interested in and do.

While the aforementioned images seem to speak to the idea that a woman's place is at home, there are a few depictions of females in occupations. These occupations are limited (compared to those depicted as appropriate for males) and all share the thread of nurturing. For example, Miss Clavel is a nun, her role is to nurture children. There are two different nurses pictured, whose role is to nurture the sick; and finally, there is an illustration of a flower vendor, who nurtures plants to help them bloom.

Portrayals of male occupations on the other hand are much more varied, including depictions of males in the roles of police officer, a thief, fez-wearing freemason, soldier, tailor, fisherman, boat captain, doctor, ambulance driver, bus driver, and gardener. The idea that men are the providers (through a variety of professions), is supported by the line of text which reads "in they walked and then said, 'Ahhh,' when they saw the toys and candy and the dollhouse from Papa." Papa has the financial resources to pay for a hospital visit and gifts – Mama is not mentioned.

These images also extend the text by telling little girls how to behave like women. In her analyses of the artistic elements of *Madeline*, Jacqueline Eastman (1991) observed some relevant themes. She stated that "the book's most often repeated image ("Twelve little girls in two straight lines") represent the "security of routine activities, the protection of numbers, and like the house itself, as point of both departure and of return" (p.82). While Eastman was not exploring the images from a gen-

dered perspective, her observations are relevant when *Madeline* is viewed as an opportunity to teach girls about what it means to be a woman. Through this lens, the repetition reinforces the idea that women's routines center on the home, that women need to be protected, and that adventure is outside the sphere of womanhood. Other repeated images in the illustrations seem to highlight the importance of obedience (the girls in "straight lines," even when in bed), proper manners and restraint (at the dinner table, but not eating), and hygiene (public teeth brushing).

The imagery in *Madeline* also illustrates appropriate behaviors for women regarding dress. For example, when Miss Clavel's clothes are changed without mention in the text, both before interacting with the doctor when *Madeline* is sick and when fearing "a disaster" later in the book, it seems to suggest that a women's bodies are socially unacceptable in certain clothing.

In examining the images that accompany the text, one norm that becomes evident is that male characters wear pants while females wear dresses that cover as much skin as possible. In all but two illustrations, females are depicted wearing dresses cut below the knee (even night clothes are long dresses). The first exception is a drawing that accompanies the text "the smallest one was *Madeline*." In this image, *Madeline* appears in her underclothes, poised with her eyes closed, chin up and hand on hip, as though challenging anyone to comment on her appearance. The next exception is when *Madeline* is depicted wearing pajama pants while showing off her scar to the other girls. *Madeline* is depicted as the deviation from the norm and as noted by Eastman in another analysis of the imagery of *Madeline*, repeated images work to develop the perspective of "symmetry as the norm to which asymmetry must return" (p.99). When applied to the female appearance, it seems to suggest that *Madeline's* divergence is destined to end in conformity.

Women in *Madeline* are depicted in very emotional ways. Both Miss Clavel and the little girls are never depicted as emotionally neutral. They are almost always feeling something strongly, whether it be happiness, disapproval, or sadness: "They smiled at the good / and frowned at

the bad / and sometimes they were very sad.” Females are even depicted crying in three of the illustrations (evidence of extreme emotional states). While there are several pages in which the text explicitly states emotion, there are also many illustrations that clearly resonate with feelings, even where the text is silent. For example, after visiting *Madeline* in the hospital the text says, “They went home and broke their bread / brushed their teeth and went to bed,” but the illustrations show us their mood... frowns on all of their faces and upset body postures. By including so much emotion in every scene in which the children’s faces are pictures, femaleness is linked to a heightened sense of emotionality. This effect is amplified by the fact that the emotion being expressed is repeated on 11-12 faces.

All of this emotion serves to move the plot along (helping us learn about how *Madeline* is different, communicating when events are serious, etc.), but it also communicates some negative perceptions of female emotions. In her analysis Eastman noted that the “the conformity implicit in the image of twelve nearly identical children is the repression of individuality” and that “the twelve figures even smile, frown, and look sad in unison” (p.82). This imagery serves to portray girls, and women by extension, as emotionally dependent, vulnerable, and submissive. Another problematic element is that the turning point and humor at the end of the book, seems to suggest that all girls are predisposed to be petty and jealous: “all the little girls cried, “Boohoo, we want to have our appendix out, too!” Further, Miss Clavel’s reaction to the girls is to be dismissive, rather than engaging with these emotions, she simply says, “Good night, little girls!” and closes the door. These actions suggest that it is the role of caregivers to teach women that they will be dismissed if their emotions are not pleasing.

Madeline: Summary & Connection to Literature

Taken together, Bemelman's *Madeline* does seem to contain a hidden curriculum socializing little girls to understand hegemonic norms for women that are dated and not appropriate to today's social context. Women are depicted in interior and domestic settings and expected to engage in nurturing activities. If a woman chooses an occupation outside of the home, that work will also be limited to nurturing activities. Men are expected to be the providers, with a multitude of career opportunities, and women are expected to be submissive and obedient. These findings mirror those observed by Clark et al. (2003) in their research of gender portrayals in Caldecott award winning picture books of the 1930s. Clark et al. (2003) noted that female characters were portrayed as more dependent, submissive, imitative, nurturing, emotional and passively active than male characters (p.442). Further, examination of the illustrations in *Madeline* indicates that women's bodies are only acceptable when presented in certain apparel. These descriptions seem to mirror established cultural norms at the time.



Figure 1
Example books covers:

Yertle the Turtle and Other Stories: **Cultural Context**

Yertle the Turtle and Other Stories was published in 1950, just after the start of The Cold War. World War II had ended just a few years prior and American found itself embroiled in political tension with the Soviet Union and its allies. Anti-communist sentiments led many Americans to glorify capitalism, democracy, and freedom. The focus of American life shifted back to the family and “embedded in the propaganda of the time was the idea that the nuclear family was what made Americans superior to the Communists” (American Experience, 2018a). During WWII, women were once again welcomed into the workplace. They enjoyed a slew of new occupations outside of the home, were meaningful income earners for their families, and were credited with keeping the American economy afloat during the war effort (American Experience, 2021). However, once the war ended, men resumed their positions in the workplace, and women were again displaced.

American women were encouraged to wear “feminine hairdos and delicate dresses, tending to the hearth and home” and “domesticity was idealized in the media” (American Experience, 2018a). The image of the “Happy Homemaker” was born and women were actively discouraged from working outside of the home (American Experience, 2018a). Women who did work outside the home were criticized and referred to by some popular writers, doctors and physicians as “lost,” “suffering from penis envy,” “ridden with guilt complexes,” or just plain “man-hating” (American Experience, 2018b). Despite cultural pressure to stay home, some middle-class women still wanted to earn an income. Home sales businesses emerged as a solution that allowed women to escape public scrutiny by hosting parties to sell products (like Tupperware) (American Experience, 2018b). This intense era of rigid gender roles resulted in the idea that men and women belonged in separate spheres.

Yertle the Turtle and Other Stories:

Plot Summary

This text is a compilation of three stories: “*Yertle the Turtle*,” “*Gertrude McFuzz*,” and “*The Big Brag*.” *Yertle the Turtle* is the story of Yertle the Turtle, King of Salama-Sond pond. In his quest to rule over more, Yertle requires his subjects to hoist him on their backs, higher and higher into the sky, under the assumption that anything he can see, he can rule over. The turtles underneath Yertle suffer. Eventually, a turtle named Mac, gets angry, burps, and dislodges Yertle from his throne, depositing him in the mud. In doing so, Mac ends Yertle’s rule and frees all the turtles.

“*Gertrude McFuzz*” is the story of a girl-bird named Gertrude McFuzz who is unhappy with the feathers in her tail. Driven by envy, Gertrude seeks out a doctor to see if there is a pill to help her grow more feathers. Originally, Doctor Dake dismisses Gertrude’s request, but after numerous tantrums, he begrudgingly recommends a pill-berry that will help her grow tail feathers. Gertrude eats the pill-berries ravenously and grows so many feathers she can no longer fly. She calls for help and the doctor (who is also her Uncle) engages in a rescue to bring her home. She is forced to pull out all her new feathers and learn to be happy with the single feather she originally possessed.

“*The Big Brag*” is the story of a rabbit that develops the belief that he is the best animal on earth. He brags and boasts until a bear hears him and asserts that he, the bear, is the “best of the beasts.” They each attempt to prove their superiority by a demonstration of skill: The rabbit demonstrates his keen hearing and the bear demonstrates his excellent sense of smell. A worm interrupts the competition to suggest that he is better than both because of his vision. He engages in a long stare and reports back that he has looked all the way around the world and spotted “the two biggest fools that have ever been seen” arguing on a hilltop about who is better than whom. The worm then pops back down in his hole and gets back to his work.

Yertle the Turtle and Other Stories: **Illustration Style**

The illustrations in the text are cartoon, drawn with pen, ink and acrylic. Thin and thick lines are used with limited color (green and blue). The limited use of color was likely based by the publisher's desire to reduce printing costs. The illustrations contain depictions of animals and nature that are naive. The animals depicted are recognizable, but not scientifically accurate. As a result, it is not wholly possible to identify gender in all of the drawings.

Yertle the Turtle and Other Stories: **Gendered Imagery**

While the characters in *Yertle the Turtle and Other Stories* are animals, they are representative of humans and assigned male and female pronouns. Of the 36 images in the book, only 10 include female characters. *Yertle the Turtle and Other Stories* contains several named characters: King Yertle, Mack, Gertrude, Lolla-Lee-Loo, Doctor Dake, Mr. Rabbit, Mr. Bear). Of those characters, only two are female (Gertrude, Lolla-Lee-Loo) and only one of the two exists as more than a passing mention (Gertrude).

In "*Yertle the Turtle*" there are no identifiable female turtles in the illustrations. While the reader understands that there should be female turtles in the pond (they are necessary for procreation), none are drawn to the reader's attention. The text mentions a King (a male ruler), uncles (male family members) and cousins (gender neutral), and uses of the male pronoun, but there are no words indicating feminine gender.

The "*Big Brag*" is similar. There are no images of female characters and only male pronouns and identifiers (i.e., "Mr." and "boys") are used. Based on representation, these stories would appear to be aimed at telling little boys what it means to be a man. The lack of female representation renders women inconsequential in both stories. This is particularly disturbing in that the stories relate to power (to rule and be superior, respectively) and the omission of women entirely suggests that women are both powerless and subordinate.

In the story of “*Gertrude McFuzz*,” there are ten illustrations of female characters, and two of these illustrations also include men. Based on representation, this story appears aimed at telling little girls how to be women. Specifically, it serves to warn girls not to grow up and be “vain, envious, greedy, stupid and fashion-mad” (Alison Laurie as cited by Foss, Dominco and Foss, 2013, p.107). In this way, the text works as a negative example; providing a criticism against adult women.

While there is strong alignment between the images and text, there are ways in which the illustrations serve to extend this negative characterization of women. For instance, while the text is silent on Lolla-Lee-Lou’s experience, the images are not. Lolla-Lee-Lou is depicted as smiling with an upturned beak while flying by Gertrude in the opening of the story. The upturned nose gives the impression of haughtiness, as though Lolla-Lee-Lou is aware of her superior beauty. Further, despite the fact that they are the only two birds depicted, Lolla-Lee-Lou’s eyes are drawn closed; she doesn’t offer Gertrude a passing glance, even though Gertrude is depicted as having turned her head in order to gaze upon her. The lines that trail Lolla-Lee-Lou give the effect of a tail flourish, as though she is flaunting her two-feather tail. This presentation reinforces the idea that even beautiful women are vain, and beauty is related to value. Further, it sets up women as competitors, perpetuating negative stereotypes of hostile relationships between women.

In terms of where women belong in the world, the body language in Seuss’s drawing of Gertrude’s conversation with Uncle Dake, the doctor, is instructive. Gertrude is drawn in a supplicant position relative to her uncle. Her head is lower than his and she appears to almost bow. It isn’t clear if the authority her body posture suggests is as a result of his role as an older male family member or as a doctor. In either case, the absence of women in familial and occupational roles is a reinforcement of patriarchal values in which men hold positions of power and auspice over decision-making (even decisions related to a woman’s own body, as is the case with Gertrude). The fact that Gertrude’s fool-headedness and vanity lead her to disobey her uncle, eating more berries than prescribed, and requiring rescue, reinforces a hierarchy which places men’s judgment above women’s.

Gertrude's rescue also includes imagery that diminishes women's agency and intelligence. After gluttonously eating berries, in the pursuit of beauty, Gertrude must rely on her Uncle Dake "and help" to fly. In this two-page spread, ten birds appear to be flying Gertrude and her enormous tail through the air. The birds appear to be exerting themselves; drops of perspiration are visible above one bird, the eyes of another are closed in strain or concentration, yet another appears with lines of motion to indicate rapid flapping, accompanied by a downturned mouth. Gertrude, on the other hand, appears motionless, with wings lowered and eyes wide and turned up. Her submission and helplessness are readily apparent. She presents as a woman who has to be saved from her own foolishness and is unable to contribute in any way to her own rescue. Her agency is minimized and her passivity emphasized.

Yertle the Turtle and Other Stories: **Summary & Connection to Literature**

Taken together, Dr. Seuss's *Yertle the Turtle and Other Stories*, seems to address some hegemonic norms for women. While "*Gertrude McFuzz*" includes women in the narrative, the exclusion of female characters is evident, and some scholars have commented that this appears to be a theme in Seuss's works (Nel, 2007). It reflects the idea that men's stories hold greater importance than stories about women, and in doing so, is reflective of patriarchal values. Further the separation of the genders by story, seems to reflect the "separate spheres" in which men and women operated during the 1950s.

While the text serves to characterize women as "vain, greedy, stupid, and fashion mad" (Alison Laurie as cited by Foss, Dominco and Foss, 2013, p.107), the images go beyond that to present women as competitive with each other, submissive to men, and helpless. This aligns with Laurie's comment that Seuss' work depicts women with "weak minds" (Alison Laurie as cited by Philip Nel, 2007, p.482). In the context of the time, this messaging served to elevate the importance of men, who having gone off to war, found women had taken their place in the workforce. Further, by presenting women with the aforementioned character flaws, it would have made it easier to remove women from the workforce and give their jobs back to men.

Additional cultural mirroring is evident in the absence of women as familial leaders or in occupations. When the book was written, men were expected to function as both the head of the household and the primary breadwinner. As noted by Philip Nel (2018) in *Dr. Seuss: American Icon*, this pattern “grant(s) girls fewer rights and opportunities” and that “women’s work differs from men’s work” (p.482).

***Jumanji*: Cultural Context**

When *Jumanji* was first published in 1981, American gender roles had considerably shifted. The 1960s-1970s marked meaningful changes in how women were allowed to engage in society. In the 1960s, “More females than ever were entering the paid workforce, and this increased the dissatisfaction among women regarding huge gender disparities in pay and advancement and sexual harassment at the workplace” (Walsh, 2010). The civil rights movement, Vietnam (and the accompanying antiwar movement), and federal approval of the birth control pill acted as cultural change engines (Walsh, 2010), helping women find a sense of agency and redefine cultural norms related to a woman’s role in the workplace and at home. Women raised by mothers who played the role of “happy housewife” were “determined to make their lives less constrained than those of their mothers” and rejected “traditional notions of motherhood and marriage” (“*Postwar Gender Roles and Women in American Politics*,” n.d.).

In the 1970s, cultural perceptions of womanhood continued to move in a pro-feminist direction. Unlike previous decades, “many marriages involved two careers, as both the husband and the wife worked and increasingly shared family duties” (“*Postwar Gender Roles and Women in American Politics*,” n.d.). One study examining trends in time-use for men and women, reported that “In 1977, only 33 percent of women over eighteen in the General Social Survey disagreed that “it is much better for everyone involved if the man is the achiever outside the home and the woman takes care of the home and family” (Thornton & Young-DeMarco as cited by Bailey and DiPrete, 2016, p.20). Additional studies, examining trends in time-use for men and women, showed

that in 1975 women reported fewer hours dedicated to childcare, meal preparation, laundry, and housecleaning than in 1965 (Suzanne Bianchi, John Robinson, & Melissa Milkie as cited by Bailey and DiPrete, 2016). During this period, women also began to pursue “careers in male-dominated fields, such as law, medicine, and business, loosening their traditional bonds to home and hearth” (“Postwar Gender Roles and Women in American Politics,” n.d.).

Cultural norms in the 1980s, also saw changes in perceptions about what it meant to be a wife and mother among both men and women (Mason & Lu, 1988). In one study, examining familiar roles in American culture from 1977-1985, researchers found that “support for the traditional role for wives decreased, and, especially among women, endorsement of the belief that maternal employment harms children or the mother-child relationship declined” (Mason & Lu, 1988, p.54). Researchers Arland Thornton, Duane Alwin, and Donald Camburn argued that “the growth in egalitarian attitudes was a consequence of growing educational attainment on the part of both men and women, growing labor market experience on the part of married women, and the transmission of more gender egalitarian attitudes from mothers to daughters” (as cited by Bailey and DiPrete, 2016, p.20). The 1980s also reflected greater wage alignment between men and women, although men were still paid more for equal work (Bailey and DiPrete, 2016).

***Jumanji*: Plot Summary**

This story begins as a mother kisses her children good-bye and leaves them instructions for caring for the house, while she and their father are away on a date at the opera (they will be returning after with guests). The children, Peter and Judy, play with their toys until they become bored and head outside to play at a park. While there, they find *Jumanji*, “a young people’s adventure game designed for the bored and restless.” The two rush home with the game and discover that with each turn they must confront a peril of the jungle in their own home (hungry lions, mischievous monkeys, sleeping sickness, inept guides, drenching mon

soons, stampeding rhinos, terrifying snakes, and erupting volcanos). The game finally ends when Judy is able to reach the Golden City, at which time their house is restored to its normal state. The children immediately pack up the game, deposit it at the park, return home and fall asleep. Later that evening, after their parents returned, Peter and Judy look out the window to see two young boys (Daniel and Walter; children of their parents' friend Mrs. Budwing) running through the park carrying *Jumanji*.

***Jumanji*: Illustration Style**

The illustrations in the book are surreal in style, depicting jungle animals in domestic spaces. The meticulously drawn black and white images appear to have been crafted with pencil on smooth paper. The limited use of color may be related to the publisher's desire to reduce printing costs, but the limited palette makes the expert rendering of three-dimensional shapes through the use of line that much more impressive. The illustrations contain depictions of people that are representational making it easy to identify gender in image.

***Jumanji*: Gendered Messaging**

Of the fourteen illustrations in *Jumanji*, only seven include a female character (whereas males are clearly depicted in nine). There are three female characters that are given names (Mother, Judy and Mrs. Budwing) compared to four named male characters (Father, Peter, Danny, and Walter). There are no un-named female characters, but at least two un-named male characters appear in the illustrations (a guest and the jungle guide). Based on visual representation, this book represents gender more equally than the previous texts (despite still favoring males). This near equality suggests that this is a story intended for the socialization of both boys and girls.

Like previous books, the illustrations extend the text by speaking to where women belong in society. Females are depicted outdoors in only one illustration, whereas three illustrations show males either outside or in the act of going outside. It is also worthy to note that the only room

in which Judy appears other than the playroom is the kitchen. While the text states “The children ran in to see a dozen monkeys tearing the room apart,” the illustration only shows Judy; Peter isn’t visible in a space historically associated with females. In the playroom itself, Judy is depicted playing with a doll house. This is particularly interesting because the text merely states, “They took all the toys out of their toy chest and made a terrible mess.” It does not indicate which toys the children selected and the accumulation of images of the playroom suggest that there are lots of other toys present that are not as clearly associated with domestic duties or nurturing (i.e., a train, a ball, bowling pins, a toy dog, a sailboat, and books). Further, the images presented do not include examples of women employed outside of the home. The only occupations that enter the story seem to be masculine (a male jungle guide, a statue of a male military hero in the park). In this way, the illustrations reify the idea that domestic spaces are the feminine domain.

Another meaningful example of ways in which the illustrations extend the text, relates to how Judy is characterized. While Judy seems to take somewhat of a leadership role based on the textual descriptions (as one might expect from an older sibling), the illustrations, depict passivity. For example, when the children are in the playroom, playing with their toys, it is Judy that suggests “Why don’t we go outside and play?” However, in the image that accompanies the text, Judy is in the background of the image with most of her body and part of her head cut out of the frame.

Despite the fact that her decisions move the plot forward, the visual focus is on Peter, shown in the foreground in an active posture, smiling and leaning out of his chair to watch his train. Another example is when the children bring *Jumanji* home and prepare to play. Judy tells Peter to “Put those down and listen... I am going to read the instructions.” However, the image presented does not depict this. Rather, Judy is shown sitting upright in the chair holding a folded instructions sheet at chest level (i.e., not reading it) and she is watching as Peter leans across the table reaching for the game piece. In this way, Peter is presented with agency and Judy appears passive, waiting for Peter to make a move.

This passivity is extended later in the text (almost to the point of submission) when Judy and Peter's parents return home. In the illustration, both Judy and Peter are depicted standing in front of their Mother and Father (and a male guest), side by side, with hands behind their backs. However, Judy appears with her head bowed, eyes downcast in a submissive posture, whereas Peter is pictured looking up at Judy, smiling. The reader can infer that this image is the moment before their mother asks, "Did you have an exciting afternoon?" As only Peter answers his mother's question ("Oh yes.... We had a flood, a stampede...."), this picture seems to convey that little girls should be seen and not heard. Little boys, on the other hand, are welcome to speak their minds.

This scene is important for another reason: It articulates expectations about what it means to be a mother and wife. Their mother is depicted standing upright in a modest, yet fashionable, floral dress, pearl necklace, with a short, bob haircut. The overall effect is reminiscent of traditional standards of beauty and decorum. Looking over her shoulder, as though supervising, is her husband (identified by his close physical proximity). She is also flanked by a male guest whose body posture (hands in pockets and turned sideways) suggests that he is monitoring the proceedings. She stands between the men and the children; body language that makes it clear that the children are under her charge. A mother is judged based on her ability to manage children, and fathers, or other males, will step in if she isn't performing to their expectations. Her proximity to the children indicates intimacy, but the children stand as if reporting for inspection or judgement (in a row, hands behind backs). Even though her face is not included in the image, one can see from the position of the mother's chin that she is looking directly at Judy. This positioning suggests that she expects Judy to report about how the afternoon went (i.e., Peter's care and the condition of the house). It is the job of a mother to train their daughters to care for both children and a household. Judy's silence in this context takes on another meaning: in playing *Jumanji*, she has let her mother down, both putting her brother in danger and messing up the house.

We can only guess about Judy's emotions during this scene because, like many of the illustrations, Judy's facial expression is not visible. In fact, Judy's face is only depicted in four images throughout the text. As a result, much of her emotional state comes from the text itself. In the text, she is seemingly level headed, making decisions based on logic rather than emotionality. For example, after the lion chases Peter around the house, she responds with rationality, stating, "No one would come from the zoo because they wouldn't believe us.... And you know how upset Mother would be if there was a lion in the bedroom. We started this game, and now we have to finish it." This level headedness is supported by the illustrations: In only one of the four images, does Judy appear to be experiencing a strong emotion (surprise at finding monkeys in the kitchen). In the remaining three images, she appears to have neutral expressions (no indications of movement in the eyebrows or mouth).

At the climax of the story, when Judy finishes the game, amidst a volcano and an approaching python, she is depicted from behind so we cannot see her emotions at all. The readers are only shown her body, leaning forward in her chair, palms braced flat on the table. In this way, the illustrations seem to intentionally downplay Judy's emotions. Also of interest, is that Peter's face is only shown in four illustrations as well, but his emotions appear to be stronger than Judy's. He is variously depicted smiling broadly at his train, shaken at seeing the lion, scared after narrowly escaping the lion, and calmly smiling while telling his mother about their adventures.

***Jumanji*: Summary and Connection to Literature**

In summary, the gendered messaging in the images of *Jumanji*, provide evidence of a hidden curriculum of gender socialization within the book. Based on visual representation, this book still favors males, but represents gender more equally than earlier books, both in terms of female illustrations and characters. This finding suggests that women (and their stories) are not as important as men. Like previous books, the illustrations extend the text by speaking to where women belong in society and how they should behave. Despite being an adventure book, in

Jumanji, females appear most frequently in interior and domestic spaces, engage in nurturing activities, and behave in passive or submissive ways. There are no examples of female occupations in the text and femininity is linked to childrearing and a pleasing appearance. It is also noteworthy that while females in the text are depicted as having strong emotions, the images do not seem to reflect femininity as overly emotional.

These findings mark a departure from previous decades. For example, in their analysis of sex-role socialization in picture books in the 1970s, Weitzman, Eifler, Hokada and Ross (1972) stated, that “Most children’s books (were) about boys, men, and male animals, and most deal exclusively with male adventures” (p.1128). *Jumanji* clearly features women and girls in central roles. This improvement in “both portrayal and representation of female characters” was also noted by Hamilton, Anderson, Broaddus, and Young (2006) in their research on gender stereotyping and under-representation of females in 21st century children’s books (p.758). These findings also align with the research conducted by Williams, Vernon, Williams, & Malecha (1987), on sex-roles in picture books (focused heavily on Caldecott winners and finalist from the 1980s). In their analysis, girls and women were more likely to be included as characters and central characters, they were more likely to be depicted outdoors, and they were portrayed with a greater variety of personality characteristics (Williams *et al.*, 1987). In these ways, *Jumanji* appears to reflect the increased egalitarianism and increasing pro-feminist perspectives of the 1980s.

That said, the depiction of marriage and motherhood in *Jumanji* seems out of sync with the times. The traditional views of motherhood and marriage seem to be intact within these images. Also anachronistic, is the fact that while women made up a large percentage of the American workforce in the 1980s, there are no depictions of working women in this book. These findings were also noted by Williams *et al.* in their aforementioned work (1987). They identified a “near unanimity in conformity to traditional gender roles” in all of the texts they analyzed (Williams *et al.*, 1987, p.155). Further, only one of the 24 books examined from the 1980s depicted a woman with an occupation (Williams *et al.*, 1987).

Conclusion

The analysis of *Madeline* by Ludwig Bemelmans (1939), *Yertle the Turtle and Other Stories*, by Dr. Seuss (1950), and *Jumanji*, by Chris Van Allsberg (1981) show that gendered messaging is, indeed, present in the illustrations. While these three books are not representative of all of the authors' picture books and they cannot be said to represent all of the books crafted during a specific time period, these findings are important. Gender norming and stereotyping of women was present in all three books. In reviewing the cultural context for each picture book, it becomes apparent that the representation and portrayal of women mirrored (at least in part) the hegemonic norms of the decade in which it was published.

There is cultural evidence that "what it means to be a little girl" and "what it means to be a woman" has changed since the 1930s, but these changes are only partially reflected in the children's books explored here. For example, trends towards more gender equity (in terms of representation and central characters) were observed in the most recent book (*Jumanji*). However, an adherence to traditional gender stereotypes also persisted. For examples, women were frequently depicted in domestic settings with domestic responsibilities rather than occupations outside the home. They were also presented as engaging in traditional approaches to motherhood and marriage.

Messages that present women as inferior to men, as having limited/restricted roles in society, being defined by motherhood or marriage, or embodying personality characteristics deemed undesirable, is harmful for society at large. Picture books that convey these messages, through text or image, can be limiting and detrimental to children's development.

Women are meaningful contributors in our society; holding powerful offices, working in every profession, leading families as primary income earners, and having fulfilling lives that do not always center on spouses or children. Children need to see this potential in the literature they are exposed to growing up. Acknowledging that picture books can convey culturally normative messages about gender is an invitation to look for books that reflect not only the culture as we see it now, but also the culture as we would like to see it. To reiterate a conclusion drawn by

Gooden and Gooden (2001) on their analysis of gender representation in notable children's books, "As society acknowledges that women are just as capable as men, it is imperative that their roles in literature also change. Today's women should be portrayed as members of the work force, as professionals, as household leaders, and as active and versatile citizens" (p.97).

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