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Illustration by  
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## Inspiring Woman: Tamora Pierce by Brianna Vear



Knights in shining armor, evil sorcerer(ess) and damsel in distress - sounds like your average fantasy novel, right? But not for Tamora Pierce. Sure, she has knights in shining armor who defeat the evil sorcerer (ess) and save those in need, it's just that her brave knight is in fact a girl and a teenage one at that. All of Pierce's main characters are strong, independent females who help protect their realm.

Tamora (pronounced like "camera") Pierce was born in South Connessville, Pennsylvania where her childhood was full of books, the television series Robin Hood, and countless movies. In sixth grade, she began writing down the stories in her head with the advice of her father. These stories resembled fanfiction of her favorite books of the time, Star Wars and The Lord of the Rings, except all of her main characters were teenage girls. Pierce developed a case of writer's block in tenth grade. Although she continued to write her papers for class, she was no longer able to write the stories she loved. It appeared to her that her dreams of being a writer had been crushed and she began to think of her future, deciding she wanted to help children. When it was time to go to college, she went to the University of Pennsylvania, where she studied psychology. During her junior year of college, her writer's block finally broke and Pierce was able to write "Demon Chariot," a five page original short story. A year later it was published.

During Pierce's college career she took a fiction writing course, where her teacher, David Bradley (author of *South Street*), seeing Pierce's great potential suggested that she write a complete novel about her life so far. Pierce tried to write that novel but couldn't seem to do it. So, she wrote her very first sword and sorcery novel with teenaged female lead roles instead. Pierce claims it was not a good novel, but it was her first.

Pierce did not graduate with her psychology degree as planned because she was unable to pass the statistics requirement, but with a stroke of luck and some persuasive skills, she was able to get the University of Pennsylvania to give her a degree which read "Bachelor of Arts." Next, Pierce went to work in a home for teenage girls as a house mother. Here she began to write *The Song of the Lioness*, which was originally written as a novel for adults. When she sent her novel out she received feedback from Claire Smith, her would be agent, that *The Song of the Lioness* would be a better fit as a quartet for teenagers. Pierce began to cut and edit her book to create *The Song of the Lioness Quartet*. *Alanna: The First Adventure* was published in 1984 by Atheneum. Her quartet was completed with *In the Hand of the Goddess* (1985), *The Woman Who Rides Like a Man* (1986), and *Lioness Rampant* (1988.)

By 1992, at the age of 38, Tamora Pierce became

one of the few lucky writers who was able to make a living through writing alone. She began to make appearances at schools, book stores, and sci-fi conventions. Her books are published by a number of companies in England, Australia, Canada and the United States (where her career first began). To date, Tamora Pierce has published twenty-six books, with two more scheduled to be released this year. Of those twenty-six books, twenty-five of them have won multiple awards, including being on the New York Times, Wall Street Journal, and USA Today's bestsellers lists.

All of Pierce's twenty-six novels take place in one of two realms. Her first realm is that of Tortall. Tortall itself is a large and prosperous kingdom that models the United States or England. The main characters of these books all come from Tortall, and tell of the interactions with the bordering countries. These books are more about knights than magic. For magic you would want to look at her Circle of Magic series, which takes place in Emelan and the Winding Circle Temple. These books center on four young teenagers whose magic is combined making them all stronger. Regardless of the realm you prefer, all of Pierce's main characters are strong independent women.

In Pierce's first Tortallan series of books (*The Song of the Lioness*), Alanna, the main character, switches places with her twin brother and disguises herself in order to become a knight. When she reveals herself she is able to save the realm from the evil Roger of Conte and become the King's Champion. In her second Tortall Series, *Immortals*, Veralidaine Sarrasri, Daine for short, is the daughter of a god who is able to help save her realm from the new and dangerous immortals that plague the land. She does this by shape shifting. Other series in the Tortallan Realm include the lives of Keladry of Mindelan ( the first Lady Knight after Alanna), Alianne of Pirate's Swoop (Alanna's daughter who is hijacked by a god and saves the neighboring country, the Copper Isles, from oppressive rulers by working as a Spymaster) and Beka Cooper (Ali's ancestor who works as a "dog" or a cop and has a unique Gift).

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## The Princess in Shining Armor: Women in Children's Literature

by Alex Nichipor

I have a personal confession to make. When I was a very young child, my mother would often read to me, but even at that tender age (two or three, maybe), I became frustrated with the lack of strong female characters to whom I could relate. So when I saw a character I liked very much (a heroic unicorn, for example), I would change his gender from male to female. "No mommy, say 'she,'" I would insist to my mother when she read any sentence identifying this character as a "he."

Not that I had anything against male characters, but there was something profoundly frustrating about rarely seeing heroic characters of my own gender. When we see others in a position of power (even if it's only in a story), we want them to look like us, because then we know that we can achieve power as well. The philosopher Plato, in writing *The Republic*, notes that we must be careful about the stories we tell children, because such material is likely to shape their personalities in ways that will be impossible to change.

Yet even as the adult world (very slowly) grows more egalitarian and feminist, children's literature continues to depict female characters in stereotypical ways. When scholar Taya Cherland surveyed popular children's literature books, she discovered major gender imbalances, especially in regard to the roles that female characters had. Cherland noted that roles for women included mother, aunt, and grandmother. In contrast, roles for men included father, uncle, grandfather, postman, farmer, fisherman, police officer, builder, bus driver, shop owner, railway porter, and many more. (1) Really, is there any logical reason why a female character can't be a farmer?

Cherland further noted that the gender expressions of both male and female characters were rigid. Male characters were portrayed as traditionally masculine – no androgynous men to be found. Female characters were usually traditionally feminine, but there was a growing trend of androgynous female characters. However, the attractiveness of female characters was still usually considered their most important quality.

Alleen Pace Nilson, a professor of children's literature, was stunned when she heard one of her mentors say that, "only girls will read a book about a girl, but both boys and girls will read about a boy" (2). She immediately set out on a study of picture books. Out of a sample of 58 books, only 21 had pictures of women. Of these 25, 21 of them depicted the female character in an apron – even when she went to open markets or public gardens (2)!

This is a shame because we miss out on well-rounded characters that would be much more interesting, but more importantly, because such stereotypical portrayals can actually negatively affect children. One

study found that reading or hearing stories about an achieving, ambitious girl boosted the self-esteem of girls, but hearing a story about an achieving boy had little impact on their self-esteem. Boys, on the other hand, enjoyed an increase in self-esteem when reading or hearing a story about an achieving boy, but reading a story about an achieving girl had little or no impact on their self-esteem (1). If we take into account the findings that male heroes predominate in children's literature, we can hypothesize that boys' self-esteem is increasing while the self-esteem of girls remains the same. Self-esteem is an essential quality in the real world, at least as important as intelligence, diligence, and integrity. It may be that children's literature is letting girls down in an important way.

There are many authors of children's literature, some of them women and some not, who are seeking to change this. More and more picture books for very young children include interesting and dynamic female characters with vivid personalities. Children's literature writer Mem Fox reports that she deliberately makes many of her main characters courageous girls, female animals, or clever elderly women (3).

Books written for the 3<sup>rd</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> grade crowd have seen a great deal of growth in the number of strong female characters. "Fearless Girls, Wise Women, and Beloved Sisters" by Kathleen Ragan is one example. It is a collection of tales from all around the world about interesting girls and women. Tamora Pierce, discussed elsewhere in this newsletter, is also a wonderful writer



Lyra, heroine of the His Dark Materials trilogy, with her friend, the armored bear Iorek Byrnison.

Image courtesy of Google.

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## The Need to Raise Strong Girls Through an Influential Media

By Skyla Seamans

Young, skinny, tall, gorgeous, and perfect are the ways women are portrayed in every form of media. These words set the stage for what is illogically expected of young girls in our society. Through the television shows and movies they watch, the music they listen to, the books and magazines they read, and advertisements they see, they are buying into this ideal world without even realizing it. Children are exposed to over a thousand advertisements every day, watch about four hours of television, and spend an extra two hours on the internet (1). What they see affects their actions and who they decide to become as men and women. Programs such as *The Bachelor* and other reality shows, though usually not targeted at children, are still being seen by boys and girls. *The Bachelor* shows a dozen women vying for the attention of one man using only their sexuality. Celebrities, with their touched-up bodies and flawless skin and hair, stand as role models for girls on the covers of every magazine. Advertisements highlight specific body parts of women and show how their products are a necessary part of life. With such an influential and omnipresent media, it may seem impossible to shield these ideas and images from our youth (1).

According to research done by *Children Now*, a national organization trying to make children a public priority, 38 percent of female characters found in video games are wearing revealing clothing and 23 percent show cleavage (2). Disney movies, from *Beauty and the Beast* to *Aladdin*, show slender, unrealistically curvaceous and vulnerable young women who depend on male figures for strength and survival instead of their own intelligence and empowerment. Media stereotyping of women as objects and helpless beings creates very low expectations for girls in our society. Female characters in children's television shows and movies are often shown being rescued by a strong male lead. For example Roxanne, the news reporter in the 2010 animated film *Megamind*, is captured over and over only to be saved by a handsome superhero every time. This portrayal is the same in all superhero movies

such as *Batman* or *Spiderman* as well as in Disney Princess films like *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* and *Sleeping Beauty*. Only a kiss from the perfect stranger can save the lives of these princesses (3). From these movies, girls begin to believe in the fairy tale that someday a knight in shining armor will rescue them from their lonesome lives and be their protective hero, just like in the *Twilight* saga. In reality, girls must grow to realize only they can truly save themselves and relying on a man is not going to get them anywhere.

In children's media, cartoons or otherwise, gendered stereotypes are all too present. For starters, male characters are more prevalent in children's television and film than female characters. A study performed by USC's Annenberg School for Communications and Journalism looked at 122 top-grossing domestic family films rated G, PG or PG-13 from 2006 to 2009. The study found that, of the 5,554 speaking characters studied, 71 percent were male and 29 percent female. Some of the films in the study included *WALL-E*, *Ocean's Thirteen*, *Ratatouille*, *Pursuit of Happyness*, and *Confessions of a Shopaholic* (4). The study also found that male characters are more commonly portrayed as independent, assertive, athletic, attractive, responsible, and much more important than female characters. They are often



"Megamind," image courtesy of ComicBookMovie.com

brave aggressors who even laugh more than female characters do. Women are sexualized, more passive and are much more concerned about love and romance than men. While the behavior of female characters is somewhat less stereotypical than it was 20 years

ago, in some ways male characters behave more stereotypically than in the past. For instance, males are now in more leadership positions, and are bossier and more intelligent while the female characters follow the male leads (5).

However, some shows go against these common portrayals of boys and girls and children's television today provides more positive role models for girls than ever before. For example, shows such as *Timothy Goes to School*, *Canadian Geographic for Kids*, *The Magic School Bus*, and the older *Dora the Explorer* (the new Dora has recently undergone a more sexualized makeover), as well as movies like *Matilda* and *Akeelah and the Bee* feature strong female characters who interact with their male counterparts and hold their own. For

## The Smurfette Principle

By Brianna Vear

Question: How many cartoons for children can you think of that have a female lead? So you may be able to think of a few. Next question: Does she have a gang of female friends? No; probably not. Here's another one: Can you name any shows that have a female character, not necessarily the lead, where she is not some female stereotype, like a sex object or blonde or ditz or nerdy? You might be able to think of one or two, but they are few and far between. This is what we call the Smurfette Principle.

The Smurfette Principle, originally coined by Katha Pollit in 1991, was first defined as a group of males with a lone female stereotype (1). Experts on the subject have broadened the topic to include a female lead surrounded by male counterparts as well. These single female characters are known as your Token Girl or Token Chick. They are often a sex object, or the vaginaed version of the main male character(s). In the late 80s and early 90s, Token Chick was given a friend, Affirmative Action Girl. Affirmative Action Girl, is generally a dorky (or nerdy) tomboyish girl who is "one of the guys," and is yet another part of the Smurfette Principle. The last part of this phenomenon is the assumption that all women were created to give men a hard time. This role can be filled by your Token Chick or Affirmative Action Girl.

When Katha Pollit first brought the Smurfette Principle to light she was writing an article in the New York Times. She had finally given in to her 3 year old daughter and bought her a copy of *The Little Mermaid*, a story about a teenager who trades her voice for a pair of shapely legs and a shot at winning the heart of the prince. Pollit claimed that although the story didn't exactly portray women in a truly positive light, it was better than Cinderella or Sleeping Beauty because at least



Image Courtesy of disneyimages.net.

Ariel is brave and strong. Pollit then began to notice that the cartoons seemed to be infected with a plague. This plague was the Token Chick, and the director's inability to portray women as strong female characters.

When animation first began to become popular, there were two animation houses that were the leaders, Warner Brothers (WB) and Disney. In the early years, WB had primarily male characters, although there were some exceptions, such as Tweety's Granny and Pepe Le Pew's love interest/sexual assault victim. Disney, on the other hand, believed that all men wanted a vaginaed version of themselves as is the case with Mickey and Minnie Mouse. This is the part of the Smurfette Principle that claims that male characters are the default and female characters are the deviation from the default. Female characters were also in place to give male characters a hard time, as is the case with Donald and Daisy. So back in the early times, women were rarely part of the show and, if included, they were either old and oblivious, sexual assault victims, or constantly impressed by male action, all of which was done for comedic effect.

Several decades later, The Smurfs and Smurfette (the principle's namesake) were created. The Smurfs lived in a utopian, all male village until Smurfette came about. She was created by Gargamel, the villain of the show, who was making a "ruthless curse that will make them beg for mercy" (2). Originally, Smurfette had a simple dress, shoes that matched the male Smurfs', and brown matted hair. She was also constantly causing unrest and havoc in the Smurfs' world. Papa Smurf took over and performed "plastic smurfery" to transform the ugly and unhappy Smurfette into a happy blonde gorgeous smurf, complete with high heels and fancy dress. Not only do you have the Token Chick, you also go back to one of the other parts of the Smurfette Principal: all women are created to make men's lives miserable.



Image Courtesy of Bluebuddies.com

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## Rugrats and the Influence on Children's Gender Role Socialization

By Kathleen Weglarczyk



Angelica Pickles

What parts of gender identity are constructed? What does it mean for a woman to take on the expected maternal role? The cultural view of how a mother should be is drastically different from most mothers' typical reality. Yes, nurturing and caring for the wellbeing of a child is fundamental but does this mean that a woman must be quiet and soft spoken? Is she viewed as nothing more than a mere spectator? How often do we forget the importance of the mother?

The television show *Rugrats*, has a decent montage of mothers. They are all significantly different and their guidelines for raising children are equally diverse. In this essay, I will examine three of the main mothers from *Rugrats* and define the stereotypes they work against or sometimes even fulfill. First I will discuss Charlotte Pickles, CEO of a major company. Next I will discuss Didi Pickles, a fragile and nervous person and finally I will discuss Betty DeVille, the bold feminist.

Charlotte Pickles is the mother of an only child, Angelica Pickles. CEO of a successful company which she established herself, Charlotte is portrayed as a workaholic. She is constantly discussing business on her cellular phone while neglecting Angelica when the child attempts to receive the attention of her mother. This is perhaps one of the greatest character flaws the writers of the show could have decided to attribute to Charlotte. What kind of message does this send to children? What kind of societal perspective does this display? If a woman has a working position, especially one of power, does this mean that she will be a cold and negligent mother? This is one of the most incredibly stereotypical and false portrayals society has placed on the working woman. There is a balance that can be maintained between work and life. However, the writers of the show seem to have decided that this is unimportant. Despite the fact that she is a self-made and successful person, these

neglect, Angelica is prone to acting out. She is bossy and mean, and constantly disrupts and ruins the play time and imaginations of the younger children who are often fighting against her in order to achieve their own personal happiness. The apparent cause of her actions is that her behavior is displaced because of her own frustration with the missing bond between her and her parents. Her father, Drew Pickles, is a successful accountant who lacks child rearing and discipline skills. Instead of listening to their daughter's true desires for a well balanced and emotional connection, Drew and Charlotte supply Angelica with a bountiful supply of toys and succumb to whatever materialistic requests the child makes. This is a reflection on the wealthy of America. The Pickles are portrayed as a family consumed by monetary ideals, not a focus on family ideology.

Consistent attire is prevalent in many children's television cartoon shows of the nineties and Charlotte always wears a business dress/suit with black high heeled shoes. Her hair is held back in a high ponytail, her eye makeup gives her a smoky and almost sexual look. She also wears red lipstick. Now, I mention this because if you were an avid watcher of the television show, you will remember Jonathan—Charlotte's male assistant. Jonathan is, essentially, Charlotte's bitch. Quite the role reversal, isn't it? Nice job on that Nickelodeon, however, there is still the problem of the stifling social dichotomy between man and woman. In order to be successful and run her business efficiently, it appears that Charlotte must be cutthroat and hard on her employees in order to gain their respect and loyalty. Jonathan takes it rather well, though he often grumbles when Charlotte is out of earshot and occasionally attempts to conjure up ideas as to how he can get back at her for the mistreatment. However, he consistently fails or backs out of his ploys out of fear of losing his job or facing Charlotte's wrath. Back to addressing Charlotte's wardrobe in regards to her relationship with Jonathan: could this possibly be an indication of sadomasochism? Is Charlotte the dominatrix, and Jonathan her submissive dog? He takes her verbal abuse with a nervous smile. He is in a relationship in which he finds himself the victim; he cannot escape. Perhaps it is a case of Stockholm Syndrome. Despite the negativity that is often portrayed between Jonathan and Charlotte,

Charlotte Pickles



questions are still posed and it appears that the more distant and cold Charlotte appears, the better she fits the stereotype.

As a result, the audience witnesses how Angelica is raised as a spoiled and materialistic three year old child. It seems that due to maternal ne-

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## Disney Princesses

By Hallie Jackson

When I was young, I had a mild obsession with the Disney movie *Beauty and the Beast*. I watched it several times a day, every day. As I grew up, I lost interest in the movie but it was apparent that I was turning out to have personality traits similar to Belle, the book loving and seemingly independent woman who does not fit the female stereotype of her time period. Belle is not a housewife and even turns down the dashing Gaston, a man that any woman in her right mind would do anything to marry. As a young girl, I only saw the positive attributes of Belle. I learned from her that it was important to be yourself and love knowledge more than a man, that it was acceptable not to be cut out for housewifery. I even learned to love someone for what's inside, not the outside, through Belle's love for the Beast. Watching it

now, though, as a young woman, I have to grudgingly admit my disappointment in Belle. Although she starts out promising, her story ends the same way as every other sexist Disney portrayal of women. She ultimately concedes to marrying the Beast and falls into a domestic lifestyle that she was clearly not destined for and would not have been happy with

at the start of the film. A part of

me wants to defend Belle, to say that what she did was for love, and that in itself is admirable. But that's what Disney wants me to think, what society wants me to think—that the merit of a woman lies in her ability to love and care for a man. Happy endings are found in domesticity, even if it doesn't fit a woman's personality. The Beast treats Belle with absolute disrespect and verges on physically abusive behavior as well as constant verbal abuse. Only a woman with serious self-confidence issues would or could fall in love with someone who treats them like dirt. Is this the kind of ideal that Disney wants our young girls to see?

I would argue that not all Disney princess movies portray women in a negative light. I'm thinking of the free spirited Pocahontas here, who dares to fall in love with someone she is supposed to have nothing to do with, all the while turning down a perfectly predictable marriage proposal from a highly respected warrior of the tribe. She does this against the advice of her father who also happens to be the chief. Whew! If that's not feminism, then I don't know what is. Throughout the

movie, the men are shown to be ignorant and hasty in their rough emotions, nearly killing each other simply because they fail to recognize differences in culture. Pocahontas and Grandmother Willow, the two main female characters, however, know best. They see people for who they truly are, not for their skin color. Pocahontas follows her dreams and the advice of Grandmother Willow straight to John Smith and away from what her society tells her would be the appropriate thing to do—marrying serious and boring Kocoum and spending the rest of her life stifling her spirit in service to her husband.

In the end, Pocahontas' father tells her that she must "choose her own path" and she does, opting to stay with her family instead of going to England with her newfound love, John Smith. Some may argue that staying behind for the family may simply be the lesser of two anti-feminist evils, but I beg to differ. The viewer

must keep in mind the society that Pocahontas was living in, a tribal one that values the unit over the self. It would have been extremely taboo and shameful for anyone living in the tribe, not just a woman, to abandon their family and friends simply because they had a romantic connection outside of the tribe. Thus, I think that Pocahontas represents Disney's one good

deed in the feminist arena.

The Little Mermaid has major downfalls when examined closely. On the surface, Ariel appears as most people would imagine a mermaid to look. However, keep in mind that this is the image that young children are seeing. They identify with the characters on screen, even if the characters are meant to be almost ten years older than the viewer. So Ariel tells young girls that it's okay to wear skimpy tops and spend most of their time obsessing over some random guy they have never met, only seen. This suggests two things; 1) what is most important about the person you love is how they look and 2) stalking is just fine. These are horrible ideas about relationships that are being planted into girls' minds at a very young age.

Ariel is not all bad as a role model. She is the most headstrong of all her sisters and seems to be capable of making her own decisions and thinking for herself on a level that surpasses all of the other female characters in the movie, aside from evil Ursula. Unfortunately, Ariel ultimately gives up her one talent, her beautiful voice,



Image Courtesy of Disney.go.com/princesses.

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## Inspiring Woman, continued

The Magic Circle Series (two quartets and two separate books) is about Sandrilene Fa Toren (a cousin of the ruling duke), Daja Kisubo (a trader banished due to bad luck), Briar Moss (a former thief who goes good when his Gift is found), and Trisana Chandler (a banished merchant). The four all have the Gift. They find themselves having to save the Realm of Emelan over and over again with the help of their teachers. The four eventually become the youngest masters to date.

Pierce has several books in the works at the moment. Mastiff, the last book in the Beka Cooper series, is to be released in November of 2011. She has also begun work on a new series that tells the early life of Numair Salmalin, Daine's husband and teacher. Pierce has also told fans she wants to write more about Keladry and Alianne, as well as the collection of children all of the main characters have had.

When Tamora Pierce was young she noticed that books seemed to lack strong, female, teenaged main characters. Since that realization, Pierce has dedicated her life to writing books that all have just that sort of main character. Whether her characters have the Gift, are knights, or spymasters, it is hard to deny that her characters are role models for young girls, showing that you can do anything when you put your mind to it.

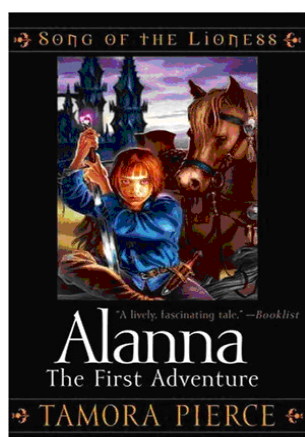
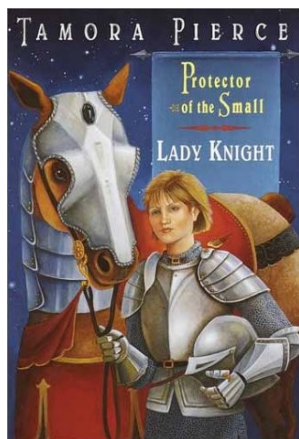
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## Women in Children's Literature, continued

– every work she has written is full of dynamic, feminist, and fascinating female characters.

High schoolers (and college students) may enjoy the "His Dark Materials" trilogy by Philip Pullman, which begins with the Golden Compass. It tells the story of the fearless and resourceful Lyra, her interdimensional travels, and her mission to save the known universe. Laurie Halse Anderson writes realistic stories about high-school girls struggling with difficult situations – dealing with rape, an eating disorder, the death of a friend – but she writes her characters with such humor, courage, and style that they remain inspirational, even in their darkest moments.

Many of these writers, you may notice, are female, and it's true that children's literature has historically been predominated by women writers, illustrators, editors, and publishers. Some of them were pigeonholed into the medium (following the myth that all women are supposed to be experts on all things child-related), but many of them used these cultural assumptions as a way to expand their career possibilities and to transgress professional boundaries, especially in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, when there were few other options for professional women. They achieved success in the publishing business, created the *Horn Book* magazine, and effectively established children's literature as a legitimate genre. These women include the librarians Anne Carroll Moore and Alice Jordan; the editors Louise Seaman Bechtel and May Masee; and the publishers of the Horn Book, Bertha Mahoney and Elinor Whitney Field (4).

Over the past 72 years, about 41% of Caldecott-winning books (the Caldecott Medal being the highest literary award for children's literature) have been written by women. This is pretty good, but I'd like to see that number be 50%. I'd also like to see more female characters that aren't cardboard cut-outs of benign maternal figures, love interests, or evil witches.

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## The Need to Raise Strong Girls Through an Influential Media, continued

teenagers, television shows like *Buffy, the Vampire Slayer* and computer games like *Tomb Raider* and *Perfect Dark*, star girls who are physically assertive and in control (even though they are often sexualized). Even in the *Simpsons*, Lisa has been acknowledged as the brains of the family from the start (6).

In every form of media, there are people coming together to make a difference for all of society's youth. The Campaign for Real Beauty launched by Dove looks to bring positive female images to advertising. *New Moon Girls Magazine*, created by a woman named Nancy Gurver to eliminate negative images from magazines, gives girls an opportunity to define their own ideas of a healthy body image. It gives girls the ability to voice their opinions about the media through writing, podcasts, and artwork. Young adult books such as Karen Eddington's, "Today I Live," show the journey of a girl to self acceptance and inner peace. Finally, children's books like Brad Wilcox's "Hip Hip Hooray for Annie McRaye," are teaching girls how to stay true to themselves and realize how powerful they are as individuals (7). Despite the progress that has been made in children's media, there is a long way to go, both in the quantity of female characters in children's media as well as the quality and depth of these women and girls.

The media's portrayal of women affects the self-image of girls dramatically. Concepts of beauty and personality are found in movies, magazines, television shows, and video games. As long as there are enough positive examples for young girls to look up to, they can be free to be themselves. When they are not, the pressure to be thin, physically attractive, and pleasing in order to be likable and popular starts to control their lives. According to the National Institute of Media and the Family, studies have found that the media's focus on body image and submissive female stereotypes has affected the way children think. Both boys and girls describe female characters as domestic, interested in boys, and concerned with appearances. Stereotypes in the media inevitably affect our culture, especially the young. To help combat the influence of negative female stereotypes in the media, and therefore encourage not only girls but all of society to go beyond these restrictive expectations, it is crucial for the media to present children with strong and positive role models for all children to follow (8).

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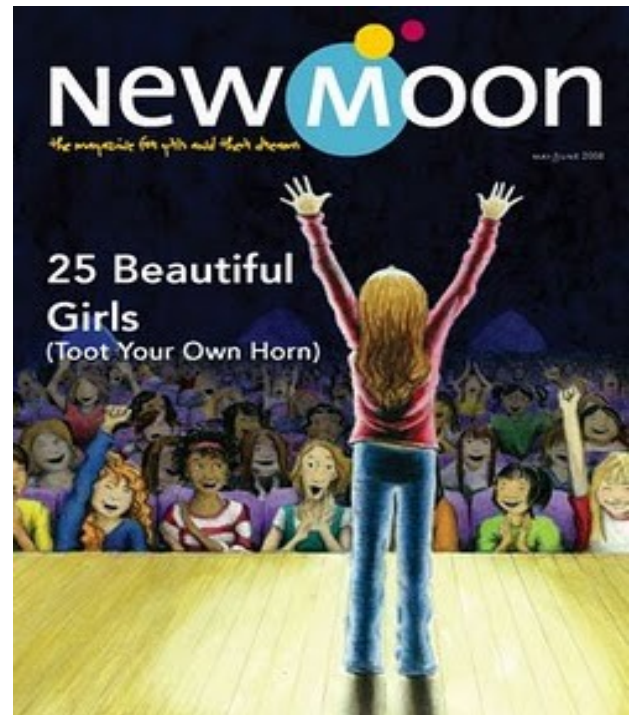


Image Courtesy of *New Moon Girls Magazine*.

## The Smurfette Principle, continued



Image Courtesy of Photobucket.

Around the time of the Smurfs, came Ms. Piggy. Ms. Piggy was rare in that she was one of the few female characters allowed to participate in the slapstick comedy atmosphere of the show, though it was generally through violence. She was also constantly abusing and controlling her love interest, Kermit the frog, much like Daisy was doing to Donald.

During the 80s we veered from gender neutral shows and entered the realm of gender specific shows with another phenomenon. This time it was pairs of shows, one for each gender: He-Man and She-Ra, Transformers and My Little Ponies. All shows had their token characters of the other sex. He-Man was progressive in that it had an almost even number of women and men on the show and they were not as passive and ditzzy as most. The same cannot be said for She-Ra, My Little Ponies or Transformers. Who decided robots needed a gender, and why were all the female robots pink?

As we entered the 90s, shows went back to being targeted at a specific age demographic rather than a gender. The characters themselves were predominantly male with a Token Chick. WB began to resemble Disney in that its male characters, such as Tiny Toons, gained vaginaed versions of themselves. The only female character who was not a spin-off of one of the men was Elmira, a young girl who was an angry brat who enjoyed reeking havoc on the other characters. The WB show *Animaniacs* originally included three male characters, but was changed at the last minute to make the

youngest sibling female. Dot mostly kept up with her brothers, except when other female characters were around. Those characters were often blond, busty and disproportionate and left the Dot feeling out of place.

Token Chickism persisted with the development of Nickelodeon. The female characters of the *Rugrats* perfectly illustrate the Smurfette Principle (minus the sexualization). Angelica was set on making the others' lives difficult, Suzie was nerdy but sweet, and Lil was the vaginaed version of Phil. There were no lead female characters in *Nick Cartoons* until 1996 when *The Wild Thornberry's* was created. In fact, since 1991 Nickelodeon has produced 33 cartoons, and of those, only three of them had strong female leads: *The Wild Thornberry's*, *My Life as a Teenage Robot*, and *As Told By Ginger*.

Since the beginning of animation, the Smurfette Principle has been alive and well. Few cartoons have had female leads, and females were most often Token Chicks or Affirmative Action Girls. What does the creation of these roles say about society? We seem not to be able to relate to female characters unless we are female ourselves, but we have no problem relating to males. Stereotypes and niches benefit no one, so why is it that we still suffer through the Smurfette Principle in cartoons and TV today?



Image courtesy of Warnerbros.com



Image Courtesy of Bluebuddies.com

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**Rugrats Gender Roles, continued**

she spontaneously rewards him for his work via bonuses and immense gratitude.

We also see Angelica take advantage of Jonathan on the rare occasion when he baby-sits the young girl. She manipulates him into doing whatever it is she wants by using her mother as a threatening consequence if he attempts to dispute or refuse a request she makes. We see Jonathan as a male dominated by females of all ages.

Diane "Didi" Kropotkin Kerpacker-Pickles is the mother of one-year old Tommy Pickles (and later Dil Pickles in the 2000 episodes) and wife of the inventor Stu Pickles. She is the complete opposite of her sister-in-law Charlotte. Didi is a stay at home mother who seems constantly on the verge of an emotional breakdown. She frequently consults various books written by the fictionally famed Dr. Werner Lipshitz, a child psychologist. Didi demonstrates the stereotype that housewives are deficient and desire something more. She is a woman who does not know her true identity and thus fails to have confidence in her own child rearing abilities. Her husband, Stu, is a toy inventor who often dabbles in dangerous experiments which only adds to her stress and concern for the babies.

When I think of Didi Pickles, I often think of Charlotte Perkins Gillman's "The Yellow Wallpaper". Is Didi perhaps still suffering, unknowingly, from postpartum depression? Though she does not feel any anger or negativity toward Tommy, she shows signs of loss of energy and restlessness, eats little and has trouble eating, and is socially isolated. It could be a possibility. Didi is a fragile woman prone to nervous breakdown, fits of tears, and anxiety. Perhaps she does feel trapped, fearing that no one understands her lack of stability. Didi is a weak woman with a soft heart who wants to be a naturally nurturing mother, but again, constantly seeks advice from a male child psychologist. Though she doesn't go crazy tearing apart the wallpaper or peeling paint from the walls, one can still reflect that she is indeed in need of a stronger influence in order to achieve her own personal happiness. She wears large glasses and a long dress that covers her entire body, perhaps a reflection of the need to cover up her personal insecurities.

Ironically enough, despite his mother's insecurities and self-doubt, Tommy Pickles is the adventurous leader of the babies. He is the constant reminder that Dr. Lipshitz's advice is useless. Tommy challenges the advice Didi and Stu attempt to implement, and so



far has been depicted as a positive and strong role model for the other babies.

Elizabeth "Betty"

DeVile is by far the most positive and influential of the *Rugrats* mothers. She is the mother of the two year old twins, Phil and Lil. She is portrayed as an overweight woman with short brown hair, held back with a blue head band, who wears a large purple shirt emblazoned with a large orange standard female gender symbol. Betty is the woman who does it all. She works at a coffee shop and constantly remains physically active, engaging in sports with the men on the cartoon series. Her husband Howard is a quiet and nervous man, often frantic and unsure of himself. Betty is always there to reassure and support her husband while standing her ground.



Betty serves as a rock for many of the adult characters on the show. While Didi and other parents on the cartoon series consult Dr. Lipshitz for parental advice, she calls him out on what his name may just properly indicate: he has a mouth dribbling with shit. Betty constantly reaffirms the other parents' own personal initial thoughts on child care, and is the voice which reminds us all that parents have been raising healthy and happy children long before they had self-help books. She is a progressive figure in the women's movement.

Her twin children wear identical green dresses and pink shirts, though Phil wears blue shorts and shoes, while Lil's shoes are pink and she also wears a pink bow in her hair. Though this may seem like an indication of how our culture has come to identify blue as masculine and pink as feminine, it seems to serve an honest purpose: the viewer is able to visually differentiate between the two toddlers. The two often switch places by putting the bow on Phil. They both carry their mother's strong and confident demeanor. She is a positive influence on both of her children. Betty is loving and caring and instills strong morals in her two year olds as well as the other characters on this popular cartoon television series.

**Sources: All Images Courtesy of Nick.com**

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## Disney Princesses, continued

in favor of a pair of legs and a boyfriend. Is Disney trying to say that muteness for a man's company is a worthy sacrifice for a woman to make? I wish I could say no, but I'm not sure how else to interpret this. Perhaps Disney is yet again simply trying to suggest that doing anything for love is an admirable thing to do. This may be a good thing to teach our children, but the way that Disney spins the story is always less than favorable for the female character. The man doesn't have to do any work. It is the woman who is expected to give up everything—her friends, her family, her voice—in order to be with him.

Mulan tries to push beyond gender stereotypes, but falls short in the end. In fact, I think that Mulan is more of a reflection of how Disney chooses to portray culture in their films by relying heavily on stereotypes, but that is for another article. Mulan seems to be a feminist at the beginning of the film. She's "too skinny" and lacks the "obedience" that men want from her. She does not marry, despite the fact that it shames her family (because all Chinese people are extremely concerned with shame on the family and all that, right?). Mulan has a strong desire to serve in the army in her father's place, which is of course not allowed in ancient China. So, she does the unthinkable for a Disney princess, she cuts off her hair and pretends to be a man! While a little clumsy at first, Mulan eventually becomes a prized soldier, after dashing handsome Captain Li Shang "makes a man" out of her. But of course, since this is Disney and we have learned by now that women simply cannot resist the charm of any good looking guy that gives them a little attention, Mulan falls in love with Li Shang and all goes to hell. In an unexpected plot twist, Mulan's secret is discovered and her love interest becomes disenchanted with her, feeling betrayed that his friend lied to him about his gender. Mulan is removed



"Mulan," Image Courtesy of Disney.

from the army and sent home to the place and people that she has once again shamed with her actions...but not before she saves all of China from the invading Huns. Mulan is clearly quite the woman!

The Princess and the Frog is an adorable movie. I loved that Tiana was the first African American Disney princess, although it



"The Princess and the Frog"  
Image Courtesy of Disney.com

took Disney forever to finally have one. So I went into the movie thinking that this could be a step in the right direction and maybe Disney was finally opening its eyes to the world around them. I am happy to report that I was less disappointed in this movie than in the other princess films. Tiana is introduced as a hardworking young woman who will do anything to reach her dream of opening a restaurant. She works two jobs making very little money and chooses work over going out with friends, refusing to wish on stars to make her dreams come true.

The first hint that this movie is going to go downhill is when Tiana's mother urges her to stop working so hard so that she can find a decent man and settle down because her mother wants grandbabies. Can you say red flag? I was hopeful when Tiana brushed off her mother's suggestions as if they meant little to her. Her business prospects are always more important than anything else in her life—a true strong career woman! Tiana finally gets lucky by coming into just the right amount of money by accident and is able to purchase the site for her restaurant. Everything seems to be going according to plan until Tiana finds out someone else has offered to pay more for her building site than she can counter-bid. She becomes a frog after kissing a prince-turned-amphibian, and has to grapple with an evil Voodoo shadow man. It turns out that the prince is actually a pauper and gets by based on his looks and charm. He has no ambitions of his own and has been cut off from his parents because they were tired of his antics. Does that sound like a man worthy of hard working Tiana's affection? Disney seems to think so. The two fall in love in a matter of days, an extremely fantasized picture of what a healthy relationship is based on—communication and mutual respect.

However, in an out of character twist for Disney, the prince is the one who is willing to give up his life to make Tiana's dream come true. The man who has never worked a day in his life is willing to work two jobs for

Continued on Next Page (13)

## Disney Princesses, continued

the one he loves. It is not Tiana who must give up everything, but the prince who must give up his lavish playboy days for his one true love. A sweet ending? I think not. By introducing the prince as the savior, Disney is suggesting that Tiana never would have gotten her dream without the help of a man. She was simply too poor on her own, incomplete in some way. While this film is indeed a step in the right direction with the gender devotion and sacrifices reversed, it still falls short of the truth, and teaches young women that if their prince would arrive, all of their problems would be fixed.

I almost feel bad for picking on Cinderella, but it needs to be done. The girl is born into unfortunate circumstances, with a mother who passed away shortly after her birth, and a father who remarried because he feels his daughter needs some more feminine energy around her (as if she isn't feminine enough). And then there are the stepmother and two stepsisters who treat her as less worthy than the dirt on their boots! Cinderella is more of a slave than a family member and only wants a decent life for herself. Who can blame her? I certainly can't. I can, however, blame Disney for the way they make Cinderella seem helpless, in need of magic and a man to change her situation in life. Disney is telling our young girls that if only Prince Charming would find their glass slipper all would be well in the world. We see, yet again, the helpless female whose life is forever changed for the better simply because she has a man in her life. Wouldn't the movie have a better message if Cinderella made an attempt to change her own situation in life? Perhaps she could have gotten a job and saved money to get out of her evil stepmother's clutches, or met Prince Charming at work. I don't think that takes any of the romance or cinematic appeal from the movie, it just paints a real world picture for younger generations. To be fair, though, Cin-

derella is one of the older Disney princesses and the young women watching it at that time probably couldn't have gotten their own jobs even if they had wanted desperately to do so. Perhaps I'm flogging a dead pony with this one.

Society is built around what men want. Women are taught to make themselves pleasing to men, to be "seen but not heard," to be lovely young women. We put on makeup to make ourselves more attractive to the opposite sex. Many women give up their careers to become



"Cinderella," Image Courtesy of Disney's Online Store

stay at home moms. Dad earns the money; mom does the laundry. Even though most American mothers of young children now work outside the home, they still come home to "the second shift" and perform most of the routine housework. There is a clear unbalance to the way society functions. It is sometimes difficult to notice how patriarchal our society is because it is so deeply ingrained in us from the time we are young. As children, we may see traditional gender roles perpetuated in the house even if our families do not consider themselves to be anti-feminist. And then we watch movies like these that tell us the most important thing to do is find Prince Charming and then give up everything for him, no matter what the cost. While I think that Disney is on to something in their attempts to say that love is important, I think they are in need of some Disney princes, some men who are willing to let go of everything they have for love instead of just rescuing the damsel in distress and then sitting back while she sacrifices everything for him. Disney should open their eyes to the world around them and realize that the ideals they are putting forth as models to young girls are detrimental to a modern society that no longer functions, or should function, under the thumb of traditional gender roles. Disney has an amazing platform and I encourage them to be an agent of change and take us one step further toward gender equality.

The older Disney princesses exist in a category unto themselves. It is simply too difficult to hold these princesses accountable for any antifeminist sentiment today because of the historical context at the time these films were made and shown. Perhaps Cinderella was a good example, progressive even, for girls watching the film. She is clearly a capable woman, even if she is bogged down by following orders from her stepmother because good women do as they're told.

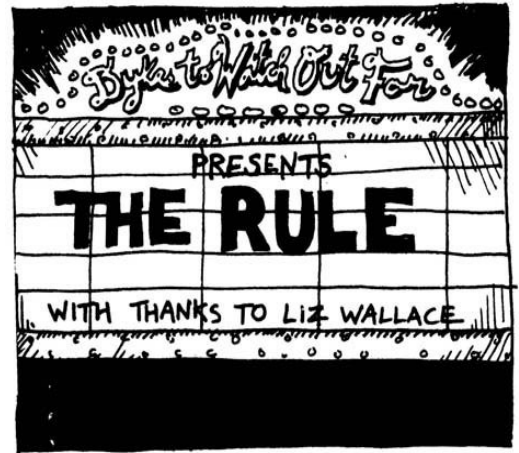
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# What Movies Pass the Bechdel Test?

The Bechdel Test was thought up by Alison Bechdel, creator of the long-running strip *Dykes to Watch Out For* and a graphic memoir, *Fun Home*. It was made famous through *Dykes to Watch Out For: Rules*. To pass the test, a movie must:

1. Have two women,
2. Who talk to each other,
3. About something besides a man.



It's not a perfect test for sexism, but a surprising number of films fail. One website, [bechdel.nullium.net](http://bechdel.nullium.net), has been keeping track.

- Among those that don't pass the first rule are *The Great Escape*, *Reservoir Dogs*, *Aladdin*, *Oceans Eleven*, *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider*, *Ice Age*, *There Will Be Blood*, *Ratatouille* and *Angels and Demons*, *Megamind*, *The Tourist*, *Yogi Bear*, *Angels and Demons*.



- Failing the second rule is *Blade Runner*, *Ghostbusters*, *Back to the Future*, *Jurassic Park*, *Pulp Fiction*, *The Lion King*, *Interview with a Vampire*, *Gattaca*, *The Fifth Element*, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, *Fight Club*, *Shrek*, two of the *Austin Powers* movies, the entire *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, *Wall-E*, *The Reader*, *Milk*, *Up*, *Green Hornet*, *Charlie St. Cloud*, *The Last Airbender*, *Shutter Island*, *Tron Legacy*

- Failures to comply to the third rule include *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory*, *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*, *When Harry Met Sally*, *Home Alone*, *Braveheart*, *Trainspotting*, *The Princess Bride*, *Watchmen*, the remaining *Austin Powers* movie, and two out of three *Pirate of the Caribbean* movies.

- The happy total passes include: *The Wizard of Oz*, *Carrie*, *Alien*, *Labyrinth*, *Thelma and Louise*, *Matilda*, *Mulan*, *The Matrix*, *Girl Interrupted*, *Boys Don't Cry*, *Bend it Like Beckham*, *Persepolis*, *Juno*, *Hairspray*, *Coraline*, *Inception*, *Letters to Juliette*, *Alice in Wonderland*, *Mean Girls 2*, *Burlesque*, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 1*, *How to Train Your Dragon*.

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