

The representation of masculinity in children's literature

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ABSTRACT

This study used discourse analysis to explore the ways in which picture books, as literature of a particular genre aimed at children, construct and represent masculinities in text and image. The underlying premise is based in a social constructionist framework which posits that language does not reflect reality, but constructs it. As a result, children's literature as a transmitter of social norms will reflect the dominant ways of being male. The study analysed twenty South African children's picture books written in English and published between 1984 and 2008. The aim of the research was to uncover and describe the ways in which various masculinities are represented in South African children's picture books. Although stereotypical ways of being male were presented, there was some variability in the possibility for the enactment of masculine roles by the male characters because of their young age. Contradictory messages about appropriate male behaviour hinted at the complexity of boyhood identities.

Keywords: *masculinity; representation; children's literature; South African picture books; gender identity*

A paradox of the influence of the proliferation of research from feminist perspectives is that it has drawn attention to the corresponding lack of knowledge about men. While studies for and by women are legitimated by the need to rewrite 'herstory' and rectify the injustice of women's exclusion from scholarship, men's studies cannot make the same claim, and may even be seen as a backlash against feminism (Brod, 1987). Despite this, the need to theorize gender, and particularly men and masculinity, remains pertinent because of the "dangers of reification, essentialism, and reductionism that arise when using such categories as 'women' and 'men', 'femininity' and 'masculinity'" (Hearn & Morgan, 1990, pp. 8-9).

The invisible man

The fact that little is known about masculinity is concealed by men's dominance in almost all other aspects of society, which has led to masculinity being taken for granted, and unspoken notions of manliness being accepted as the 'norm' and 'natural'(Morrell, 1998). This relative 'invisibility' of men may serve men's interests in maintaining the status quo and their position of social dominance (Hearn & Morgan, 1990). Masculinity is not a natural state; it is a socially constructed, fluid, collective gender identity. It has become commonplace to speak of 'masculinities', the plural referring to the notion that there is no one universal masculinity, but rather dynamic "configurations of gender practice" negotiated in time, ideology and culture (Connell, 2000, p. 28).

One of the ways this enquiry into masculinity has gained salience in contemporary society is as a framework for understanding the so-called 'boy crisis'. Boys have been found to both volatile and vulnerable: at higher risk for suicide, reckless driving, drug experimentation, and committing or being a victim of violence (Greer, 2007). Certain explanations for why boys are in trouble appeal to essentialised ideas of boyhood, positioning them as newly disadvantaged by the gains of feminism (Flood, Gardiner, Pease & Pringle, 2007).

Issues such as this call into question whether masculinity is biological or socially constructed. From birth, gender is given prominence as arguably the most powerful identity marker when newborn children enter the world as either boys or girls. The act of being named male or female carries gendered expectations, limitations and conditions which have effects throughout the lifespan. Although this decision is made on the basis of a biological sex distinction between genitalia, there is nothing inherently 'male' about a child born with a penis (Whitehead, 2007). Masculinity is acquired and enacted through certain culturally

variable roles and rules, which govern behaviour, dress, and subjectivity, so that men are made rather than born (Connell, 2002). The complex relationship between embodied reality and cultural influence that interact to produce masculinity is uncertain and emphasises the multiplicity, changeability and fluidity of maleness. What is constant is the social position of men in a gendered political category of dominance (Whitehead, 2007).

While a sexist society ensures the dominance of men over women, not all men are always in dominant positions. Masculinities are organised hierarchically and accorded prominence according to race, class, sexual orientation and other factors (Consalvo, 2003). Hegemonic masculinity refers to “the socially exalted form of being a “real man”” (Cooper & Foster, 2008, p. 5). All men suffer because of male dominance, both those perpetuating hegemonic masculinity and those excluded from dominant groups because of their lack of ‘manliness’, their race, class or sexual orientation (Connell, 2002; Morrell, 1998). Young boys can be said to be part of a marginalised male identity because their age prohibits them from exercising their masculinity fully, as the relinquishment of boyhood through various rites of passage is a requirement for achieving manhood in most cultures. Boyhood is also marginalised in gender studies, “the boy is all but elided in the various descriptions of manhood in the making which tend to present him as an incomplete man, and entertain no suspicion that the finished man might be an incomplete version of the boy” (Greer, 2007, p. 33). An incomplete understanding of boyhood means an incomplete understanding of gender, a state quite unlike girlhood, which women assimilate into their identities as they grow older, but men must renounce boyhood in order to accomplish manhood (Groth, 2007).

The gender order in contemporary society is structured so that boys are primed to be hard, strong and dominant in order to grow into men. They are encouraged by their peers, school and the media to be competitive, tough and aggressive. There are various theories as to how children acquire gender, one of the most influential being ‘sex role’ theory. It proposes that sex roles are acquired through socialization managed by various agencies, such as the family, school, peer groups and media, and that compliance with the prescribed social norms is engendered by positive and negative reinforcement (Connell, 2002).

Challenges to sex role theory argue for a more dynamic conceptualisation of masculinity and femininity and how it is acquired. This model is problematic because it implies that there is one sex role for boys and another one for girls, when in reality there are multiple patterns of masculinity and femininity in society. It also assumes that acquiring gender is about acquiring certain traits, but research has shown that men and women are quite

similar psychologically. Sex role theory positions boys and girls as passive receivers of social norms, without recognising their agency in negotiating their gender identity (Thorne, 1993), and its one-directional model of learning does not explain what happens when gender patterns are rejected (Connell, 2002).

The social constructionist view of gender is the starting point of Western conceptualisations of how gender identity is developed (Jiahua, 2006). There is evidence that children are able to distinguish between their own and members of the opposite sex from as early as three years of age (McDonald, 1989; Turner-Bowker, 1996). By the time they enter kindergarten, most children have fairly rigid sex stereotypes in place (Gooden & Gooden, 2001; Turner-Bowker, 1996), and are aware of the gender appropriate behaviour for men and women (Weitzman, Eifler, Hokada, & Ross, 1972).

Gender relations in South Africa are characterised by various patriarchies, including an English-speaking kind, an Afrikaans type and what is broadly referred to as Black culture. The meaning of the word ‘boy’ in South African English, often used as a demeaning way to refer to male African workers, is bound up with servitude and the denial of adult masculinity that came to be a feature of Apartheid (Morrell, 1998). After democracy, class and race continue to impact on the formation of young masculinities in South Africa, especially those marginalised by adverse socioeconomic circumstances, as Cooper and Foster’s (2008) analysis of the language used by coloured adolescents awaiting trial to construct intersecting discourses of masculinity shows. It also foregrounds the primacy of language in understanding masculinities, as language “actually inscribes certain forms of masculinity through discourse” (Cooper & Foster, 2008).

Learning to be a man – children’s literature and masculinity

One of the most important methods of transmitting the values and norms of a society to its members is through storytelling (Kortenhaus & Demarest, 1993). Therefore language, and books, are some of the most powerful mediums through which this process takes place. This research is based on the premise that books have an effect on the way children come to conceptualise their own gender and that of the opposite sex. Books allow children to learn about how other boys and girls behave and experience worlds outside their immediate environment (Gooden & Gooden, 2001; Kortenhaus & Demarest, 1993). They continue to play an important role in children’s lives, even with the dominance of other popular culture mediums, such as movies and television. Books appear to have a longer lasting effect because

of the personal investment required by literature, as well as their fixed nature which allows them to be read and reread. This means that characters in children's books have the potential to influence children's perceptions of socially accepted roles and values of how males and females are supposed to behave in a relatively enduring way (Kortenhaus & Demarest, 1993).

Children's literature has many functions, and is variously viewed as an introduction to the world of reading, entertainment, and even a socialization agent. As a means of conveying social norms, children's literature can be seen as simultaneously reflecting the ideals of society and the inherent prejudices within it (Van Vuuren, 1994). The prevalent gender role stereotypes shared by society shape the gender identity of children. Language, storytelling and children's books combine as an effective and important means of communicating cultural ideals regarding gender appropriate behaviour (Gooden & Gooden, 2001; Kortenhaus & Demarest, 1993). The emergence of children's books as part of a distinctive literature intended specifically for young people dates back to the 1740s (Marshall, 2004), although some writers suggest the early 1500s as the starting point (Gooden & Gooden, 2001). This movement began with a vested interest in the promotion of conformity to normative heterosexual femininity and masculinity. By the mid-1800s, separate books for boys and girls had been established, with themes of adventure and domesticity respectively (Marshall, 2004); by 1930 children's literature had reinforced the traditional role of the active male and the passive female (Gooden & Gooden, 2001).

Given their influence, there is much interest in the implications of depictions in children's books of female and male role models, their comparative value, as well as permissible behaviour and suitable occupations in which they can engage (Crabb & Bielawski, 1994; Hamilton, Anderson, Broaddus, & Young, 2006; Kortenhaus & Demarest, 1993; Weitzman et al., 1972). Young children are especially susceptible to these messages because they are in the process of developing their identities, and books provide some of their early exposure to expectations of how men and women are to behave (Gooden & Gooden, 2001). Masculinity, as a social construct that "connects with but does not necessarily coincide with maleness" is an important concept to explore in children's literature so that the assumptions about what it means to be masculine as portrayed in these books can be evaluated (Nodelman, 2008, p. 2).

Much research has gone into uncovering the gender inequalities in the representation of women and girls in children's literature, and contributed to the anti-bias movement which serves to promote books for children which are free from stereotypes and encourage

egalitarian gender roles. The place of boys in this enterprise has until recently been neglected, but increasing attention to the effect of gender stereotypes on boys and the representation of masculinities in children's literature has highlighted the importance of this field (Stephens, 2008; Nodelman, 2008). Looking at picture books as a particular kind of cultural artefact and how they represent masculinity "can make visible the ways we construct gender, specifically the ways we construct gendered children within cultural discourse" (Wannamaker, 2008, p. 10).

A false, but popular assumption is that picture books are written for young children at an age when gender is irrelevant, they are "merely children, genderless and often ageless" (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2006, p. 108). Their simplicity belies the complexity of meaning and interpretative skill required to understand even the most seemingly undemanding of them (Hunt, 2005). It may not be apparent on the surface, but ideas which imply and reinforce normative masculinity exist within literature written for children. Nodelman (2008) identifies the contradictoriness in representations of masculinity in children's literature as indicative of a wider culture which sets a double standard for boys:

...it confirms that to be appropriately male, you must be triumphantly animal-like and express your true masculine animal nature. But in doing so, you will have to be punished for defying civilized values, and you will have to take your punishment like a man (Nodelman, 2008, p. 6).

A brief review of research on the representation of masculinity in children's literature

In the wake of feminism, there has been considerable interest in the under-representation and stereotypical role of females in children's literature, and concern about the messages this sends to girls about their abilities and potential (Weitzman et al., 1972). Research has been heavily focussed on this area, particularly with a view to rectifying the situation by advocating for non-sexist children's books. The preponderance of male characters and their positive characterisation in children's literature is accompanied by a surprising lack of academic enquiry into the representation of masculinity in books for young children and its varied consequences. Various platforms such as EBSCO Host, JSTOR etc. were searched using the keywords *masculinity*, *gender representation*, *children's literature* and *picture books* to source journal articles. Few articles were found specifically related to the representation of masculinity in children's literature, making it necessary to trace more

articles from the reference lists of these, as well as looking for articles on the representation of females in children's literature which also discussed male characters.

In research on the representation of gender in children's literature, the focus has been on the inequalities between male and female characters, which has led to a limited view of masculinity in the genre. It could be that the dominance of boys in children's literature has resulted in an analysis of their representations in comparison with that of girls, and not as separate subjects in their own right. The research finds boy characters in children's books to be independent, dominant and authoritative, and engaged in active roles outdoors (Kortenhaus & Demarest, 1993; Marshall, 2004; Williams, Williams, Vernon, & Malecha, 1987). It has been found that stories about boys sell better than stories about girls, and the preponderance of male characters in stories and illustrations in books for children of both genders implies that they are more interesting and important than females (Hamilton et al., 2006; Turner-Bowker, 1996). Boys in the literature are brave, heroic leaders who go on exciting adventures, occasionally rescuing girls and animals; they are competitive, aggressive, and assertive, aspiring to career roles that require skill or training (Hamilton et al., 2006; Turner-Bowker, 1996). It can be seen that such descriptions of boys using oppositional descriptors to those of girls do not begin to fully engage with the complexity tied up in the representation of masculinity in children's literature.

The view that the effects of gender stereotyping are detrimental to girls because it limits their opportunities for personality development and career options is well-documented (Gooden & Gooden, 2001; Turner-Bowker, 1996; Weitzman et al., 1972), but less attention has been paid to the harmfulness of gender stereotypes to boys (Hamilton et al., 2006; McArthur & Eisen, 1976). Characterising boys according to these stereotypes, even though attributes such as strength, leadership and assertiveness are desirable, may not necessarily be beneficial for them because it disallows a range of emotional expression, such as tenderness and nurturing, as reserved for girls.

It may be inferred that narrow gender roles with strict rules about what either sex can or cannot do restricts development and excludes those who do not conform to the gender stereotype prescribed by their sex. The boundaries between genders are more permeable for girls than boys, as it is more permissible for girls to identify with male characters than for boys to identify with female characters (McArthur & Eisen, 1976). Boys unable to identify with the stereotypical male character pressed upon them in much of the literature for children are presented with limited opportunities for access to a masculine identity suited to them.

These questions highlight how the complexity of identity formation and representation is negated when the femininity and masculinity are compared according to their relative worth and not as distinct states in their own right. To address this issue, scholars have suggested a move away from essentialist conceptualisations of identity, and binary male/female distinctions (Ellis, 2008; Jiahua, 2006). This entails a recognition that non-female individuals do not make up a homogenous group, and include marginalised categories, such as young boys, which have different masculinities. Age, as a transitional category, makes the study of masculinity in boyhood, and its depiction in children's literature, particularly interesting (Ellis, 2008).

An example of the role of popular literature in the construction of masculinity is Farley's (2008) study of twentieth-century English boys' annuals. These 'handbooks' of acceptable behaviour for boys communicated the dominant beliefs regarding race, class and culture to an uncritical readership in the process of forming their gender identity. As was found in children's literature, the most pervasive characterisation of boys was as independent, active individuals, as hunters, fighters and navigators, looking for adventure (Farley, 2008). Archetypes such as these have been recommended as tools for engaging young boys in reading from an early age, as well as including atypical ones which "help boys understand that there are many ways to manhood and that some paths look very different from traditional ones" (Zambo, 2007). Exposing boys to stories where male characters display behaviour that is non-traditional allows those who do not fit stereotypical masculine identities more agency and diverse opportunities for self-expression (Wellhousen Tunks & McGee, 2006).

AIM

This study aims to explore how masculinities are constructed in text and image in South African picture books. Examining masculinity in South Africa is especially important because of the effects of the shifting political dispensation on all aspects of society, including gender relations. Children's literature speaks to a captive audience in their formative years, and it is worth investigating which ways of being desirably masculine these books are communicating. The portrayal of masculinity is frequently done in "complicated, contradictory, often paradoxical ways that highlight the difficult negotiations boys are making as they develop gendered identities within, against, or on the margins of current cultural constructions of masculinity" (Wannamaker, 2008, p. 10).

METHOD

The development of the ‘turn to language’ radically altered the conception of language as a neutral way of communicating internal states by reconceptualising it as social performance. This understanding recognizes how language constructs versions of social reality to accomplish social objectives (Willig, 2001). Discourse analysis as a theory is concerned with issues of construction, representation, and power; and as a method provides a way for examining how systems of statements construct objects (Parker, 1992).

Tonkiss (2004) defines language as the subject matter of discourse analytic research, the purpose of which is to reveal how it is deployed to construct particular versions of the social world. Discourse analysis views language as being both constructed and constructive, an idea which highlights the functional power of text as social action (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Willig, 2001).

Discourse analysis is located in a social constructionist epistemology, which challenges taken-for-granted understandings of ourselves and the world, especially the assumption that the categories used to interpret the world relate to actual ‘objective’ entities (Coyle, 2007). This makes discourse analysis appropriate for the purposes of this study because it interrogates how ideas of gender become fixed and naturalised.

Parker (1992) outlines criteria various for distinguishing discourse. With respect to the representation of masculinity in picture books, the exploration of connotations with the use of free association, identifying objects (particular concerns) and subjects (agents), drawing out systems of meaning, identifying intertextuality, and paying attention to self-referential ways of speaking were found to be particularly useful for analysis (Parker, 1992).

SAMPLE

The units of analysis in this study are social artefacts in the form of children’s picture books. Picture books may be defined as “a unique combination of graphic art and narrative in which a sense of story is completed and more frequently extended by the illustrations” (Cianciolo, 1973, p. 1). They are often seen as an introduction to reading because of their simplicity, brevity of text and abundance of accompanying illustrations, making them particularly suited to younger children, who have not yet learned or are still learning to read.

For the purposes of this study, picture books will be defined as books written specifically for children where the text is supplemented by illustrations to tell a story. Only English fiction books with male protagonists that fit these criteria published in South Africa

were considered for inclusion. As I am a first-language English speaker, only English books were selected, as I felt I would be able to do the best possible analysis in my mother tongue. However, there are translations of four of the titles in the sample available, and one of the books has the text in both English and Xhosa (*Utshepo mde – Tall enough*). Books about or with animals behaving as humans were also excluded, as the identification of gender in anthropomorphized characters requires its own separate, complicated schema, and was not deemed useful in the context of this study.

Initially the sample was to be selected by cross-referencing the awards conferred by various organizations (such as the Maskew Miller Longman Literature Award, Percy FitzPatrick Award, etc.) and selecting those that appeared on more than one list. This was found to be unfeasible because many of the lists were out of date, they did not each have corresponding lists in the same year, and some of the books on the lists were not available in the UCT library, Rondebosch Public Library or Cape Town City Library. However, it was noted in other studies using award-winning books as the sample that this was noted as a limitation because it restricted analysis to a category of books, which is only available to a select portion of the picture book-reading audience, and award-winning books do not reflect the picture book genre as a whole (Kortenhaus & Demarest, 1993; Williams et al., 1987).

A version of non-probability sampling, purposive sampling, was deemed most appropriate because it allowed the selection of items for analysis to be based on personal judgment, the purpose of the study and its research aims (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). To get an idea of the books available to the general public, a list was made of all the South African picture books with male main characters at Exclusive Books. A catalogue search showed the majority of these titles to be available in the UCT Libraries Rare Books Collection, and consultation with the specialist librarian revealed further books that fit the criteria. Librarians in the Children's department of the Rondebosch and Claremont libraries also gave suggestions based on professional experience of books to include. A convenience sample of 20 books published between 1985 and 2008 was selected based on these considerations.

METHOD OF ANALYSIS

The texts were first each read in their entirety without any specific preconceptions in order to get a feel for how they functioned as picture books. They were also discussed informally with others (one male, one female) in a type of "free association" (Parker, 1992) to reveal further connotations. A simple content analysis was then conducted to give a systematic overview of

the trends in the sample (Alexander, 2008). The coding scheme counted how many male characters were present in the story, how old they were, what race they were, and whether their activities and speech were active or passive. This was combined with an interpretive analysis looking at colour, line, and themes, to give a more nuanced understanding of the illustrations, as well as reveal ambiguity and intertextuality (Alexander, 2008).

The images and text in picture books work jointly to produce meaning, and so were considered together. Discourse analysis can also be extended to visual methodologies for examining images, based on the premise that visibility is a type of discourse which makes particular things visible in certain ways, and makes others invisible (Rose, 2007). Picture books combine two kinds of communication; the visual and the verbal, an arrangement which provides countless possibilities for different interpretations (Nikolajeva, 2006). The illustrations were analysed with regards to how they interacted with the text to communicate a particular message, as well as how they added further meaning to the text.

After multiple readings, certain pertinent themes emerged. These were used in conjunction with some of Parker's criteria for distinguishing discourse (1992) to formulate a set of research questions for working through each of the books. This framework was used to identify the relevant objects, subjects and contexts within which masculinity operated.

The results of these questions were then interpreted using the typology of gender-role messages for appropriate male behaviour devised by Harris (1995). Although these categories were generated in a Western context, globalization and the proliferation of media from America contribute to a discernable stereotypical masculine ideology. This does not mean there is a universal way of being a man, but rather highlights the consistencies in the messages informing male behaviour norms. These "scripts" of normative behaviours help men organize and plan their lives, as well as set standards which try to realize, but may fail to achieve or deviate from. Many of these standards are inconsistent and contradictory, for example the expectation that men be tough and not show their emotions sometimes, and at others be in touch with their feelings and able to communicate them. Living up to these conflicting ideals can cause significant stress, referred to as gender role strain (Mahalik, 2007). These contradictions are of interest because they expose the competing masculinities involved in constructing a young, male gender identity.

ANALYSIS

Harris (1995) describes 24 gender-role messages, which are further grouped into five categories. The “Standard Bearer” type classifies behaviour involving ways men maintain traditions by valuing and respecting standards, holding up traditions of excellence, and looking after others. Men often define themselves in terms of their occupation, and the “Worker” type recognises their self-imposed expectations as providers, and how they earn money. The “Lover” type refers to men’s relationships with others, their friendships, romantic relationships, and fathering. Messages which compel men to strive for success and power, take risks and be heroes fall under the “Boss” category. The “Rugged individual” type represents man as tough, resilient, and facing the hardships of life without admitting weakness or showing emotion (Harris, 1995).

Although these categories refer to masculine factors in the gender identity of grown men, these messages are communicated to children from a young age as they learn to assume a male or female gender role. Not all 24 kinds of gender roles were present, but examples from each of the five broad categories came out of the sample.

Table 1.*Frequency of Gender Roles in Sample*

Message	Frequency
<i>Standard Bearers</i>	
Nature Lover	3
Be the best you can	4
Good Samaritan	4
<i>Workers</i>	
Work ethic	3
Money	5
Law	1
<i>Lovers</i>	
Breadwinner	2
Nurturer	8
<i>Bosses</i>	
Control	2
President	1
Hurdles	1
Adventurer	3
Sportsman	1
Be like your father	1
<i>Rugged individual</i>	
Self-reliant	2
Rebel	1

Standard bearers

Children's literature often serves an instructive function (Marshall, 2004) and moral lessons were evident in many of the stories. These lessons were implied rather than stated explicitly, with varying degrees of subtlety. In its most simplistic form, morality hinged on being a

“good boy” or a “bad boy”, on terms decided by adults, and with little room for negotiation. Three messages from the “Standard bearer” category were found in the sample. This category prioritizes the preservation of moral principles for the purpose of generativity, and is often marginalised in discussions of masculine characteristics in comparison to other stereotypically male categories, such as the “Rugged individual” (Harris, 1995).

The “Be the best you can” aspect of the “Standard bearer” category was most prevalent in the sample, occurring four times. This message encourages men to strive for excellence in everything they attempt. In *The Race*, Tembu wants to improve his behaviour and stop losing things so that his parents and teacher will not be cross at him. He also fulfils this message when he wins the race. There is a clever play on the words “win” and “lose”: when Tembu learns the importance of looking after his belongings, he stops losing things, and starts on a “winning streak” when he beats the big boys in the race.

The “Be the best *you* can” message can also be seen as encouraging an appreciation for individual talents. In *Too small Themba*, a young boy wants to try his hand at the various activities the older members of his family are engaged in, but his efforts are thwarted when they all consider him too small to be helpful in their more grown-up endeavours. He proves his worth by using his climbing ability to get into the house when the family is accidentally locked out, and his small size and unique skill are subsequently appreciated.

Having a street child as the protagonist of a picture book may seem like heavy subject matter for children, but interpreting it as a narrative encouraging the individual development of talent gives *Lizo’s song* an uplifting element. Lizo lives on the streets of the city, his only resource for survival being his voice. He uses his singing voice to the best of his ability – an effort which pays off when he wins a prize in a carnival competition. The illustrations enhance the message of the benefits of striving for excellence. In the beginning of the book, Lizo is introduced as “a small boy”, and the pictures emphasise how small he is by showing him wearing an oversized jacket which dwarfs his tiny frame. Later, when a carnival band discovers his talent and recruits him, he is shown proudly wearing the band’s uniform. He seems to have grown up slightly from the small, forlorn figure at the beginning of the book, to a bigger, more self-assured and thriving boy.

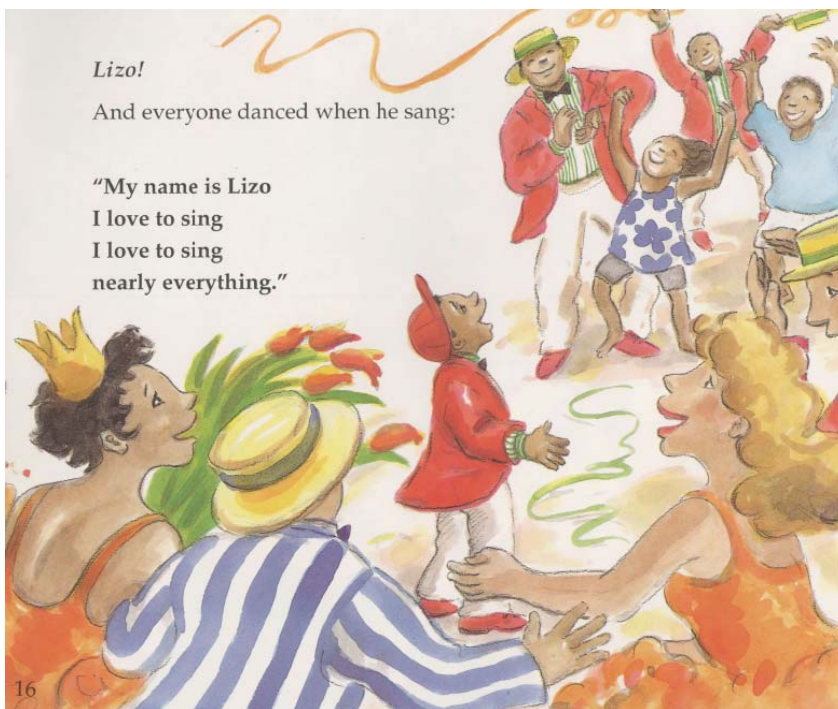
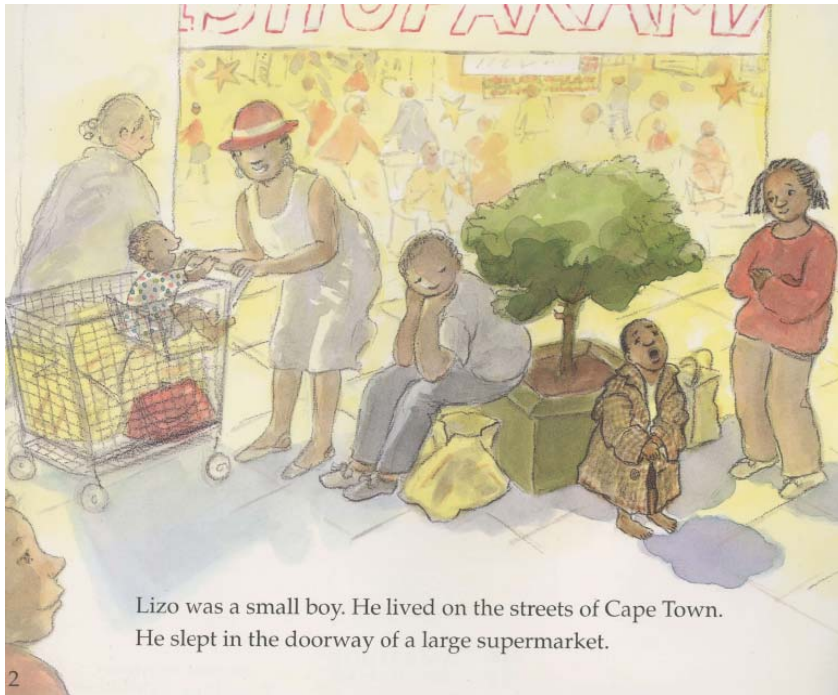


Figure 1. *Lizo's song* (C. Hodson, 1993)

According to the nursery rhyme, little boys are made of "frogs and snails and puppy dog's tails", an indication of their affinity with nature and untamed characters. The "Nature lover" category foregrounds a love of the outdoors, the duty to care for plants and animals, and an emphasis on harmonious coexistence with nature (Harris, 1995). This message came through in *The little lost goat*, a simple story about a young boy's efforts to find a safe home

for a goat. In *I want to see the moon*, a toddler's insistent request to go outside and see the moon can be interpreted as an early interest in nature and the outdoors.

An old man's careful study of the animals he reproduces in wood carvings exemplifies the "Nature lover" ideal in *Kensani's kite*. Nature is also used metaphorically when he carves an eagle for Kensani, his new friend, symbolising the lifting of his spirits provided by the companionship he desired. The front cover of the book captures the interplay of meaning between new friendship and fresh possibilities, represented by the soaring kite and the eaglet.

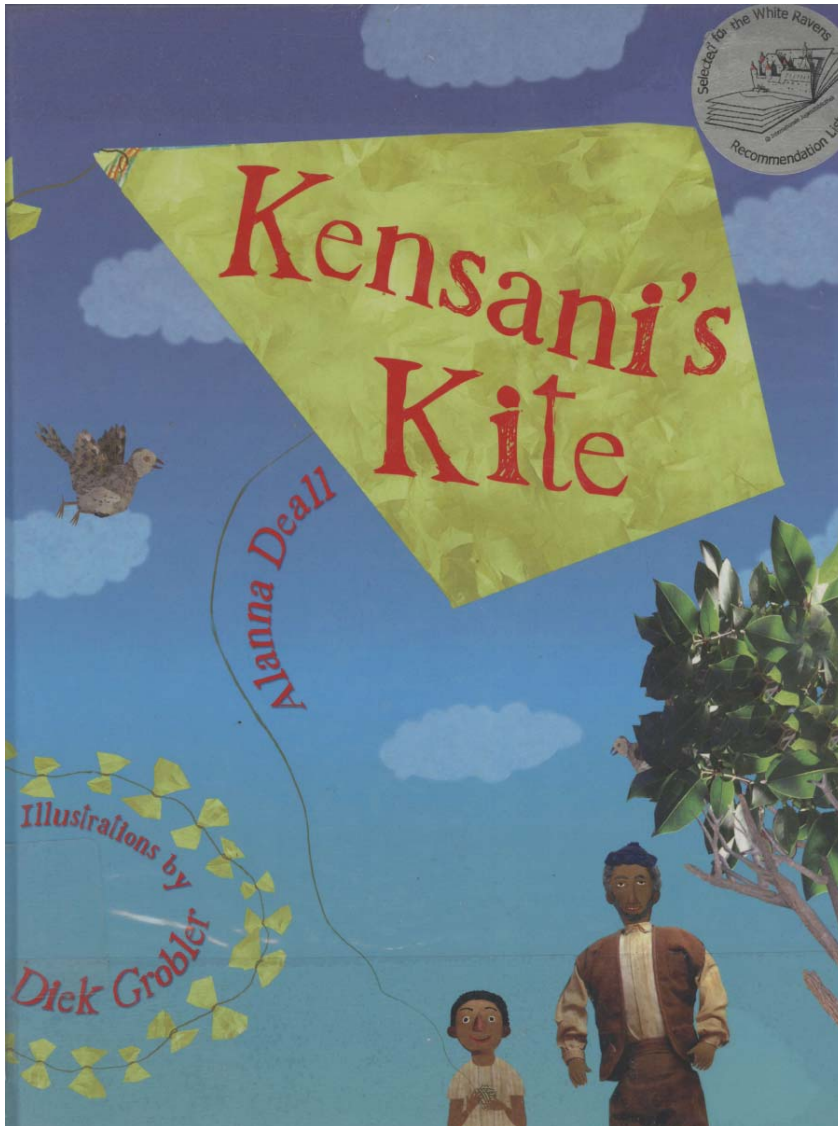


Figure 2. *Kensani's kite* (A. Deall, 1995)

An important cognitive milestone for young children to attain is the ability to be aware of other people's mental states (Robberts, 2008). This is related to putting others' needs before your own, setting a good example, and doing good deeds, all of which form part

of the “Good Samaritan” message (Harris, 1995). Although he is disobedient for sneaking onto his uncle’s boat, Armien is hailed as a hero for helping to save a sailor gone overboard in *Armien’s fishing trip*. Mr. Mabaso comes to the aid of a young boy in *Sipho’s new shoes*, by giving him a weekend job so he can afford to purchase the shoes he dreams of owning. The example of this kind deed makes Sipho determined to work hard so that he will be able to be a Good Samaritan too, and help others the way Mr. Mabaso helped him in the future.

Siyolo’s jersey, the story of a generous young boy who ends up giving his jersey away strand by strand to help others in need of pieces of wool for various reasons, is the strong example of the “Good Samaritan” message. He puts the needs of others before his own, and ends up in the cold without a jersey. However, he is rewarded for his altruism with a new jersey.

Although some of the messages from different categories overlap and have links with each other, there are also some messages which are conflicting. The community-orientated spirit of the “Standard bearer” category has similarities with the “Lover” category, but differs from the more individualistic “Bosses” category.

Workers

The “Worker” category recognises the importance of labour, production, earning potential and career success in constructions of masculinity. Even though the opportunities for such behaviour are limited for young children, three messages from this category were found in the sample.

I love my father is an expression of admiration for a father’s work ethic.

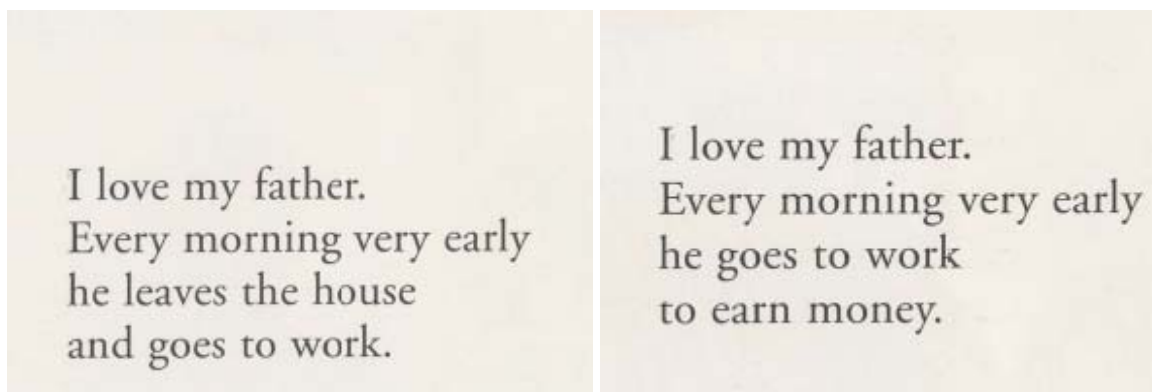


Figure 3. *I love my father* (F. Ngobese, 1997).

The positioning of the text implies a linear relationship between the concepts, as if the boy’s love for his father is contingent upon his ability to work and earn money.

The value of working hard and the satisfaction it brings is implied in the positive framing of Pondamali's wood-carving craft, in *Kensani's kite*. He loves his work, and benefits financially from selling his wares as well.

The "Work ethic" message is a significant component of male gender role constructions, and the principle of working hard for a living can stretch into other aspects of men's lives, as is shown in the similarities with the "Breadwinner" and "Money" messages. The most striking example of this message came out in *Sipho's new shoes*. When a young boy's dreams of buying new shoes are dashed after his mother is mugged, Mr. Mabaso, a kind stranger, offers him a weekend job so that he can save up money to buy the shoes himself. Although Mr. Mabaso is a rich man, and could probably afford to buy Sipho the shoes, he uses the opportunity to teach Sipho the value of hard work and the satisfaction of earning something by himself.

Being a man is tied to financial status, the ability to earn money and have material means to provide for oneself, and a family. These activities are out of the reach of young boys because of their age, but still emerged as an aspiration of some of the characters. The "Money" message is closely related to the "Work ethic" message; however, it is not to be confused with materialism, as this principle views money as means for men to achieve what they value, rather than an end in itself (Harris, 1995).

For two of the protagonists, the "Money" message was symbolised by a desire for new shoes. Both of them were accustomed to hand-me-downs, and had never had a pair of brand new shoes of their own. The yearning for a new pair of shoes can be seen as more than a material desire, but signifies a longing for a better life and economic stability. In *Sipho's new shoes*, money (and not having money) is a central issue in the book. Sipho helps his mother sell vegetables at the market and dreams of one day having enough money to buy new shoes.

He had never had new shoes. His had always been given to him by other people – worn, not the right size, no longer shiny. He would love new shoes. He would treasure them. Perhaps he wouldn't even wear them? Perhaps he'd keep them in a box wrapped in tissue paper, just to look at (Christopher, 1992).

After a good day of sales, his mother asks him what he would like to buy with the extra money. It is clear that having extra money is a rare occurrence, as Sipho's mother usually complains about barely having enough money for school fees and food. Sipho is so excited at the prospect of getting new shoes that he can hardly sleep the night before they go to the shops. Once there, he is enthralled by the selection of shoes, and enjoys the sensuality

of touching and smelling them. The illustration reinforces this, depicting the shoes as Sipho's object of desire, glowing tantalisingly as he looks on with obvious glee at the prospect of owning his very own pair.

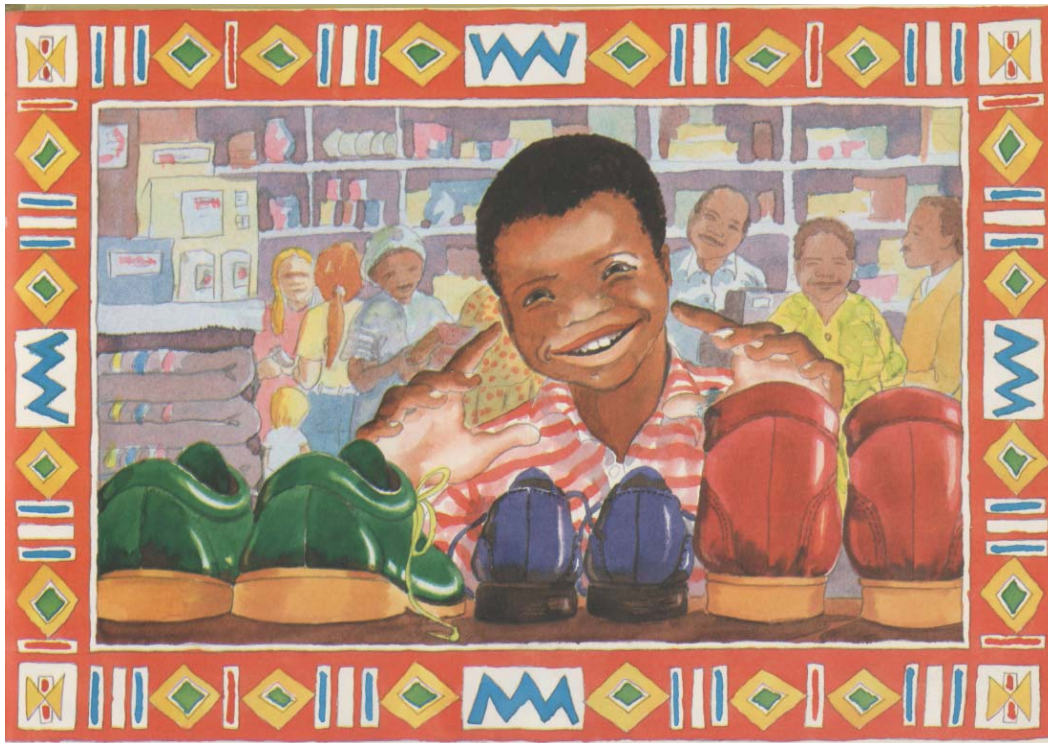


Figure 4. *Sipho's new shoes* (W. Christopher, 1992)

The “Law” message tells men to respect the rules, obey authority, and uphold ethical principles. It is a message especially important in childhood, as children in the care of their parents are expected to obey them, and other adults in authority, without question. This message came through implicitly in a few of the books in the sample. In *The little lost goat*, Xolani demonstrates respect for his mother's rule of not allowing animals into the house by trying to find another home for the lost goat. In contrast, *The boy in the middle and the flying spaghetti* goes against the wishes of his parents with his disobedient behaviour. Tembu's preoccupation with keeping the adults happy by not losing his things in *The race* can be viewed as an attempt to obey the rules. He learns how to negotiate the behavioural determinants of being a “bad boy” and a “good boy” by complying with the expectations of adults.

Parallel to the “Law” message is the social obligation to instil in children a respect for doing what is right and obeying their elders. At the same time, conventional expectations of

young males dictate that “boys will be boys”, condoning their rambunctiousness while simultaneously exacting punishment for breaking the rules (Nodelman, 2008).

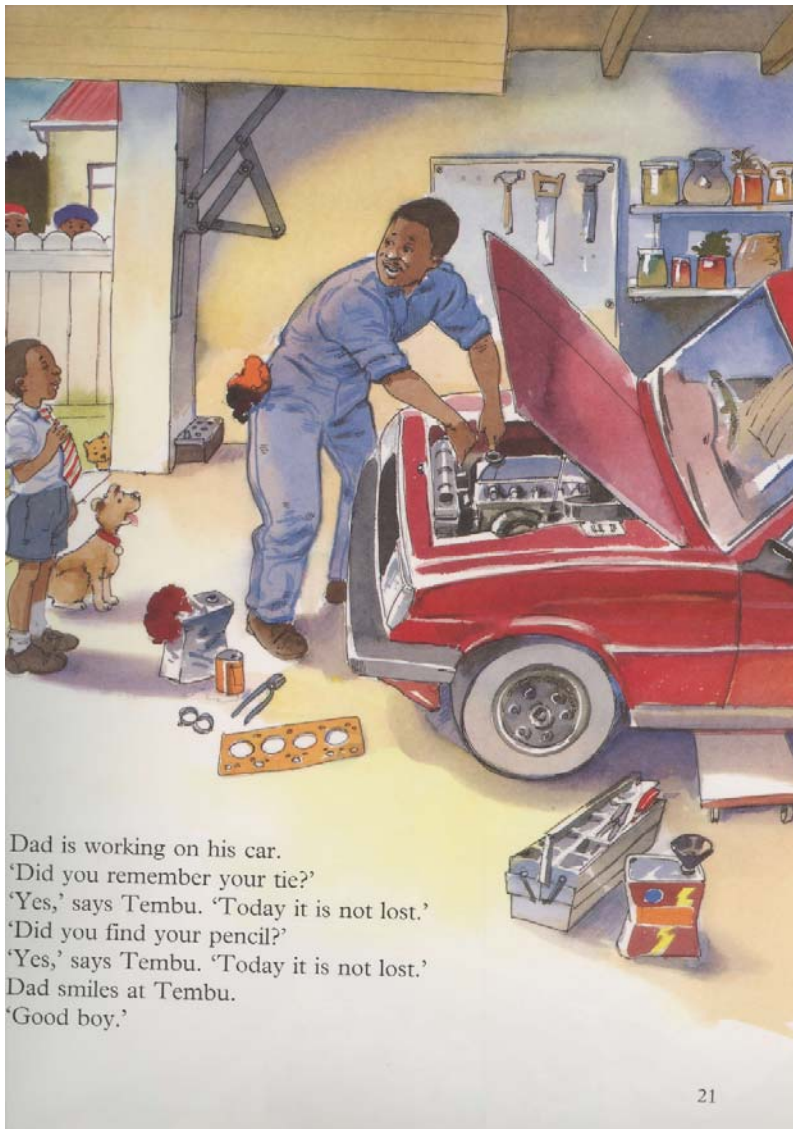


Figure 5. *The race* (L. Beake, 1992)

Lovers

The “Lover” category refers to men’s capacity for affectionate and caring relationships. The ability show warmth to others is something both genders have, but being expressive and loving is thought to be a feminine trait (Harris, 1995). Masculinity is often defined as not-feminine, and for boys to achieve manhood, they must expel all traces of femininity. In early childhood, young boys and girls are similar in their desire for affection, but while girls are allowed to openly express this, boys learn that male gender norms require them to conceal their emotions (Groth, 2007).

Notwithstanding, the message that came through most often was that of “Nurturer” from this category. The “Nurturer” is kind, gentle, warm, supportive, and cares about others’ feelings (Harris, 1995). This type of behaviour was present in eight of the characters in the sample. The prevalence of the “Nurturer” can be seen as part of the rise of the “Sensitive New Man”, a man who is in touch with his emotions, as well as being aware of those of others (Connell, 1995). Furthermore, children’s literature is dominated by females, meaning it is oftentimes a “maternal” kind of literature, featuring good, caring, loveable boy characters (Wannamaker, 2008).

Many of the instances of nurturing in the sample were of young boys showing care for older people. In *Ouma Ruby’s secret*, a young boy with a love for reading discovers his grandmother is illiterate. He had wanted her to read aloud his special birthday letter, but shows concern and tact by reading it to her instead. Charlie shows nurturing behaviour when he designs his dream house to include a lounge and television for his grandmother to entertain her friends in *Charlie’s house*. Shepherd is sensitive to his grandmother’s age, and helps her by holding her walking stick, helping her onto the bus, and taking her hand and leading her slowly across the road in *Not so fast Songololo*.

Although all men have the capacity to be nurturers, nurturing is seen as a feminine trait (Harris, 1995), and is something many men have to learn. In *We shouldn’t keep it*, Sam is initially jealous of his new baby sister, and wants to get rid of her, but after becoming involved in taking care of her by bathing her, dressing her and putting her to sleep, he changes his mind.

The example of a nurturing father is shown in *I love my father*, where a man demonstrates his love for his children by not only by providing for them, but also interacting with them by telling them bedtime stories. *I want to see the moon* also shows fatherly nurturing. We are led to assume that the father is a single parent, which is quite progressive for a book published in 1984. Nonetheless, he appears to be very competent, the illustrations showing him to be adept at the “motherly” tasks of changing his son’s nappies, doing the laundry and keeping him occupied. He is very involved in his son’s life, and plays the role of mother and father by going to Toby in the night, showing him affection, taking him to the bathroom, giving him a glass of water, giving him a piggyback ride down the stairs, and suggesting play activities.

Bosses

The “Breadwinner” message tells men to be protective and provide for family members. This is different to the “Nurturer” message, in that it does not require men to be caring, but is more concerned with providing material support to those dependent on them.

Sipho shows an early understanding of this message, as shown by his desire to earn money one day so that he will be able to take care of his mother and help others (*Sipho’s new shoes*).

The “Breadwinner” icon is honoured in *I love my father*, in which the boy’s love for his father seem to centre on the father’s ability to earn money.

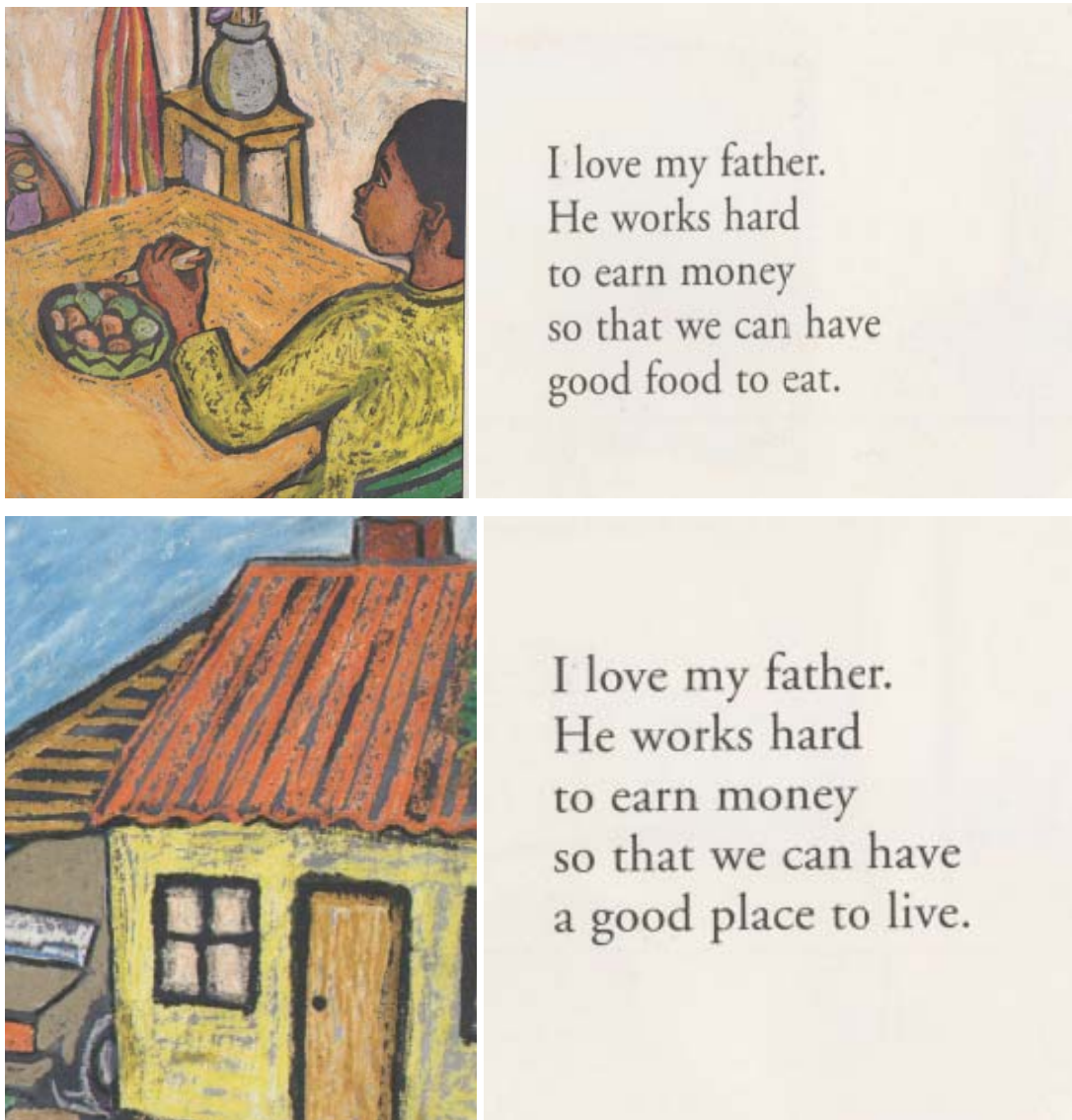


Figure 6. *I love my father* (F. Ngobese, 1997)

Patriarchy is a social arrangement which promulgates male dominance. Competition amongst men is encouraged by hierarchical social institutions which prioritise ambition,

leadership and tenacity as important masculine traits, realised in the “Bosses” category (Harris, 1995). All except one of the messages comprising this category occurred in the sample, albeit at a comparatively lower frequency.

The “Adventurer” message was most prevalent, occurring three times. This message expects men to be brave, courageous and bold, fearlessly taking risks and facing danger, often in pursuit of excitement. Men have to prove their manliness by facing danger and confronting trouble bravely (Harris, 1995).

In *Armien’s fishing trip*, a young boy sets out to prove he is old enough (and man enough?) to face the tempestuous seas. In response to teasing from his friends, he lies that his uncle is taking him out on his boat “I’m going out with all the men to do some real fishing.” His aunt confirms his suspicion that he won’t be allowed on the boat: “You on the *Rosie*? Don’t be a rascal. A boat is no place for little boys” (Stock, 1991). He decides to sneak onto the boat to prove to everyone he is old enough to face the challenges of being at sea. The sea represents danger, unpredictability and the power of nature, all of which Armien sets out to confront to prove his maturity. Conditions are especially rough, and when he emerges from his hiding place, a huge wave crashes onto the boat, knocking him over and throwing an old sailor overboard. Armien is the only one to see this, and quickly throws him a life ring. When his uncle discovers him, he has no time to be angry when Armien points out his drowning crewmate. His uncle manages to save him, who is grateful, but says “you owe your life as much to Armien here as to me.” He is hailed as a hero on their return, having proved his bravery and ability to survive the seas.

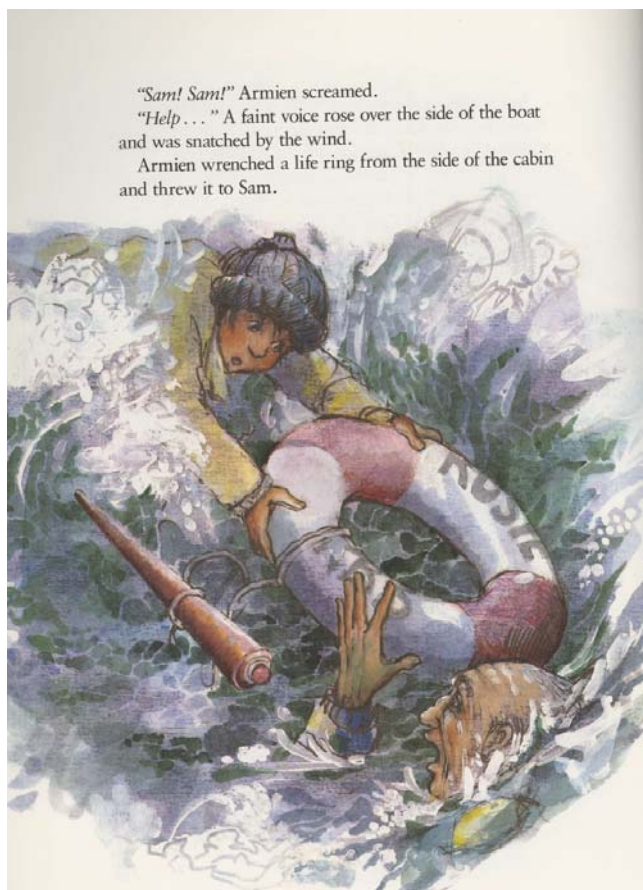


Figure 7. Armien's fishing trip. (C. Stock, 1991)

An appreciation of bravery and independence can be seen in *Ashraf of Africa*, the story of a young boy who experiences the thrill of "untamed Africa" in his imagination as he ventures into the city by himself. The city is compared with the jungles and wild terrain of the Africa depicted in his favourite book.

A fascination with the danger of the unknown and the thrill of the great outdoors is also implied in young Toby's insistence on going outside in *I want to see the moon*.

Being in charge and having control, of yourself and others, is a trait commonly desired by men because of the power associated with it. The "Control" message tells men it is manly to manage themselves and others, using manipulation if necessary to gain control of situations (Harris, 1995).

Children are dependent on adults, and because of their young age are limited with regards to opportunities to exercise agency. In *The day Sandile lost his mother*, Sandile has very little control when he is separated from his mother and has to rely on a stranger to help him find her. He is unable to control his emotions, and even though the text does not give

any hint of his emotional distress, it is evident from the following illustration he is throwing a tantrum.

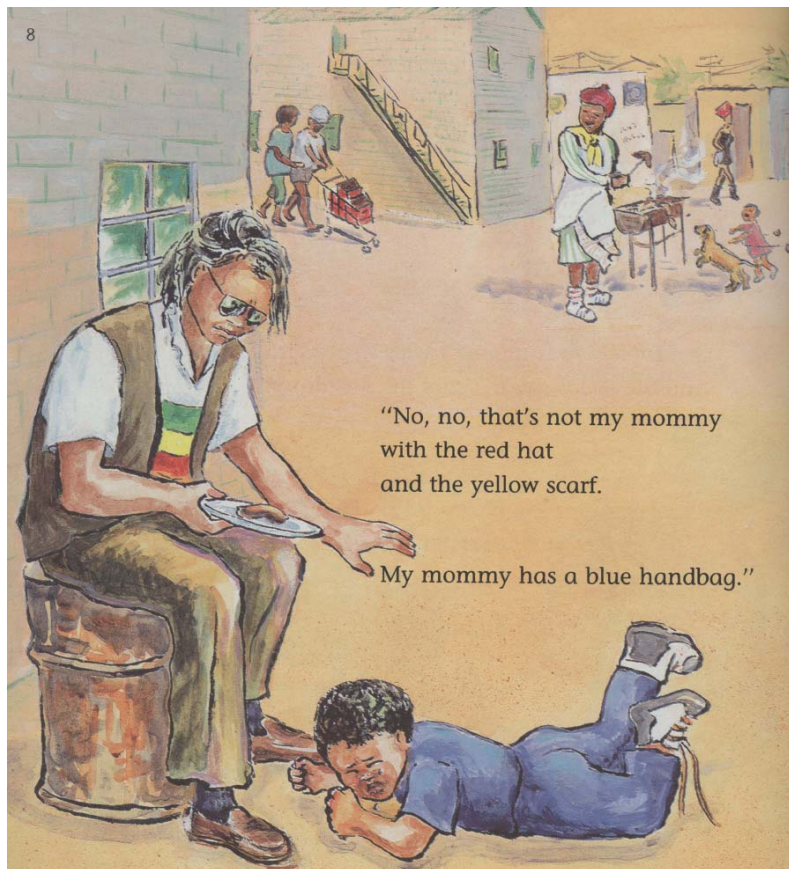


Figure 8. *The day Sandile lost his mother* (S. Boucher, 1998)

Being in control of one's emotions is also important in *Too small Themba*. Frustrated and upset by his brother's refusal to let him join in a soccer game, Themba bursts into tears, but hides behind a corner to avoid the big boys calling him a cry baby. When his knitting attempt also fails, Themba almost cries again, but instead vents his frustration by climbing a tree. This act allows him to symbolically reject being labelled 'too small' by pretending to be a giant.

In *I want to see the moon*, it seems as if the father has control of the situation, as he directs most of Toby's activities (going to the loo, changing him etc.), but Toby reclaims control with his persistence, which allows him to achieve his goal in the end.

There is one example of each of the remaining messages in the "Bosses" category in the sample. The "Hurdles" message encourages men to overcome various tests to prove their manliness (Harris, 1995). *Armien's fishing trip* communicates this message by positively framing Armien's conquest of the seas. Competitive behaviour and sporting achievement as a way for men to validate their manliness is central to the "Sportsman" message (Harris, 1995).

It is significant that Tembu competes with older boys in *The race*, making his victory all the more impressive.

The “Be like your father” message positions fathers as an example of manliness for their sons (Harris, 1995). Fathers are important role models for young boys to learn how to be men. They are idolised (*I love my father, Siphos hides*), work hard to provide for their families (*I love my father, Siphos hides, The race*), are disciplinarians (*The race, Too small Themba*) and give their sons encouragement and affection (*I want to see the moon, The race, The boy in the middle and the flying spaghetti*). Father figures made an appearance in only five of the books in the sample. They were referred to briefly in three of the books, but completely absent from the remaining twelve. The absence of a father figure is especially noticeable in *We shouldn't keep it*. There is no mention of or reference to any other male character, which is peculiar because it leaves unanswered the question of who Sam and Sally's father/s is/are. There is no father in the story, a conspicuous absence in light of the birth of a new baby. The benefits of close relations with fathers is evident (Connell, 2000), and there is also evidence that absent fathers can be detrimental to the development of young boys (Anderson & Hamilton, 2005).

The clearest instance of the “Be like your father” message is Siphos's desire to emulate his father. He wishes he did not have to go to school, and could stay home and help his father run the scrapyards instead.



Figure 9. *Sipho hides* (S. Mntubu, 1997)

Rugged individuals

Men are expected to be strong, tough and independent. The “Rugged individual” category encapsulates these values, and is a powerful stereotype in popular culture (Harris, 1995). These characteristics are largely out of reach for young boys, but two messages from this category came through in the sample. The “Self-reliant” message emphasizes autonomy and the ability to “go it alone” as exemplary masculine characteristics (Harris, 1995). Two characters exhibited the self-sufficiency of this message with their skill at navigating the city (*Ashraf of Africa* and *Not so fast Songololo*). *Not so fast Songololo* is particularly groundbreaking, as it was the first time a black child left the destitute rural environment for the urban setting on the page in full colour. This post-apartheid shift gave new possibilities for the representation of different cultures, as well as building bridges between them (Hofmeyr, 2008).

In *Ashraf of Africa*, an analogy is drawn between the untamed savannah, teeming with wildlife, and the bustling city, buzzing with urban energy in the illustrations. Ashraf navigates

both with skill, making his way through the city by himself, and using books and his imagination to experience an exotic Africa of crocodiles and lions.

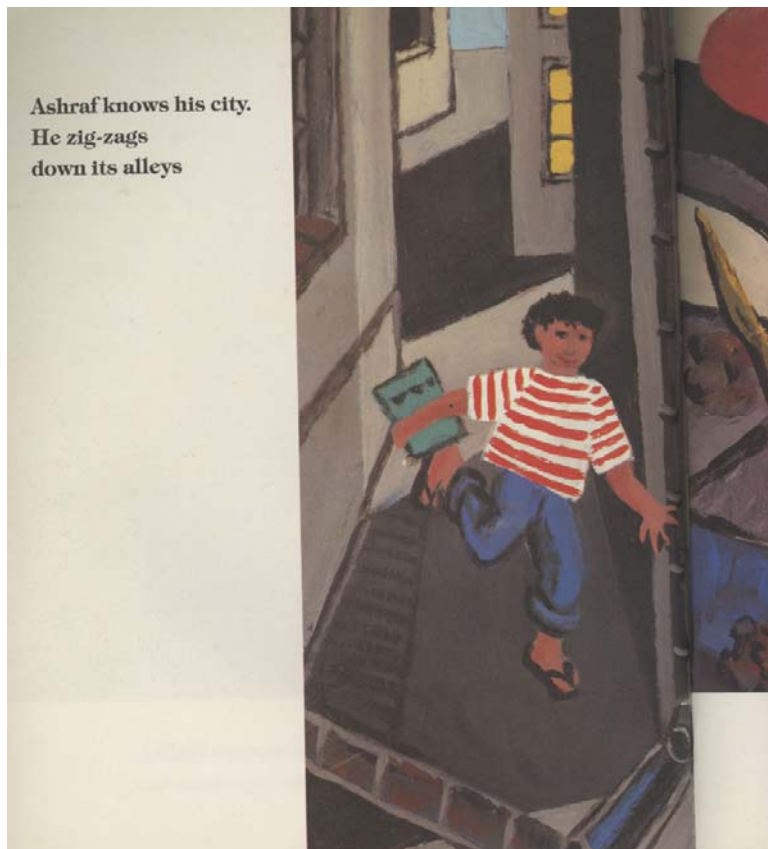


Figure 10. *Ashraf of Africa* (I. Mennen, 1990)

The “Rebel” *message* connects manliness to non-conformity and a defiance of authority (Harris, 1995). It was somewhat surprising that this type of “naughty boy” message was only expressed in one of the books in the sample, as young boys often test the boundaries of authority by misbehaving (Connell, 2000). The nameless boy in *The boy in the middle and the flying spaghetti* is a rebel who acts out because he feels he has no special talents. He seems to have classic “middle child syndrome”, unhappy about not being big and talented like his older brother, who can read and play the flute, or small and cute like his younger sister. The abilities of his siblings gain them the parental approval he craves (“smiles from Father and Mother”), and this spurs his rebelliousness.

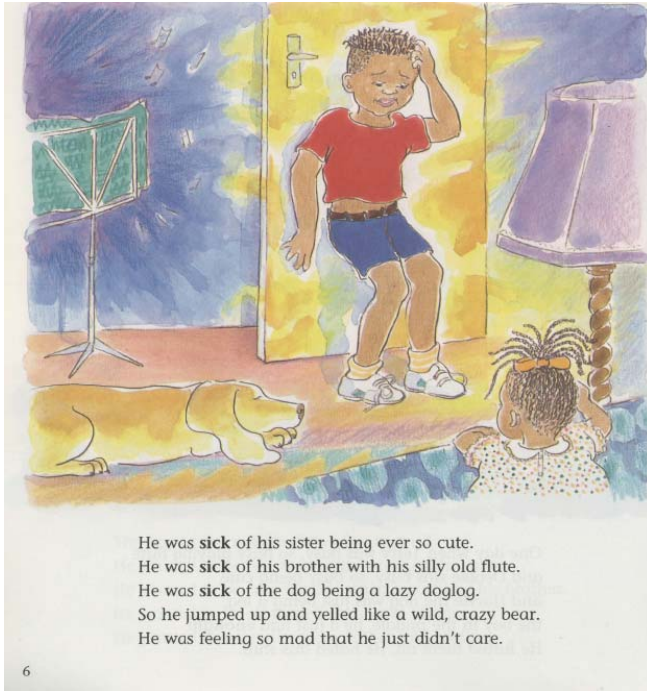


Figure 11. *The boy in the middle and the flying spaghetti* (Donvé, 1998)

He decides he has had enough, and starts misbehaving in a bid for attention. Even though the reaction he gets from his parents is negative, and he knows what he is doing is wrong, he continues to “cook up naughty schemes” because it is “fun” and makes “things happen”. His biggest prank involves covering the dog with a mixture of glue and spaghetti, which causes a mess all around the house. Instead of being angry at him, his parents and family are amused.

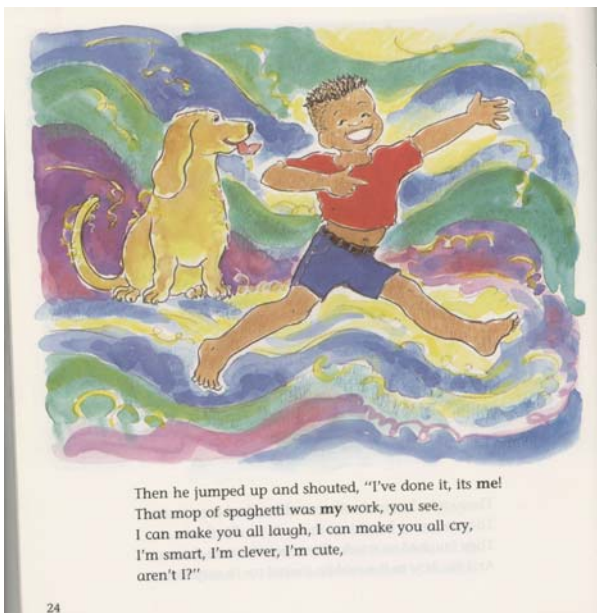


Figure 12. *The boy in the middle and the flying spaghetti* (Donvé, 1998)

He discovers his talent for making people laugh by pulling pranks and doing funny tricks, but is also not punished for his bad behaviour (damaging property, wasting food, cruelty to animals)

The perfect gentleman – Nelson Mandela as the ideal man

What a gentleman is different from the other books in the sample as it is not about a young boy and features a well-known public figure, but it was included because it gives an idea of idealised manliness embodied in the person of Nelson Mandela. This book was published in the wake of a new democracy, and the vibrant, colourful illustrations convey a sense of exuberance and optimism. A grandmother explains why she loves Mr Mandela so much by listing all his good qualities, which can be read as a template for a perfect gentleman. He is wise, caring, and helpful, loves children, is patriotic, enjoys sport, exercises to keep fit and healthy, is a trendsetter, is a family man, loves nature, is handsome and charming, with a good sense of humour, and is heterosexual. The message of heterosexual normativity is cleverly conveyed in the grandmother's quip inviting Mr. Mandela to put his shoes under her bed anytime. This is literally portrayed in the illustration, and the innuendo is subsequently lost on the little girl in the story, who wonders why her grandmother would say such a thing.

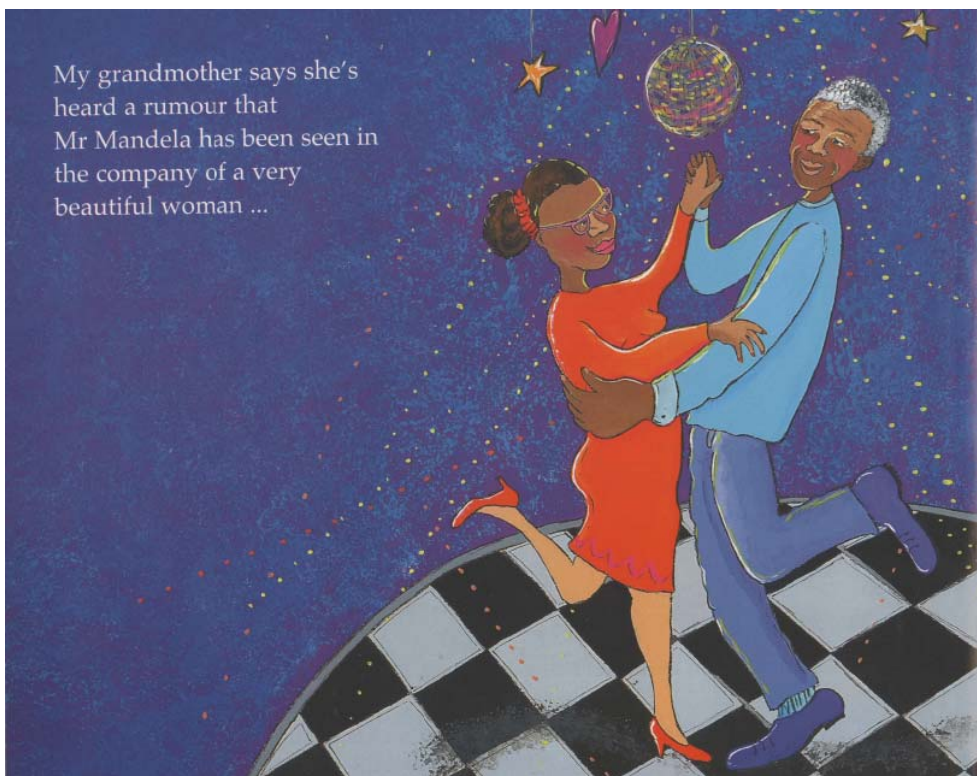


Figure 13. *What a gentleman* (D. Case, 1997)

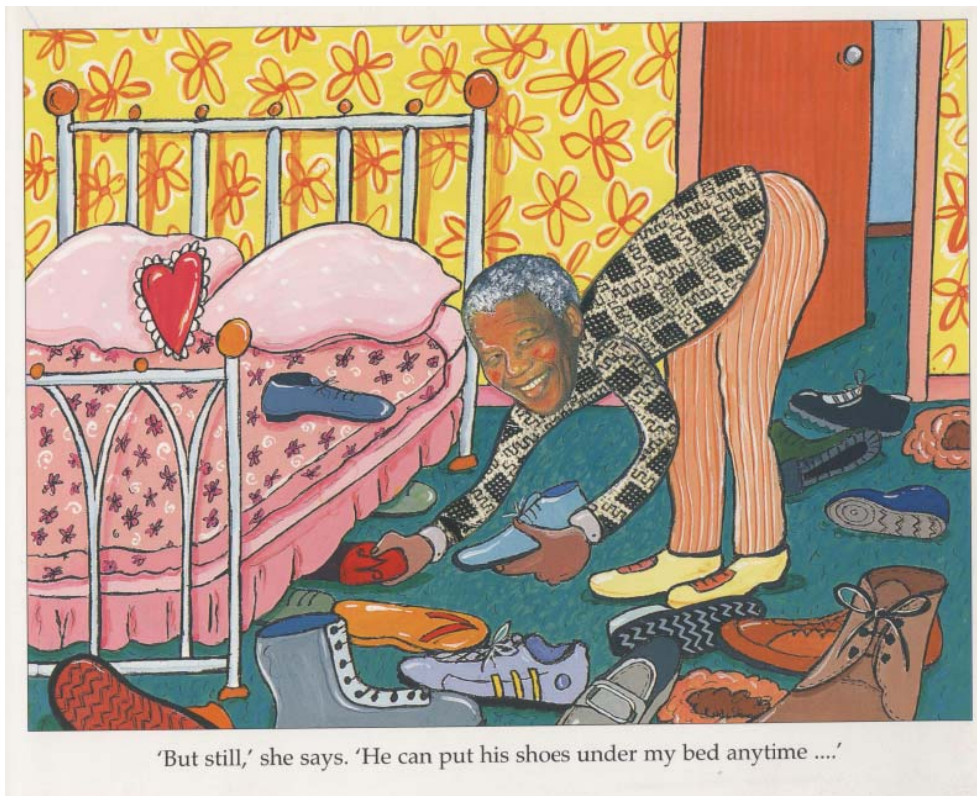


Figure 14. *What a gentleman* (D. Case, 1997)

Conclusion

The representation of young masculinities in picture books by South African authors reveals a chorus of competing messages which sometimes sing in unison, and at other times clash. These messages can be seen as relating to the complexity with which various male gender identities are conceptualised and portrayed using the minimalist textual resources afforded by the picture book genre. Although there is evidence of the portrayal of stereotypical masculine traits, such as self-sufficiency, independence and toughness, these have different meanings and are expressed differently in the context of boyhood. It would seem that even as boys are prevented from fully enacting a range of masculine behaviour norms because of their age, this same factor also gives them the opportunity to explore other ways of being male which involve nurturing, being respectful and caring for others. The various conventionally masculine and more progressive traits exhibited by the protagonists in these stories point to the possibility of boyhood being a time of experimentation with different kinds of gender roles, however these spaces for renegotiation tend to be limited in the face of more enduring stereotypical models of masculinity.

Directions for future research

The complexity of class and race were hinted at but not explored with enough depth in the present study because of time limitations, but promise a rich topic for further research. This would entail examining a larger sample of books, encompassing more of the national languages in order to give a more nuanced perspective on multicultural aspects of gender identity. It would also be of use to examine the effects of author gender and race on their different constructions of masculinity.

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Appendix A

Sample

Year	Title	Author	Illustrator	Publisher
1984	<i>I want to see the moon</i>	Louis Baum	Niki Daly	London: Bodley Head
1985	<i>Not so fast, Songololo</i>	Niki Daly	Niki Daly	Cape Town; Pretoria: Human & Rousseau
1989	<i>Charlie's house</i>	Reviva Schermbrucker	Niki Daly	Cape Town: Songololo Books (David Philip Publishers)
1990	<i>Ashraf of Africa</i>	Ingrid Mennen & Niki Daly	Nicolaas Maritz	Cape Town: Songololo Books (David Philip Publishers)
1991	<i>Armien's fishing trip</i>	Catherine Stock	Catherine Stock	Cape Town: Songololo Books (David Philip Publishers)
1991	<i>We shouldn't keep it!</i>	Ann Walton	Jo Harvey	Cape Town: Songololo Books (David Philip Publishers)
1992	<i>Sipho's new shoes</i>	Wendy Christopher	Beate Willich	Durbanville: Garamond Publishers
1992	<i>The race</i>	Lesley Beake	Ian Lusted	Cape Town: Oxford University Press
1992	<i>Too small Themba</i>	Sue Boucher	K. Pienaar	Pietermaritzburg: Shuter & Shooter
1993	<i>Lizo's song</i>	Christopher Hodson	Elizabeth Pulles	Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
1993	<i>The little lost goat</i>	Amanda Jespersen, Sive Sonto, Caroline Mjindi, Brian Prehn	Alida Botha	Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
1995	<i>Kensani's kite</i>	Alanna Deall	Diek Grobler	Parklands: Jacklin Publishers
1997	<i>I love my father</i>	Falakhe Ngobese	Hamilton Budaza	Cape Town: Tafelberg Publishers Limited
1997	<i>Sipho hides</i>	Sidima Mntubu	Nicolaas Maritz	Cape Town: Kagiso Publishers
1997	<i>What a gentleman</i>	Dianne Case	Jo Harvey	Wynberg: Kwagga Publishers
1998	<i>The boy in the middle and the flying spaghetti</i>	Donvé	Avril Wiid	Kenwyn: Juta & Co. Ltd.
1998	<i>The day Sandile lost his mother</i>	Jen Lewis	Jen Lewis	Kenwyn: Juta & Co. Ltd.
2006	<i>Ouma Ruby's secret</i>	Chris van Wyk	Anneliese Voigt-Peters	Johannesburg: Giraffe Books (Pan Macmillan South Africa)
2006	<i>Utshepo mde – Tall enough</i>	M. Jadezwi	Hannah Morris	Cape Town: Vuvu
2008	<i>Siyolo's jersey</i>	M. Grobler	Elizabeth Pulles	Cape Town: Tafelberg Publishers Limited

Appendix B

Research questions

1. What is the book about? (Brief summary)
2. What is the age and race of the protagonist?

3. Who are the other male characters? What is their relation to the protagonist?
4. What does the protagonist do? (actions) What does the protagonist say? (speech)
5. Who is in control of the situation/s? Who has the most power in the situation/s?
6. What is the role of fathers in the story?
7. What is the role of mothers in the story?
8. What is the role of grandparents in the story?
9. Is being small in size/young in age an issue? How does the protagonist confront this?
10. Is being a 'big boy'/old enough an issue? How does the protagonist confront this?
11. Is being good/bad an issue? How does the protagonist confront this?
12. Does having/not having money play a role? How does the protagonist deal with this?
13. In what ways is the protagonist active?
14. In what ways is the protagonist passive?
15. In what ways is the protagonist dependent on/independent of adults?
16. What emotions does the protagonist show?
17. Who does the protagonist idolise?