The American Identity Formed and Reflected in Children's Literature: An Analysis of Dr. Seuss through the Lens of Erik Erikson

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DOCTOR OF PSYCHOLOGY

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Abstract

The American Identity Formed and Reflected in Children's Literature: An Analysis of Dr. Seuss through the Lens of Erik Erikson

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Nowadays there is a big push for parents to read to their children early and often. Reading connects us to our children; through the stories we read as a child, we connect the world we learned and understood to their world. Reading books that we read and loved encourages a thread from our understanding of what it means to be a member of the community to which we belong. When we read, we know we like morals that communicate the basics: honorable action, ideal interpersonal interaction, and modeling of desirable attitude. Books helped form our cultural identity, just as the books we are reading to our children are helping to form their identity.

This dissertation explores Erik Erikson ideas of identity development and how he understands the American identity. Erikson's three main themes are then applied to three popular books of Dr. Seuss to examine the ways in which the American identity is reflected in American children's literature. It was confirmed that the three books used for this analysis did contain the ideals of the American identity identified by Erik Erikson, within his book.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my daughter, who inspires me to think about the future we are creating for her as an American child and whose identity is being formed by the multitude of books read to her, everyday.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the faculty members who have helped me with this project. Dr. Randy Wyatt provided much guidance, as well as appropriate literature and ideas. I would like to thank Dr. Samuel Gerson for encouraging me to expand my analysis, and Dr. Valory Mitchell for her sharp editing skills. Without her, I doubt I would have proposed.

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Finally, I would like to thank my family. I thank my parents for believing in me and supporting me. My wife, Erin Harrell, was unwavering in her confidence in me. I cannot imagine a life without her seeing me through. I would also like to thank my daughter, Ara Jean, who sacrificed countless quality hours with me, and gave up ever being read three important books of Dr. Seuss's by her mother.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

This dissertation examined three works of children's literature, and considered their potential impact on American children's identity development. To explore this topic, I first reviewed the work of Erik Erikson, a psychological theorist who wrote extensively on identity – both individual identity and the American identity. I applied Erikson's ideas to three books by a single American author of children's books, Theodor Seuss Geisel – better known as "Dr. Seuss."

Seuss' first children's book was published in 1937 and his last (that was published before his death) in 1990. Because his writing spanned over five decades, it reflects the identity of a nation across time. I explored the ways that the identity of a nation affects the individual identity of its children, by examining the interplay between national identity and its reflection in these children's books.

It has been argued that Dr. Seuss is an iconic figure in the United States (Nel, 2004). He has a national monument in Springfield Massachusetts. His honors include two Academy awards, two Emmy awards, a Peabody award and a Pulitzer Prize. His books have sold more than 600 million copies ("Dr. Seuss," 2012). Two of his books made the top ten list of bestselling children's books of all time, and ten made the top 50. (Roback, D., Britton, J., Turvey, D.H., 2001). Children have read his books in the classroom, at the library and in their homes.

Rationale for the Project

Parents and caregivers often use books to influence a child's development and thinking about the world around them.

> Children's literature provides insights into the social milieu in which the work was developed and uncovers the values that society hopes to transmit to its children ….Cultures have many ways to socialize the young, and Western cultures relied heavily on books to transmit certain social values and to cast aspersions on other cultures (Schmunk & Murray, 1998, p. xv).

It is difficult to measure the impact any writer has on society. There is no accurate way of measuring the ideas of children over 70 years ago, before Seuss published his first children's book. Similarly, it is impossible to tease apart the millions of cultural influences on any child. However, many Americans report that Seuss influenced their life, their thinking, or their reading habits. A premise of this dissertation is that our interpretations of the things that we see, hear, and read contribute to the formation of our identities.

Erik Erikson on Individual Identity, American Identity, and Child Development

Erik Erikson (1902-1994) may not be as widely read by the American public as is Dr. Seuss, but he has powerfully informed the psychological community. Erikson was interested in child development. He was also deeply interested in identity and identity formation, both individual and for a community. He was particularly interested in the American identity. His theories can help us to understand how values posited by Seuss in his writing affect the identity of the youth who read his books. Seuss was an American, and he wrote for American children. Erikson's look into the American identity can explicate the ways that Seuss' writing was uniquely American and furthered the American identity.

Identities Evolve from Narratives

Stories help shape our identities. Narrative therapy is a type of therapy in which the stories we tell, to ourselves and to others, are investigated. The idea is that although events in our lives have physical components, how we relay these events affects how we think and feel. To gain insight into oneself, one must know one's own story (McAdams, 2006, p. 11). How we relay a story can offer insight. For instance, if one detail is emphasized, or another left out, this can reveal the importance one places on certain things.

Erik Erikson's "theories of the life span" were formulated in stages. As we develop, we move fluidly through the stages. Typically, there would be a dominance of either the ideal or its antithesis that would push us forward to the next dichotomous stage (Erikson, 1982, p. 66).

For adults, the stage was generativity vs. self absorption and stagnation. The idea was, if you were able to create in your life something positive to give to the next generation to enjoy and benefit from, then you negotiated through this stage. The concept of generativity included new ideas and innovations. The opposite of this was, appeasing one's self, without considering the impact on the next generation. Erikson cited that the most significant difference between the two sides was caring. "Did you care about the next generation, the world, even the youth immediately close to you" (Erikson, 1982, p. 67).

One interesting study McAdams (2006) found that those individuals who had successfully entered Erikson's stage of generativity had different stories than those who did not. McAdams and his colleagues asked 269 midlife adults and 125 college students to tell open-ended stories about meaningful episodes from their lives. Blind

raters then tallied the stories' "redemption sequences," in which bad events have good outcomes, and "contamination sequences," in which the reverse happens.

People who told stories with many redemption sequences also tended to score higher on McAdams's (2006) Generativity Scale, endorsing such statements as, "I have a responsibility to improve the neighborhood in which I live" and "I try to pass along the knowledge I have gained through my experiences." Regardless of the story's overall tone, participants who told redemption sequences also tended to be happier, the researchers found.

I have assumed that if the adults in the study tended to be happier when they heard redemptive stories, it follows that children are also likely to be happier when hearing and learning redemptive stories. This would mean that Seuss's stories encourage happiness in children. Seuss is certainly not the only author to write and create redemptive stories for children to read. But the stories reviewed in this dissertation, particularly *Horton Hears a Who!* (Dr. Seuss, 1954) and *The Sneetches* (Dr. Seuss, 1961), have a redemptive quality. They both urged changes that would benefit future generations. *Horton* urged future generations to be mindful of those who cannot protect themselves, and *The Sneetches* urged future generations not to discriminate based on arbitrary characteristics.

McAdams (2006) and his colleagues argued that redemptive stories may help lay the foundation for volunteering, parenting and other such activities. They suggest that these stories encourage you to believe that doing such hard work pays off in the end. As frustrating as it is to see setbacks and stagnation, there is hope that eventually it will prove rewarding.

Erik Erikson has argued that generativity is the healthier stage of adulthood and that to reach this stage is more psychologically stable, beneficial, and superior. McAdams (2006) suggested that only those who have a belief in eventual positive outcomes can reach this stage. In *Habits of the Heart*, (Bellah, et al. 2008) there is a call to all Americans to invest their energies into activities that would fall under this category. Yet, there is undoubtedly not nearly enough hope in this country, based on our current political climate and the lack of generative activities engaged in by adult Americans.

McAdams (2006) also made the suggestion that, "at the same time, people who work hard and persevere through adversity have better raw material for such stories and may therefore be more likely to tell them". There is the idea that it is cyclical. Those who have the belief in a positive outcome will engage in such activities. They will then tell stories that support within them this psychological foundation, and then, in turn, re-create activities and more stories- a positive schema if you will. The flip side, of course, is that those who do not have hope from the beginning, do not believe in the positives from such work, will not engage, and will have their own stories that justify this existence.

Analyzing the Moral to the Story in the Three Children's Books

This analysis of children's books was guided by the premise that each story, and the moral to that story, has a distinct impact on an individual. The three children's books were chosen because the moral of each book reflects an aspect of American moral values. An assumption of this project was that the sociopolitical context reflected the moral values of that time in history. This analysis relates the historical context, at the time that Seuss was writing, to the morals of the stories he wrote.

The first book I analyzed was *Horton Hears a Who!* (Dr. Seuss, 1982). This book illustrates several morals, but one that stands out is that all people have the right to be protected. The second book to be analyzed was *The Sneetches*:*and other stories* (Dr. Seuss, 1961). This book's dominant moral is that all people should be treated equally. The third book is *If I Ran the Zoo* (1950). This book's moral is that individuals are able to create, and it offers newness as an ideal. These morals reflect American ideals during the mid-20th century. These three morals are central to Seuss' influence on American society and will be the main focus of the dissertation.

I examined the life of Theodore Geisel, the man who would later use the pen name Dr. Seuss, and how his identity included the morals and values he instilled in his children's stories. Seuss endorsed values in his stories that was integrated from his own identity development. This dissertation explored how Seuss was affected by the American society in which he grew up, and how this influence affected his choices in his work.

I also examined the text, illustrations and cadence of the stories, and place them within the historical context for which they were written. Finally, I discussed the relevance this has for psychological practitioners and the implications for understanding identity.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

Erikson's Theories

Erik Erikson, an eminent psychological theorist, wrote mainly between1950 and 1990. He began his career in psychology by undergoing psychoanalysis, and became a colleague of Anna Freud, daughter of Sigmund Freud (Freidman, 1999.) Erikson was interested in Freud's ideas that humans develop in stages. Freud described five psychosexual stages in development from birth to adulthood; Erikson extended the stage theory to cover the entire lifespan, and included eight psychosocial stages (Erikson, 1964). The stages Erikson laid out are ideal for discussing the impact Dr. Seuss might have on an individual's development.

The first stage is the stage of infancy. In 1968, Erikson labeled this the stage of "Trust vs. Mistrust" because the baby learns how much to trust the world based on the care it receives in this critical stage. Next is the toddler years, and the stage that Erikson labeled "Autonomy vs. Shame/Doubt" because this is the stage where children begin to make choices and to either assert their own will over what is held in and what is put out, or to become doubtful in both themselves and their caregivers if this mastery is not properly guided. Then there is pre-school, the stage where children are concerned with "Initiative vs. Guilt." Here, children begin to take initiative to further their personal goals and use language and imagination to further understand their world. They may feel guilt if they do not feel able to exercise this initiative. Next are the elementary school years and the stage of "Industry vs. Inferiority" where children learn basic academic and social skills, and feel industrious or inferior depending on their skill level. The adolescent stage is Erikson's "Identity vs. Role Confusion". Erikson focused his

attention on identity development in this stage because adolescence is the time when individuals are moving toward adulthood and wondering about who they will be in the adult world, separate from their parents and families. In adulthood, Erikson termed the next stage "Intimacy vs. Isolation" because it is a time to make connections with significant others, and, for many, to create families through having intimate partnerships. Erikson coined the next stage "Generativity vs. Stagnation" where individuals focus on giving back to society and future generations – by raising children, preserving resources, or offering creative works. Finally there is the retirement phase, "Ego Integrity vs. Despair". Here, people know that the life left to them is short. If it has been a full and rich life, there is a sense of fulfillment, but without that, a person can feel regret and bitter despair.

Erikson labeled adolescence as the "Identity" stage, but his writings on all eight stages included how a person's understanding of the world relates to his understanding of himself. Erikson (1902-1994), wrote much on the subject of identity and how our identity is formed in relationship to our world. While adolescence is the central time for identity development, it continues to be developed, adjusted and transformed throughout an individual's life.

Identity. As with most philosophical concepts, defining the concept of identity can be complex. The more one attempts to define it, the more there is to consider. Erikson wrote that, "The more one writes on the subject, the more the word becomes a term for something as unfathomable as it is all-pervasive. One can only explore it by establishing its indispensability in various contexts." (Erikson, 1968, p. 9). To understand something as multifaceted as identity, we have to blow it up and let the bits of dust settle in clumps of something to pull insight from. I am assuming that readers

already have some understanding of the concept of identity from their experience of themselves, which they can draw on as the basis for this discussion.

Components and characteristics of identity.

Identity is both internal and external. Most people go through life knowing their identity without consciously exploring it. We define ourselves by our occupations, and by our identity-groups, such as gender, ethnicity, or social class. We may also base our sense of identity on how we experience ourselves in our own minds. For example, to everyone else we may be a boy student who gets decent grades, but to ourselves we are a famous actor just waiting to be discovered. Identity is both how we perceive of ourselves and the values we choose to honor for our lives.

Erikson adopted this understanding from William James, who said that identity is something that "comes upon you" as a recognition, almost as a surprise rather than as something you strenuously "quest after" (Erikson, 1968, p. 20). Identity, in James' view, comes not from struggling to find it, but by allowing it to reveal itself.

To have an identity one has "a sense of being at one with oneself as one grows and develops; and it means, at the same time, a sense of affinity with a community's sense of being at one with its future as well as its history—or mythology" (Erikson 1974, p. 27).

The mystical aspect of identity. There is a spiritual aspect to the thread that connects an individual to their identity. There are times when we have been identified as something other than what we wish to be, and yet this still becomes part of our identity. This illustrates key aspects of identity that Erikson has recognized: "Identity is 'not just mental,' then, and certainly not 'private,' but a deep communality known only

to those who shared it and expressed in words more mythical than conceptual" (Erikson, 1968, p. 21).

Identity is shaped by a recognition of death and requires a program of action. Erikson feels that identity is shaped by an awareness of death: "We all dimly feel that our transient historical identity is the only chance in all eternity to be alive as somebody in the here and now" (Erikson 1974, p. 41). From this perspective, death is the ultimate motivator, and identity provides meaning to the cycle of life. We dread the idea that we might have lived the wrong life, or never lived at all; identity placates those fears, and gives us direction. We would have no identity without action. Erikson quotes Gandhi as saying, "God only happens to you in action" (1974, p. 44).

The identity formation process. Erikson describes the way that identity is formed:

> The process of identity formation emerges as an evolving configuration -- a configuration which is gradually established by successive ego syntheses and resyntheses throughout childhood. It is a configuration gradually integrating givens, idiosyncratic libidinal needs, favored capacities, significant identifications, effective defenses, successful sublimations, and consistent roles. (Erikson, 1968, p. 163)

Identity formation is a process, an evolution. The ego synthesizes and resynthesizes its functions, and integrates these functions into the self. Defining identity is a process that spans years throughout childhood and beyond.

Identity formed from uncertainties. Erikson postulated, "that any new identity must develop the *courage of its relativities* and the *freedom of its unconscious resources*; which includes facing the anxiety aroused by both" (1974, p. 103).

People use what they learn about their environment and the outside world to get a broader understanding of themselves and their place in it. Erikson believed in the importance of each person's standpoint relative to others and relative to new ideas and roles. Our understanding of ourselves comes into question when we acquire new ideas.

Identity in different generations. Younger people may feel that having an identity will impose restraints on the natural flow of gliding through existence: "These young people seem to be permissive towards themselves and disdainful primarily toward those who believe so strenuously that they know who they are" (Erikson, 1974, p. 105).

Children are defined both by what they want to be when they grow up and by what they do in their present life. One's identity formation process must unify aspects of the self that may seem contradictory: masculine within feminine, rebel within conformist, teacher within student. One is always oneself: with all the dichotomous and integrated parts. Role-playing has its own relationship to identity formation because children entertain possibilities in role-play and these possibilities may become parts of their identity. But role-playing is not limited to childhood endeavors.

American identity. Erikson believed that to properly understand an individual's identity, one must be aware of the influences of the environment and the times on that individual. Because many individuals have a similar experience in relationship to their environment and era, Erikson began postulating that groups can have identities. Nations, at heart, are groups of individuals; therefore he became interested in national identities.

Group identities. Even though identity conveys the uniqueness of an individual, groups of individuals have identities. The identity of the community develops in much the same way as the individual identity.

> The problem is so all pervasive and yet so hard to grasp: for we deal with a process "located" *in the core of the individual* and yet also *in the core of his communal culture*, a process which establishes, in fact, the identity of those two identities. (Erikson, 1968, p. 22)

The following year, he wrote:

> For identity is (or so I have claimed) a process "located" in the core of the individual and yet also in the core of his communal culture, a process which establishes, in fact, the identity of those two identities. (1969, p. 265-266)

Pseudo-speciation. Erikson used the term "pseudo-speciation" as a way to discuss national identities (which modern day theory would term "internalized racism"). This concept describes the human tendency to split our species into separate groups, even though our DNA can mingle and we can breed with all other humans. Erikson postulates that it is a part of the human psychology to create pseudo-speciation to give us the illusion that we are different from and have superiority over others. In 1969 he wrote:

> The most frightening aspect of pseudo-speciation, however, is the fact that a "species" which has come under the dominance of another is apt to incorporate the derisive opinion of the dominant "species" onto its own self-estimation, that is, it permits itself to become infantilized, storing up within and against itself a rage which it dare not vent against the oppressor and indeed, often dares not feel. (p. 432)

Erikson goes on to explain:

> Far from perceiving or accepting a human identity based on a common specieshood, different tribes and nations, creed and classes (and, perchance,

> political parties) consider themselves to be the one chosen species and will, especially in times of crisis, sacrifice to this claim much of the knowledge, the logic and ethics that are theirs. (1974, p. 28)

We may respect and enjoy others that we do not group ourselves with. We may know that there is no biological difference and that we are no better; yet humans feel pride in the group to which they belong.

Erikson's Three Aspects of Reality

According to Erikson, identity is anchored in three aspects of reality (Erikson, 1974). The first is *factuality*: universally recognized facts, data or techniques that can be verified by observation. The second is the *sense of reality*: the unifying facts and techniques that energize the participant to put effort into concrete tasks. The third is *actuality*: the activating and invigorating of one another in the service of common goals.

Erikson (1974) felt that these three aspects of reality were the foundation for the national identity of the United States. He pointed to the phrase from the United States' Declaration of Independence that "We hold these truths to be self-evident", as a statement about factuality. Actuality was shown in the structure of government in which the local community influenced the federated structures (Erikson, 1974). An American ideal is that all voices are created equal and that those voices matter. There is an expectation that American people influence each other, and band together to have influence on the government.

The Foundations of the American Identity

Erikson described several key dimensions of the American identity, and traces their roots in the history of the United States. These themes are: tension between the old

and the new; identity as self-made and self-conscious; the pursuit of happiness; an identity for a nation of immigrants; independence and equality.

The tension between the old and the new. When Erikson addressed American identity, he looked at how new ideas can be either embraced or rejected in favor of holding to the old identity. The founding of America was an invigorating drive towards shedding something old and being liberated into the new (Erikson, 1974). The immigrants to America gained their identity from the old world - England at first and then other countries they immigrated from -- but America was also aware that it was defining itself in opposition to the identity it was trying to leave behind. "The revolution, that emergence of an identity…newer and wider than any preceding one, is still with us." (p. 32). This gives us a sense that our identity is about breaking molds, fighting pre-existing ideas and making things anew.

Erikson saw America today as having an "old new identity", one that gets in its own way by repeating itself (Erikson, 1974). He saw Americans as in conflict between wanting to hold onto who we believe we are, while also wanting to become something new and special and better. If we change into something more than we are now, are we being true to ourselves? An identity of newness is always created out of some pre-established identity. Actually being new is more difficult than it initially appears, because it involves "the balance between the wish to hold onto what one has proven to be and the hope to be renewed" (p. 99).

Most countries are grounded in traditions and structure. They do not continuously ask who they are as a country of its citizens (Erikson, 1974). However, in the United States, there is an excitement in the search for newness. Erikson cited one of America's Founding Fathers, Thomas Jefferson, who wrote that idleness begets ennui,

ennui begets hypochondria, and hypochondria brings about a diseased body (1974). This idea that if you don't remain active you will actually become diseased illustrates America's continual focus on moving ever forward. As far back as Jefferson, Americans felt that, without creating more newness, the individual will be left bored, incomplete, and even diseased.

Self-made and self-conscious. The new American identity, according to Erikson (1974, p.100) was that one was consciously self-made. America was conscious of creating itself, which affected the relationship it had with its identity. Erikson argued that this makes American writing and psychology self conscious, "interfering with the innocence of the process" (p. 100).

Choice is an American ideal; choice defines freedom. Americans want to believe that they are free to make choices, even if the consequences of their choices are so severe that it's as if there is no real choice (Erikson, 1963). Americans convince themselves that they are in control of whatever step they take, whether it be to follow the roads that lie ahead, or to turn back toward where they came from. Erikson described this view:

> He found chances, in his later childhood, to develop autonomy, initiative, and industry, with the implied promise that decency in human relations, skill in technical details, and knowledge of facts would permit him freedom of choice in his pursuits, that the identity of free choice would balance his self-coercion. (p. 323)

Because people feel they have choices, their actions affect their identities and express their individuality. Erikson discussed how the American identity is centered around these choices. For example, many young Americans hold their life plans

tentative, and do not define themselves by their current job, because they hope to achieve their dream later in life. Young Americans preserve the freedom to choose to be something else, to take advantage of the opportunities available to them (Erikson, 1963). At the same time, just as working and moving towards a dream is a choice for some, the choice to settle down and be sedentary is taken by others. "Sitting with conviction presupposes also the assurance that they could move if they chose to, move geographically or socially or both" (p. 286). Writing five years later, Erikson saw that at the heart of the American identity was a need for a belief in choice:

> For the American group identity supports an individual's ego identity as long as he can preserve a certain element of deliberate tentativeness, as long as he can convince himself that the next step is up to him and that no matter where he is staying or going he always has the choice of leaving or turning in the opposite direction. (1968, p. 67)

Choice has always been at the backdrop of American motivation: the right to choose the leaders and laws that govern this country; the choice to spend or save; the choice to expand and grow. When an individual identifies with the American group as a whole, he does so only with the idea that his individual choices are protected. The irony of the American group identity is that to be American one must adhere to the ego of the individual first to be American.

The pursuit of happiness. America defines its citizens as deserving inalienable rights. The American Declaration of Independence states that all citizens have the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Erikson assertedthat the American identity emphasizes the right and the expectation that all will pursue happiness, through independence and resolute action (1974). From this belief that everyone has the

opportunity to move up in the world comes the assumption that the poor have the choice to put in extra hard work and, if they choose, will no longer be poor. Erikson noted that this view is often combined with another tenet of the American identity, which holds that there is no problem so desperate that it cannot be conquered through resolution (Erikson, 1974). This leaves the American able to reject those who are homeless, because they can be seen as unwilling to adhere to the American ideal. The belief in the pursuit of happiness also supports the belief that Americans deserve their high standard of living. The American identity is steeped in the notion that industrious bodies earn happy lives.

The dark side of the pursuit of happiness. Erikson discussed the negative side of the desire to pursue happiness by obtaining influence and power, and acknowledged that there are aspects of the American identity that are ugly and imperfect. He wrote about the "bosses" -- self-made autocrats who consider themselves the crown of democracy (1963). This boss takes advantage of the newness of the American identity because, while he follows the laws that have been established, he also looks for ways to manipulate them to his own advantage. Bosses primarily think of themselves and their own financial gain. Erikson considers this a dangerous aspect of the American identity:

> "Bosses" and "machines", I have learned, are a danger to the American Identity, and thus to the mental health of the nation. For they present to the emancipated generations, to the generations with tentative identities, the ideal of an autocracy of irresponsibility . . . .They make "functioning" itself a value above all values . . . .That they view the world and run the people as machinery becomes a danger to man. (p. 322)

When American children are raised with the belief that they possess the freedom to make life choices and acquire opportunities, there is an implication that these opportunities will be positive, because they have earned the benefits life provides. However, the realities of American life are usually not without the bumps of being taken advantage of, being swindled, or being coerced. "These machines do their powerful best to convert him into a consumer idiot" (Erikson, 1963, p. 323).

Erikson presented these dangers, and their resolution, as parts of the American identity:

> For the sake of emotional health, then, a democracy cannot afford to let matters develop to the point where intelligent youth, proud in its independence and burning with initiative, must leave matters of legislation, law, and international affairs, not to speak of war and peace, to "insiders" and "bosses" (Erikson, 1963, p. 323).

Consumerism is also at the heart of the American identity, and Erikson was aware of the very American temptation to buy more than you can afford, and spoke out in his hope that Americans will not continue to let these ideals of overspending, unaccountability and focus on personal financial gain be the way of American life.

An identity for a nation of immigrants. Erikson suggested that America was in a unique position because it was aware that it was creating an identity for immigrants and migrants. This created generational polarities and contradictions (Erikson, 1974). Only a nation of immigrants would need to grapple with the challenge to both transcend the identities left in the mother countries, while continuing to embrace the values and traditions that created the original identity of the people.

Furthermore, Erikson analyzed the way Americans settled on their land and how that affected their identity. On the one hand, children had to grow within a community and learn to accept social constraints and norms, but they also had to be prepared to deal with the physical realities of the frontier. The American ideal was to be both acceptable in polite society and be able to protect oneself from the American wilderness.

As the American community expanded to include more immigration, there was a clash of ideals between the new immigrants and the frontiersmen:

> To the new American, with a regional tradition of stratification, newcomers increasingly came to be characterized by the fact that they had escaped from something or other, rather than the common values they sought. (Erikson, 1963, p. 294)

Erikson suggested that this country has seen the extremes. "the greatest expansiveness and yet also deeper anguish" (1974, p. 60). As a result, Erikson feels, we continue to have generational divisions, because the experience of one generation is so different from the generation that came before. These generational divisions leave our youth struggling with their identities as Americans, continuously creating new identities from this struggle.

Identity-confusion. Identity is not stable and Erikson talked about how as a child developed, he may come across negative aspects to his identity. Erikson talked about "identity-confusion," a term he coined, "which describes the inability of young people in the late teens and early twenties to establish their station and vocation in life, and the tendency of some to develop apparently malignant symptoms and regressions" (2000, p. 174). Erikson postulates that without a sense of belonging or purpose, young

adults may either slip back into early developmental stages or have a negative influence within their community.

Independence. As a country, we are geographically isolated from much of the rest of the world. This has encouraged us as a country not to lean on others and to handle problems ourselves (Erikson, 1974).

Erikson (1968) noted that this idea of striving for freedom and independence can sometimes take a negative turn. The idea that to be free is to be free to have everything is a very American ideal, one that can lead to an endless struggle towards an unreachable goal.

Equality. Erikson saw the premise of equality as an important aspect of the American identity. This ideal comes from the assumption that each individual has a valued and valuable sense of self. The central illustration of this aspect of American identity is a government founded on democracy, where no political party is allowed to dominate (Erikson, 1963). With the American governmental system of checks and balances, one party can lead in one branch of government, and another may lead in another branch.

This idea, that one group does not dominate another, shows itself within the structure of the American family as well:

> The American Family, similarly, tends to guard the right of the individual member—parents included—not to be dominated. In fact, each member, as he grows and changes, reflects a variety of outside groups and their changing interests and needs . . . .These interest groups determine the individual's privileges in his family; it is they who judge the family. (Erikson, 1963, p. 316-7)

He later wrote:

> For it is of great relevance to the young individual's identity formation that he be responded to and be given function status as a person whose gradual growth and transformation make sense to those who begin to make sense to him. (1968. p. 156)

Only those who the individual deems worthy within the community are able to positively reflect the values and morals of the individual. If people feel they understand, relate, or make sense of an individual, there needs to be reciprocation for this to influence identity development.

The family provides protection against any outside threat, while at the same time each member is engaged outside, and this influences the power that individuals have within the family. Children, wives, husbands, grandparents can gain status based on their community influence.

American Identity Theories: Beyond Erikson

Erik Erikson had many theories relating to identity, but for this dissertation I focus on three main themes:

1) The first theme is that we define our own identities by using others to reflect what we are not. We decide that a group of people are others; they have all the values, characteristics, etc. that we decide we do not have. This helps us to understand what we are not.
2) American identity is defined by the idea of creating a sense of newness, cultivating the frontier, and the ideal of innovation.
3) American identity is defined by the idea of the Individual hero: we do not decide how to act or what our moral standards are based on what the group

around us tells us, but what we know is intrinsically right and just within our own moral values.

Many others have written on this idea of the American identity. In 2008, Robert N. Bellah, Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swindler and Steven M. Tipton published a book titled *Habits of the Heart* that explores American society, its identity, values and culture. Bellah et al. elaborate on Erikson's themes and the important role they play in defining an American identity.

Individualism and the American hero. Bellah et al. (2008) found that these themes are intrinsically part of the American identity. However, where Seuss underlined them as strengths and virtues, Bellah et al. argues that it describes our societal downfall. As an example, consider the American hero. The main premise of *Habits of the Heart* (Bellah et al.) is that "we", as an American society, should learn from de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* (p. vii), specifically, that we should be concerned with the consequences of what he termed individualism (Bellah et al., p. ix). Individualism focuses on independence, individual courage and strength, and a focus on individual gain. This is the crux to what Seuss found so honorable in Horton's behavior. Horton disregarded his community in favor of his own beliefs. Bellah et al. argued that this leads to caring only about oneself and those immediate in one's life, but not about the greater community (Bellah et al., p. ix-x). They reasoned that this idea of individualism leads to Erikson's antithesis of generativity. "American Individualism resists more adult virtues, such as care and generativity, let alone wisdom, because the struggle for independence is all-consuming" (Bellah et al., p. xvii).

This is an argument that relates to Erikson's ideas about the part of American identity that reveres the Individual hero. But here, we look at the negative attributes of

this characteristic. Here he is talking about how the downfall of this attribute is that he cares only for those immediately around him. He cares for himself and his family and his immediate community, but not his fellow citizens. "Under these circumstances those in power may become absolute almost without the citizens being aware of what is happening" (Bellah et al., 2008, p. ix). Americans choose not to fully engage in their communities, and then they feel they don't understand the way decisions are made within government. This creates a cycle of American citizens choosing not to hold politicians accountable. This creates a suspicion of politicians being intimately linked with big business and America's fears that politics are corrupt. Bellah et al. cited this suspicion of government and individualism as factors contributing to a decline in American society.

This individualism has led Americans to become disengaged from civic involvement (Bellah et al., 2008, p. xvii-xxii). This has led them to see government as not something that they are an integral part of, but as the other. "What goes together with the decline of associational involvement is the decline of public trust" (Bellah et al., p. xxiii). In *Habits of the Heart*, Bellah et al. discussed that individualism has cultivated a country that has seen a decline in all kinds of community involvement (PTA, Masons, union membership, and attending local civic events such as town meetings).

The only community involvement that has seen a rise in the past few decades is that which involves the church or religion. I have my own theory as to why that might be. This dissertation has set out to show that we as Americans have come to understand that the individual is unique and honorable and, well, special. Being a part of something that is open to anyone does not make us feel special. Religion is on that list of distinguishing features that includes race, class and ethnicity, etc. that this country

readily points to. Being a part of a religious group or organization makes us feel unique and special in a way that being a part of a union or PTA lacks. Religion carves out more of our individuality than those things open to all Americans because it has its own traditions, songs, and honored days. We get the double benefit of feeling connected as a group when we are praying or engaging with others in a temple or church, but we feel unique and individual out in the greater society. It strengthens our understanding of belonging.

American others. We, as Americans, have a greater divide between those who are rich and those who are poor than our East Asian and European counterparts (Bellah et al., 2008, p. xiv). If we think about it in terms of Erikson's theme of otherness, we can question why someone on top (with the most money and power or "the 1%") would need to create an even greater divide between the others (the 99% of the rest of us) and themselves. Historically we have allowed meaningless physical characteristics to divide us, but as the American consciousness evolves to reject these as justified differences, we are forced to find otherness somewhere else. Complying with such a divide between the rich and poor has only morphed our previous understanding of what is an "other". Although, justifying someone's "otherness" based on physical characteristics definitely still exists in American culture, the more it gets questioned, the more Americans will rely on characteristics such as socio-economic status to group us, because part of the American ideal is that this is fluid, and to be an American means you have the chance to dream of moving up the ladder of monetary wealth.

Americans find the growth of the global economy frightening. We fear less jobs and less pay (Bellah et al., 2008, p. xiv). Anyone who is not an American is certainly an "other". They are not part of our identity by definition. Our identity informs us that we

are more rich and privileged than any other culture in this world, and we are anxious not to lose that privilege and access to our comforts. By conceiving of those countries as not as privileged in gaining wealth, power and modern comforts, we fear including them in our access. We do not embrace the idea of sharing the wealth. On the contrary, we are making panicking decisions about what we consider to be the heart of power: oil, land, stockpiles of money, etc. As Americans, we need to evaluate what truly makes a happy and peaceful life and living environment, and make changes to our lifestyle choices that create that for as many of us as possible.

Newness and innovation for Americans. As for this concept of newness and innovation, we Americans believe we can make something of ourselves through hard work and achieve self-respect in society, but we doubt our institutions (Bellah et al., 2008, p. xiii). We are willing to praise the individual, but not the organizations that mold these individuals. We do not praise our schools, and worry that they are failing our youth. When schools attempt to be innovative or re-structure we fight against it, long before we can see if there is a shift in performance. Even if we believe that a hospital might help us during a crisis, we question rather than trust our medications and procedures. We mistrust our political leaders, even when we vote them in. Allowing an individual to strike out and create, innovate and endeavor is very much a part of the American identity. Believing in our institutions, our community groups, is not.

Culture and character. *Habit of the Heart* (Bellah et al. 2008) is an interesting look at the American identity because of its interest in the founding of the U.S., its ideals, the inception of American identity. Bellah et al. pointed out that many of the Founding Fathers focused their energy on building the community and building the framework for the future of America, to the point that their personal affairs often

suffered (Bellah et al., p. 28-35). John Winthrop, elected first governor of Massachusetts, "devoted his life to the welfare of the colony, frequently using his own funds for public purposes . . . he had to step down from governorship because his neglected estate was threatened with bankruptcy" (p.29). Thomas Jefferson, who was a staunch believer in equality and wrote in the Declaration of Independence that "all men are created equal," also "left office much poorer than he entered it and faced bankruptcy in later years" (p. 31). Our Founding Fathers believed in the community of America, far more than their own personal wealth. We were founded on ideals where the American community came first. We were founded on the idea that to be involved outwardly was more important than maintaining and increasing our personal wealth. Somehow that has changed for Americans.

Symbols. Bellah et al. (2008) discussed how symbols influence our identities:

> A representative character is a kind of symbol. It is a way by which we can bring together in on concentrated image the way people in a given social environment organize and give meaning and direction to their lives. In fact, a representative character is more than a collection of individual traits or personalities. It is rather a public image that helps define, for a given group of people, just what kinds of personality traits it is good and legitimate to develop. A representative character provides an ideal, a point of reference and focus, that gives living expression to a vision of life, and in our society today sports figures are frequently held up as such examples. (p. 39)

This is interesting because that is what Seuss's characters are -- representations. He was trying to create symbols for children to have clear meaning and direction. But this was also poignant because they were characters. His representations were basic and therefore reflected this idea. The Sneetches are a perfect example of this. There were only two types of Sneetches, looking nearly identical save for height (child vs. adult), and the stars. They weren't even their own individuals, just beings with or without stars. This enhanced the symbolism in the moral.

Regions in America differ. Not all of the regions in the US share an identical identity. In *Creating an American Identity: New England 1789-1825*, Stephanie Kermes (2008) writes about how regional identity comes into play when thinking about the American identity. Those from New England believed that to be an American, you had to have core values of that region and that national identity does not overpower regional identity (Kermes, p. 2). When we think of the Founding Fathers, Americans typically point to those from the northern region. In fact, the documents that we founded our nation on, The Declaration of Independence and The Constitution, were written by men from the North East. By writing New England's history, New England intellectuals aimed to establish the centrality of their region to American history. In their works they used "New England" and "America," "New Englanders" and "Americans" as synonyms. (Kermes, p. 21)

The south and its values were not considered within the framework of conceptualizing this nation (Kermes, 2008, p. 3).

New Englanders specifically designed America and its identity away from that of the south. "They employed what they perceived as southern shortcomings to demonstrate their own virtues and to define national ideals shaped by their own regional

bonds" (Kermes, 2008, p. 3). Erikson speaks of identity as needing an "other" to define itself as what it is not. But Kermes believes that the New Englanders did not use Europe as its "other" as most Americans believe, but that of an actual portion of what was America, the south. For example, because it clashed with their values, New Englanders denied they ever had slaves or that slavery existed in that region (p. 8).

They used artwork to promote their ideals. During the era of 1789-1825, New Englanders depicted art of individuals engaging in "republican virtues of liberty and equality" (Kermes, 2008, p. 8). They marketed New England as America through paintings, quilts, needlepoint, etc. Much of the art that was produced in the time promoted New England, which led the "look" of America to be thought of as that of Northerners in general (p. 15). Publishers in Philadelphia and New York printed American images from New England and audiences then adopted New England ideals. This worked so well that Mid Atlantic states bought into the rhetoric that those from New England were more educated and drank less simply because that was how they advertised themselves (Kermes, p. 9).

Kermes (2008) explained that this American identity evolved into something that had a condescension towards that which was European, "a sense of superiority and exclusiveness defined the New England national identity" (p. 5). He argues it was the influx of European immigrants who attempted to maintain some of their original European values that led to this. "The immigrant character of the young American nation complicated the process of creating images of the "other" and led to an ambiguous perception of everything European" (p. 2). Even though there was some modeling after European values, many New Englanders felt superior to Europeans (p. 8).

The American identity and self-understanding. Christian Bacher (2004) also wrote on the American identity from the perspective that it involves self-understanding. There are some things he wrote with which I disagree, primarily that "the ideal of American society has been a classless society" (p. 4). If the U.S. promotes capitalism, how is that a classless society? Perhaps he means that the American ideal is that you can move up class levels based on hard work and performance, but that is not at all the same thing as saying that America is a classless society or even that it aspires to be one.

Nevertheless, Bacher (2004) does have some interesting things to say. He validated Kermes in suggesting that incorporated into the American identity is a sense of superiority and that America holds to the belief that it was and is a "new and unique nation" (Bacher, p. 4). He also identifies a part of the American identity as that the US is a moralizing nation, believing in the need to do things right and fighting for the just.

> Whatever seems to be the right and true answer in a conflict of interests, the prior question is never one of different arguments, which should be solved in a consensus, it is one of "good" or "bad". Both in the individual and in the collective sphere exists a distinction between "the good and the bad", the "coalition" and the "axis of evil" (Bacher, p. 5).

Liberalism and American identity. Patrick M. Garry (1992) has argued an attack on liberalism is a vital aspect to American identity. This attack had its apex in the 1988 presidential elections (p.10). This liberal aspect comes from the idea that "America has been a nation identified with a mission and founded upon an idea" (p. 10). He believes that it was not the region or the land that defined America, but these ideals, "The American dream defined America; and the liberal belief in freedom expressed that dream" (p. 11).

He also writes about how a part of American identity is the search and exploration of it, and that American identity development tends to be characterized within decades. "Americans have been searching for a deeper understanding of the national identity and character" (Garry, 1992, p. 33).

American identity after globalization. In his book *Beyond Citizenship: American Identity after Globalization,* Spiro (2008) argued that there is an entrenched class system and that racism and sexism, etc abound in the U.S. He made the point that all marginalized groups experience identity in the U.S. differently from each other and from the status quo. This gives richness to the American experience. Spiro's premise is that "before one asks what it means to be an American, one must ask who is an American" (Spiro p. 4). Spiro points out how significant the Constitution is to our identity, and how through actual laws, groups of people have had different access to citizenship.

Spiro (2008) and other writers on American identity concur: that to be an American has less to do with physical boundaries than with a mentality. Because you can be born to American parents outside the U.S., "global mobility may have enlarged the numbers of American citizens born and residing abroad who maintain no effective, sentimental tie to the United States" (Spiro, p. 10). Spiro argues we are tolerant of dual citizenship now more than ever, and that this exemplifies that America, now more than ever, is not based on physical boundaries (p. 6).

This leads to another conclusion of Spiro's (2008) that validates what others, including Erikson, argue: that the American identity evolves. Spiro argues that because only ideals hold American identity into place (not physical boundaries) and ideals develop, so does the decline of American identity. The distinctiveness that makes the

American identity strikingly and uniquely American is eroding. "American Identity has also been more adaptable to a world in which those moorings have been shaken, as territorial intermingling precludes the possibility of spiral homogeneity" (p. 7).

CHAPTER III

Method

This dissertation presents an analysis of three children's books by Dr. Seuss, as seen through the lens of Erikson's theories of identity.

Subjects: There are no typical participants, the kind that are interviewed or observed in a controlled environment, instead America, the characters within the Seuss books, and the life story Theodore Geisel (the man known as Dr. Seuss) serve as the participants of this dissertation.

Design: using Erikson's theories and applying them to children's literature

Materials: the three Dr. Seuss books-- *If I Ran the Zoo* (1950), *Horton Hears a Who!* (1954), and *The Sneetches and Other Stories* (1961).

Procedures:

In order to complete this analysis of the three works of children's literature, I first read thoroughly to become deeply knowledgeable about Erikson's theories of identity, identity development, and national identity. Three of Erik Erikson's theories on American identity were then applied to Dr. Seuss's children's books. The three theories were:

1. The idea of otherness and how we understand our own identity by understanding what we are not.
2. The value Americans place on the individualism and the Individual Hero.
3. The value Americans place on innovation and newness.

With this psychological lens, these theories were applied to three of Dr. Seuss's books: *If I Ran the Zoo* (1950), *Horton Hears a Who!* (1954) and *Sneetches: and other stories* (1961). I recorded my observations of contact points between the children's

books and the psychological theories. Before studying his books, I looked at the life of Theodore Geisel (Dr. Seuss). Through the biographies of Dr. Seuss, I explored how historical and political events influenced his identity and how it may have affected his work. I looked at his family relationships, his experience of being an 'other', his relationship to America and his expectations for his country, his comfort in social settings, and the evolution of his artwork.

First, the three Dr. Seuss books were read. During this time, each Dr. Seuss book was analyzed for content. The main characters were determined, and the significance of their role as main character and what type of hero they were was deduced. Their perceived goals, desires and motivations were analyzed based on their actions and any thoughts that were offered within the text of the story. All minor characters were also analyzed in this manner. From this, themes were extracted and morals and values were inferred.

The accompanying pictures were also analyzed. Facial expressions were determined, racial overtones were noted, and overall impressions were used to determine what the illustrations themselves communicated to the reader.

The three Erikson theories of the individual hero, the understanding of otherness, and innovation and newness were applied to the three Dr. Seuss books one at a time. Each book was analyzed to determine if they had any of the three themes present, how strong each theme was, and if they had any of the other three themes present. The theme itself was analyzed to reason whether the story was supporting these themes as being positive or rejecting any of these three themes as being shown in a negative light. The significance of the theme being present, and the way in which it was present (strongly or weakly, positive vs negative, etc) was further analyzed.

The overall historical significance was applied to each of the three stories. This dissertation set out not only to expound upon the notion that America has a unique identity, but that the American identity develops and modifies throughout the decades. Each Dr Seuss story was written at a slightly different time period. What was going on during the time that the book was written for America and its people was analyzed. Themes within the stories that related to what was going on historically and politically at that time were evaluated to understand the socio-historical significance and how historical context related to the moral of each story. This contributed to understanding how Seuss the writer was being influenced and how this had an effect on the development of the American identity.

The idea that within each community, the individuals that make up the community have influence on how the overall group identity is constructed was kept in mind throughout this analysis. Seuss was a man who was being influenced by the American community, but he also was having an impact on this community. This is more readily understood because he was a writer that was being read by millions. The fact that he had individual influences that affected his understanding of his own identity was also analyzed. What was going on for Seuss in his life while he was writing each book was considered in how it related to the morals and values he imposed within each story.

This analysis was used to further understand the American identity and how it can be communicated through children's book and the potential role of literature in an individual's psychological development.

CHAPTER IV

Results

I will analyze three books of Dr. Seuss's: *If I Ran the Zoo* (1950), *Horton Hears a Who!* (1954), and *The Sneetches* (1961). The three themes identified from Erikson's theories that incorporate the American identity-- otherness, individual hero, and newness/innovation-- were searched for within the three stories. The text, illustration, and overall ideals were considered. These stories were then juxtaposed against the background for which they were written to get a further analysis for their meaning to the American identity.

If I Ran the Zoo

The story synopsis. *If I Ran the Zoo* was written by Dr. Seuss and published in 1950. The story is about a boy named Gerald McGrew who goes to the zoo and believes that it's a fine zoo, but if he were running things, he'd make it far more interesting. McGrew starts by letting out all the animals currently in the zoo and then replacing them. He begins with more traditional animals, such as a lion, but instead of the traditional four footed lion, McGrew's has ten. He imagines hens that have hair tufts in which smaller hens nest, and animals of two breeds such as an elephant-cat.

As his imagination gets more creative, he continuously thinks up animals that are more unique. He imagines how he must procure them. He imagines that he must go to "places no others can get to." The places he goes to are imaginary: "Zomba-ma-Tant" and "Motta-fa-Potta-fa-Pell." McGrew also collects animals in places not imaginary, such as South Carolina and Russia, but the majority of places have made up names (Dr. Seuss, 1950).

The theme of newness/innovation. One of the themes that Erikson considers when he theorizes about the American identity is the idea of innovation and newness: the desire and ability to create new and better things. Dr. Seuss's *If I Ran the Zoo* (1950) does include this theory of Erikson's. McGrew sees a zoo, in his words a "pretty good zoo." It is presumed that it has no major flaws and may even be as entertaining or educational as most zoos are. But for McGrew that is not good enough. His idea is to be far more innovative. He wants to remove all the traditional animals and start afresh.

His animals come from places that they "don't read about in geography books," implying that for the sake of the story these places are real, yet simply haven't been discovered yet. For McGrew, having animals not typically seen in zoos but that are from places people commonly know to exist is not quite unique or innovative enough. Even the idea of the places the animals come from have to be completely novel to satisfy McGrew. Dr. Seuss shows through *If I Ran the Zoo* (1950) a metaphor of the American public's love for innovation and newness simply for the sake of what is new and innovative.

The theme of otherness. Another of Erikson's theories on how identity is formed is how we use others to understand ourselves. *If I Ran the Zoo* (Dr. Seuss, 1950) illustrates this theme and shows us some of the negative consequences of this.

There is an inner security that McGrew will be praised based on what he can capture. "Now I like that boy heaps. His New Zoo, McGrew Zoo, is growing by leaps. He captures them wild and he captures them meek. He captures them slim and he captures them sleek" (Dr. Seuss, 1950, p. 23). McGrew imagines what people will say after they view his zoo. He goes to far away lands, uproots the animals from their natural habitat and the people around him respond to this with joy. Then they are

imagined to say, “What do you suppose he will capture next week?” (Dr. Seuss, p. 23) This implies that the people also expect that Mcgrew will continuously come up with more unique creatures for their enjoyment.

The book is set in the U.S. and presumably the majority of the patrons are Americans. Their acceptance of McGrew’s actions, and their payment to enjoy his zoo, suggests an acceptance of the behavior of taking whatever he likes from these other lands. Other cultures also collude in this behavior. In one stanza McGrew brings to his zoo several animals from “the wilds of Nantasket” (Dr. Seuss, 1950). “Eight Persian Princes will carry the basket” (Dr. Seuss, 1950) that carry the animals to the zoo. These Persian Princes have no qualms whatsoever with carrying a basket of their animals over to the zoo. As they are princes, it is doubtful they need any monetary compensation, we can only imagine it is because of some willingness to please the young zoo keeper, or perhaps the U.S. itself. In several of the other drawings we see the idea of the peoples of these lands collaborating with McGrew to give over their unique creatures for his zoo. We see drawings of what appears to be Africans from the island of “Yerka” (Dr. Seuss, 1950) carrying a bird, a Russian giving over a “Palooski” bird (Dr. Seuss, 1950), and a few other drawings of individuals who all readily give up their lands’ animals for the betterment of the McGrew zoo. The implication is that countries real and imaginary readily welcome members of the U.S. to take creatures off their land and out of their countries.

There is a stanza where McGrew captures a creature from the desert, “A high-stepping animal fast as the wind. From the blistering sands of the Desert of Zind.” This beast he names a “Mulligatawny” (Dr. Seuss, 1950). What is so disturbing about this stanza is that not only does McGrew take back the Mulligatawny for his zoo, but he

takes back the rider as well! “The beast is the beast that the brave chieftains ride. When they want to go fast to find some place to hide. A Mulligatawny is fine for my zoo And so is a chieftain. I’ll bring one back too.” (Dr. Seuss, 1950, p. 28) Regardless about how one feels about caging wild animals, there needs to be at least some moral agreement that caging people for the entertainment of others is abhorrent. The chieftain, of course, is smiling in the illustration. It is unclear if Seuss finds it charming to believe that a zoo could be so special and unique that it would cage actual humans, but we are lulled by his appealing drawings to have this response encouraged in us, the reader, as well.

This idea that the people of other lands are happy to have the American McGrew come and conquer their animals and take their rarities is a narrow-minded belief in one’s own superiority. This is compounded by the stereotyping and racism smattered within *If I Ran the Zoo* (1950). As I mentioned before, there are Persian Princes who are only too obliging to give McGrew their animals. Not only do they hand them over, but they do all the hard labor for McGrew. In the illustration, McGrew walks ahead while the Princes carry the basket for McGrew, smiling delightedly at getting to do so. Their lack of importance is multiplied when, in the stanza accompanying the picture the Princes are not given names, “eight Persian Princes will carry the basket, But what *their* names are, I don’t know. So don’t ask it” (Dr. Seuss, 1950, p. 40). Even though they are Princes, because they are from Persia they are therefore less than, and their names are not needed to be known (or perhaps too complicated for McGrew’s American boy brain to bother to learn). They do the grunt labor for McGrew even though they are princes, and that appears to be the extent of their interaction.

There are other races within Dr. Seuss' story (1950) that happily enslave themselves for McGrew. When he hunts "in the mountains of Zomba-ma-Tant" he has "helpers who all wear their eyes at a slant". These men have long tops with the long wide sleeves seen most often in kimonos of the Japanese. These men in the drawing also wear Geta, shoes with an elevated base worn by both Chinese and Japanese. This leads us to presume that although it is not mentioned where "Zomba-ma-Tant" is somewhere near the region of Japan.

These men all appear to be enjoying their work as they balance the beast for McGrew's zoo on their heads. McGrew gets to stand atop the cage, mug raised upward, with a shot gun grasped in his hand. McGrew does not even have to lower himself to walk. The implication is that he dominates both the creatures he collects from these places and their human inhabitants as well. To make this palatable to the readers, Seuss has the people being dominated smiling, as grateful to be carrying the great American McGrew (Dr. Seuss, 1950). It begs the reader to infer that not only are the people less than, but because they themselves are condoning the behavior; McGrew's subjugation of them is rationalized.

The African people, of the make-believe island of Yerka, are also drawn to insinuate servitude. The illustrations of the African people carrying the rare "Tufted Mazurka" bird are short in stature, have round bellies and are literally black in color. Their noses and ears are large, the ring from their nose is exaggeratedly large and they wear few clothes save for a small red skirt. All of this is a stereotype of an African. But what is even more notable than the obvious stereotypes, is the expression on their faces. Their eyes are cast upward, and their mouths are no larger than a dot. It gives the appearance that they are both mesmerized by the charge they are carrying, and at the

same time dumbfounded by it (Dr. Seuss, 1950). The reader is led to believe that although the bird is from Yerka, and presumably seen by the native people who live there, natives do not possess enough brain power to make sense of it. It is the blankness of their faces that begs the reader to believe that they are not intelligent. This is what implicates the illustration to be entirely degrading in its racism.

Dr. Seuss's (1950) book does much to help us to understand Erikson's theory that otherness is a way we understand ourselves. The American identity has a unique relationship to otherness and how it is embedded within our consciousness throughout history. Although using others to understand ourselves may be a natural process of understanding our identity, it can also have negative consequences such as feelings of superiority and racism.

When the story was written: Seuss wrote If I Ran the Zoo in 1950 and was influenced by the era in which he wrote. Prior to 1950, the U.S. had been reeling from a world war that Seuss had been politically engaged in long before the U.S. officially went to war,

> On December 7, 1941, the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. . . . .On December 8, Dr. Seuss published his first cartoon reacting to the changed situation . . . .It did not show Japan or Pearl Harbor . . . .For months before December 7 "isolationism" and "isolationists" had been Dr. Seuss's targets. (Minear p. 17, 1999)

At this point Seuss had been writing political cartoons centered on Seuss' belief that the U.S. should be involved in the war. He made many cartoons making fun of both Nazi's and Japanese. *Dr. Seuss Goes to War* (Minear, 1999) is an anthology of political cartoons Seuss wrote mostly in the first half of the 1940s. Although Hitler, the Nazis

and several American leaders are not drawn in favorable lights, the mockery of the Japanese is undeniable. Within Seuss's anthology there are cartoons insinuating that the Japanese were flooding the West Coast to be able to wait "for the signal from home" (Minear p. 65), and Hitler marrying a Japanese woman with a "Hashimura Frankenstein" baby at her side (Minear p. 154). The Japanese flooding the West Coast have enormous buck teeth. They sneer and smile and crowd reaching back until Seuss draws them as mere dots inundating the landscape. They happily take TNT, undoubtedly to blow up the U.S. they have recently immigrated to. The cartoon of the woman marrying Hitler is almost grotesque in her depiction. She is overweight and stubby. Her lips are drawn as to almost look chapped. Her eyes are slanted and closed as if not registering the world around her, as she rocks an even more hideous baby of a Hitler-like face and hair, with slanted menacing eyes and large gapped teeth. The images from this anthology provide evidence that Seuss had very little positive feeling towards the Japanese.

Although technically his characters in *If I Ran the Zoo* (Dr. Seuss, 1950) are never specified as Japanese, and are from places made up in his imagination, the mockery of the Japanese people linger within his accompanying images.

1950 was not a time of racial consciousness in the U.S. The civil rights movement had not yet begun. Although the McCarthy Era red scare was not in full swing, there were hints of fear of the unknown and outside cultures already brewing within the U.S. and set to explode in a full force of Communist fear within a few short years. Seuss's *If I Ran the Zoo* (1950) painfully reflects the racial consciousness of the U.S. in the 1950's. I do not believe Seuss's book was meant to be racially hateful, yet at times it depicted stereotypes. In some instances, it was encouraging the racist views that Seuss himself agreed with, such as with the Japanese.

1950 appears to be a good time for Seuss in his life. Seuss and his wife were settling down to a quieter life in La Jolla after a youthful, jubilant, yet impoverished romp in New York City. "Getting accustomed to his new working quarters, his thoughts turned toward his childhood home in Springfield…the night sounds, the howls, the cries of the nearby Springfield Zoo. And he thought of his father, who took him to the Zoo…" (Fensch 2000, p. 102).

Several historians of Seuss have discussed how important the zoo was in facilitating Seuss's imagination and love of animal drawings. "In reading a number of articles about Geisel, I'd discovered that he had been drawing "his" animals since his childhood days at the zoo;" (Fensch 1997 p. 109). Seuss had been born in the year 1900 in Springfield Massachusetts and in 1909 Seuss's father, Theodor Robert Geisel, was appointed to the Springfield park board. "The jewel of the park system was five-hundred acre Forest Park…(Dr. Seuss's father's) pride within the Forest Park was fledgling Springfield Zoo…On Sundays and Holidays his father took him on behind-the-scene walks through the zoo, and Ted began to bring along a pencil and sketch pad . . . his animals emerged with features that were mismatched and curiously exaggerated" (Morgan and Morgan, 1995, p. 12).

If *I Ran the Zoo* (Dr. Seuss, 1950) is about a young boy who is exploring a modest park zoo and decides he could create a better one if he were in charge. "*If I Ran the Zoo* acted out a childhood fantasy" (Fensch 1997 p. 199). As a boy, Seuss got to explore the world of the zoo and how to run it. As an adult he was able to fully propel himself into a childhood fantasy of being an adult running a zoo, but doing it far better. Because his characters are in his imagination, it is not a direct slight on his father's abilities as zoo keeper. Instead, it implies that Seuss could improve on what his father

accomplished through his ability to imagine and communicate to that vast array of the American population. Seuss was able to surpass his father not in actually doing his job better, but presenting the idea of a better way to run a zoo.

Seuss had mixed, complex feelings towards his father. "It was Ted's father, Theodor who imposed discipline, although he rarely raised his voice or hand. When he grew angry, he turned away and ignored the offender" (Morgan & Morgan, 1995, p. 7). In 1925, Seuss had been attending Dartmouth for his undergraduate education. He took Economics classes he hated, for his father's benefit (Morgan & Morgan, p. 29). Seuss "approached graduation with no career in sight, no job on the horizon, no plans, and—no real ambition to do anything. But when his father asked what he was to do, (he) grandly said he was going to win a scholarship . . to attend Oxford" (Fensch, 2000, p. 41). Clearly proud, Theodor Geisel went straight to the local paper to print the story of his son winning a scholarship to Oxford. Seuss was forced to tell his father he had made it up. Seuss "didn't receive any punishment from his father, nor even a lecture—his father's disapproving silence was enough" (Fensch, p. 42). To manage his own humiliation, Theodor Geisel then paid for his son to attend Oxford the following fall.

But it is clear that Theodor Geisel was an engaged father, not only regularly taking his son to the zoo, but also Seuss "and his father built snow tunnels and igloos in the backyard" (Morgan & Morgan, 1995, p. 7).

The fact that Seuss's father was a zoo keeper implies some influence on Seuss's choice of writing a story about a zoo. It is not dedicated to him, but it does encourage us to wonder at what Seuss was working through in his relationship with his father. The fact that the main character is still a boy communicates that he may have been working through emotions lingering from his childhood. Seuss is at a time in his life where he is

coming into his own. He is gaining respect as a man throughout the wider community. In the final picture, the actual zoo keeper is happy and content in his zoo and young McGrew is looking up at him, "I'd make a few changes, If *I* ran the zoo" (Dr. Seuss, 1950). The zoo keeper did a fine enough job, as Seuss's father must have, but Seuss wants to better this with fantasy and creating newness from the imaginary world.

Dr. Seuss's writing was heavily influenced by his own experiences as a man and what he was exposed to when he wrote *If I Ran the Zoo* (1950). Each individual and their identity affect the identity within a group. Dr. Seuss's identity and experiences affected his writing which in turn affects the experiences and identity of the American children reading his stories.

Dr. Seuss was a prolific writer, and this dissertation could have examined all of his books and searched for many signs of identity development within his texts, but the focus was on the three I felt illuminated Erikson's theories most obviously. All three books illustrated more than one of the three concepts, but each book really exemplified one in particular.

If I Ran the Zoo (1950) is equated with innovation and newness because the premise of the story was a boy who took a small, typical zoo with the typical lions, elephants and zebras found in most zoos and decided that he was going to travel to all regions of the globe in search of the most unusual and new animals he could find. The type of zoo that typically delighted most people was not original enough for the boy. He was after innovation and newness for its own sake.

Seuss wrote this book in 1950. The decade leading up to that year had been about being exposed to the idea of other cultures and countries, but for most Americans, not actually having access to go to those countries. Americans heard stories about

Europe and Asia during World War II, but few Americans actually left the States. It is not surprising that *If I Ran the Zoo* exoticizes that which is foreign, and creates a fantastical world from it.

If I Ran the Zoo reflects both the type of racism that existed for Seuss, but for 1950s America as well. This was the time when segregation was in full effect. Japanese Americans were placed in internment camps as early as 1942. The separation of African Americans by education, transportation, housing and medical was not legally questioned until 1954 with Brown vs. Board of Education. Even during the war, the military was separated into racially segregated units. Seuss's book reflects this acceptance of segregation. And those are only a few examples.

The character in his story, young Gerald, went to the far reaches of earth, went to the most exotic places, captured the most remarkable creature that culture had to offer, brought it home, and placed it safely behind bars, segregated from American culture. In the beginning of the story, Gerald literally unlocks the doors for the typical animals, and allows them to be free within American society.

Innovation and newness were dominant aspects of American culture in the era leading up to 1950. There were all kinds of inventions: the TV, Velcro, Tupperware, jets, and the Microwave to name a few. Hollywood was producing movies that are considered to be some of the greatest films of all time, even by today's standards: *It's a Wonderful Life, Casablanca, Citizen Cane,* and *Sunset Blvd* (made that year, 1950). *If I Ran the Zoo* (Dr. Seuss) reflects this focus for that time. Although innovation and newness may have been aspects of American identity from its inception, there are times in our history that reflect this more strongly than others. The era leading up to the year he wrote *Zoo*, is one of those eras. It does not seem surprising then, that Seuss wrote

that book at that time. Seuss was an American and was being affected by the ideals around him. He in turn, reflected those ideals in his books.

It was in this era that the man, Theodor Geisel, was himself making films. After being politically active via the newspaper cartoon medium in the early 1940s, Geisel then served in the Army U.S. Signal Corps and made informational films. His one film, *Hitler Lives*, received three Academy Awards and earned him the Legion of Merit (Fensch, 2000, p. 18). From his films, he was able to travel, perhaps not to the far reaches of Africa or Asia, but certainly to Europe which exposed him to different cultures and novel ideas.

Geisel found Hollywood frustrating. He felt, after his Academy Awards, he was brought on by Warner Brothers, only to have his work butchered to the point where only the title remained. He moved over to RKO, which won him another Academy Award, but that did not settle his ambivalence towards the film making process and the Hollywood atmosphere. "Despite his years in Hollywood, he had no tolerance for infighting and was quickly overwhelmed by studio intrigue" (Morgan & Morgan, 1995, p. 133). "He reveled in the freedom and relative permanency of books," (Morgan & Morgan, p. 120). Geisel had become discouraged by that which involved a large team. In fact, one of his later films, *The 5000 Fingers of Dr. T*, was a flop. Geisel had pulled out of it half way through, due to irritation with the "chaos" of the company (Morgan & Morgan, p. 134).

In a sense, Geisel illustrates the American hero. He could not work in a team, or find his success in it. His main success came from working alone. His first book was published in this fashion. *And to Think That I Saw it on Mulberry Street* was published in 1937, after being rejected 27 times (Fensch, 2000, p. 17). Perseverance is an aspect

of the American hero ideal, to fight against even the worst odds, and to believe in one's self anyway. When Geisel worked alone on this story, he persevered after being rejected again and again. But within the team setting, one flop virtually ended his interest in the film making medium. This is particularly notable because, with movies, he won the ultimate in awards and received the most noteworthy of accolades.

Horton Hears a Who!

The story synopsis. Not too long after publishing the children's book, *If I Ran the Zoo* (1950), Seuss wrote *Horton Hears a Who!* It was out in bookstores in 1954. *Horton Hears a Who!* is a story of an elephant who is happy and content splashing about in a jungle pool. He hears a sound as if a tiny person was calling for help, but cannot see anyone around him. He identifies a small speck of dust as the origin of this sound, and determines that there must be someone very small living on the speck, as dust does not make sound on its own. Horton is a very helpful elephant, and he is determined to save this person on the speck, spouting that "a person's a person, no matter how small" (Dr. Seuss, p. 12).

Unfortunately, Horton is immediately met with resistance. Almost as soon as he rescues the speck from falling into the pool of water with him, a female kangaroo and her child scoff at Horton that there couldn't possibly be a person on the speck, because of its dramatically small size. But Horton never doubts what he has heard, and he believes there could be any number of beings on his speck. The kangaroo and her offspring attack his speck with splash water and Horton hurries to rescue it. He carries it throughout the jungle as all the other animals laugh and taunt his foolishness for believing in beings small enough to live on a speck (Dr. Seuss, 1954).

At this point the beings on the speck speak to Horton and thank him and communicate that they are an entire town of beings living on the speck. Just as Horton is assuring the mayor of this town that he will keep them all safe, jungle monkeys and an eagle interfere and drop the speck into a sea of clovers. But Horton does not give up. He picks through three million flowers until he finds the one with his speck on it (Dr. Seuss, 1954).

Horton is delighted to have rescued his friends, but this only incenses the jungle animals further. They cage Horton and heat up a kettle to drop the speck into boiling "Beezle-Nut" oil. Panicked, Horton believes that the only way to save his friends is to have every one of them make as much noise as possible so the other jungle animals can hear them. So the beings on the speck, who are called "Whos," all shout and bang and make as much noise as possible, but still the jungle animals cannot hear them. Horton begs the mayor to make sure that every Who is making as much noise as possible. The mayor searches the town and finds that every Who is, indeed, making as much noise as possible, except one young boy Who. The mayor has him make noise as well, and it is this one voice that finally is enough to have the jungle animals hear the Who voices. After that, all the jungle animals are as determined as Horton to protect the Whos on the speck (Dr. Seuss, 1954).

The theme of otherness. Like *If I Ran the Zoo* (1950) before it, Dr. Seuss's story *Horton Hears a Who!* (1954) includes Erikson's theme of understanding identity through otherness.

In *Horton Hears a Who!* (Dr. Seuss, 1954), "Horton must protect an entire civilization from annihilation. If he cannot save the speck-sized planet from its sneering adversaries, a nation of Whos will be destroyed. Significantly, Seuss wrote the book

directly after his return from Japan . . . learning that they were less interested in militarism and more interested in the west." (Nel, 2005, p. 53). Seuss dedicated the book to a Japanese Professor he met on his travels, so Nel deduces that Seuss was thinking about the Japanese people when he wrote the book and that annihilation is synonymous with dropping of the atom bomb on Japan in August 1945 (Nel, 2005, p. 53). There is a vital difference between the Whos and the Japanese: the Whos were completely powerless and Japan had the power to attack Pearl Harbor. But I think this is why a children's story is so vital for conveying the messages of how we want the world to be, not how it actually is. Nel points out that this thinking is a "bit too much" (Nel, 2005, p. 53) in equating Horton with the U.S. Seuss may have been inspired by true events in history, but the story is more the philosophy that Seuss desires children to learn from and live by.

One way of viewing the story as a metaphor could be that Horton is the U.S., the Jungle animals Japan and the Whos Pearl Harbor. He certainly was disdainful of the Japanese before he took his trip there in 1953. No doubt he wishes the Japanese people to adopt a similar mentality of protecting the innocent as he does the U.S. "So, if we look at Seuss's political development as an artist, we could see the book . . . as an allegory advocating equal treatment of all people." (Nel, 2005, p. 54).

There is an evolution of consciousness from his first cartoons in *PM* and later what he was drawing in *If I Ran the Zoo* (Dr. Seuss, 1950). In the previous chapter, I argued that Seuss saw the Japanese in a disfavorable light when he was writing if *I Ran the Zoo*, but his trip to Japan in 1953 enlightened him. America's consciousness has had a similar evolution. During World War II, the Japanese were feared and Japanese-Americans were rounded up into internment camps. I would argue that America as a

whole was not as quick to shed its racist views of the Japanese as Seuss was. But all the individuals within a group help comprise the mentality of the group. Seuss and others who encouraged acceptance and openness led the way towards relaxing the hysteria around the Japanese.

Racial consciousness evolves. With Seuss, this was true as well. Seuss was not completely hateful towards the Japanese before he left for his visit to Japan. Nel agrees that Seuss political cartoons for *PM* that depicted the Japanese were racist and that his, "initial racism gives way to a deeper understanding" (Nel, 2005, p. 57). But Nel also observes that Seuss made a film titled, *Your Job in Japan* that was so sympathetic to the Japanese people that General MacArthur prevented it from being shown (Nel, 2005, p. 57). This film was written in 1945 five years before *If I Ran the Zoo* was written. Seuss was predisposed to feel for the underdog. During his *PM* days, he undoubtedly saw the Japanese only as a fighting force--some sort of cohesive race that only sought to conquer. But looking at the Japanese people as individuals he saw them as "victims of seven centuries of class dictatorship" (Morgan and Morgan, 1995, p. 119).

Horton (Dr. Seuss, 1954) was a story written to communicate that it is the duty of those who have the means to care for and protect those who do not. Japan as a whole, was a country that was dominating and conquering countries that were weaker. But viewing the Japanese people as individuals, they were seen as needing sympathy and protection due to the bombing they endured at the hands of the United States.

In the Literature Review Chapter, we looked at Erikson's theories of identity. One of his themes was this idea of "otherness." Specifically, that we define ourselves by positing ourselves against what we are not. Seuss used stereotypes of other peoples to let American children come to understand what they were not. There were also other

ways that Seuss used this concept of otherness to communicate his ideas of what it means to be an ideal American citizen that was not based on a racist concept.

In the story, there were several jungle animals that attempted to thwart Horton. In the end Horton showed these jungle animals that he was right and they were wrong in their assessment (Dr. Seuss, 1954). This validates to the child reader that the way to be and act is as Horton, not the other animals. Seuss also has a way of communicating right from the beginning that these animals are not to be viewed favorably and that the only hero in the story to identify with is Horton. When we are introduced to the kangaroo on page 14, she is described as a "sour kangaroo." The kangaroo (and her child rooming in her pouch) are instant disbelievers. They say that since there never has been a person so small as to live on a speck before, then there can't be one now (Dr. Seuss, 1954, p. 14). Because Seuss establishes that children are not to identify with the kangaroo, he establishes that children are not to identify as non-believers. American children are raised to be believers, even in things they cannot see. This may be why, today, American children are voted number one in confidence amongst other countries (http://www.education.com/magazine/article/waiting-superman-means-parents).

The kangaroo also laughs at Horton, particularly in the illustrations (Dr. Seuss, 1954, p. 14-18). She also calls him a fool (Dr. Seuss, 1954, p. 17). From this we learn we are not to laugh at others or to judge them as foolish when trying to protect others. No matter what we think of the significance (or lack there of) of those they are trying to protect.

Another animal in this Seuss tale, with whom we are meant not to identify, is an eagle named Vlad Vlad-i-koff. The Eagle carries the speck away from Horton, thwarting Horton's endeavor to save the Whos. The Eagle then proclaims that he will

hide the speck where Horton will never find it (Dr. Seuss, 1954, p. 30). In the illustrations, Vlad has a smile on his face when flying away with Horton's speck. Not only is he thwarting Horton's endeavors to save the small, but he is enjoying it. In the story, Horton does not have the ability to keep up with him, he being a large elephant that moves slowly and Vlad being a fast flying eagle. The message is clear that our American identity is not that of thwarting others who take risks to save and that we are not to enjoy having that kind of power over someone who cannot keep up to our pace.

Both the kangaroo and Vlad are bullies. They dominate. They don't respect the rights of the Whos, and they also don't respect the personal rights of Horton. Vlad stole from Horton, and the Kangaroo intended to keep him locked up and essentially to torture him into watching something meaningful to him (the speck) be boiled in oil. All of this is not, then, an aspect of the American identity. Regardless of what Americans actually do in practice, the identity of America is one of respecting individual rights, of not having the community bully the individual and to not psychologically torture others.

In *Horton Hears a Who!* (1954), Dr. Seuss appears to have made a conscious moral in regards to what it means to be an "other." Even if we do use "otherness" to understand our own identity, this does not entitle us feel superior to, or to persecute, those we have decided are our others.

Newness / innovation. There is a brief moment within *Horton Hears a Who!* (Dr. Seuss, 1954) where Erikson's concept of newness and innovation is demonstrated.

We have already established that Seuss uses certain characters in his stories to be the antagonists of the story and establishes to the reader what *not* to identify with. The Kangaroo, the key villain of the story laughs at Horton and says, "Why, that speck is as small as the head of a pin. A person on that? . . .Why, there never has been!" (Dr. Seuss,

1954, p. 14). The kangaroo will not believe, because there has never been something of that nature prior to that moment. Since we, the readers, do not identify with the Kangaroo, we know that believing in something that is a new concept is an aspect of our identity. We can believe in something, even if it "never has been." In this way, Seuss validates that newness, and believing in a new concept is an aspect of our identity. *Horton Hears a Who!* (Dr. Seuss) briefly shows us a positive example of innovation and newness, which Erikson theorizes is an integral aspect of the American identity.

The individual hero. Primarily, *Horton Hears a Who!* (Dr. Seuss, 1954) illustrates Erikson's theory of the hero in the American identity being one in which individualism is highly prized. In the story Horton is a part of a jungle community. The big kangaroo is somewhat of a leader of the mob that rounds up Horton. She is the one who influences the jungle monkeys to cage and rope up Horton and drop his speck in a pot of boiling oil. The monkeys are happy to please. Thus, the monkeys represent the majority of jungle beliefs and the kangaroo represents the leadership. Horton goes against them all. He is not swayed by the majority, nor is he swayed by the powerful leader. What this communicates about the American identity is that one must hold to ones individual beliefs, regardless of what the leadership believes in or what the dominant view is. The hero of the story is a true individual, listening to his inner voice over everything else.

The hero strives against intense adversity. When Vlad flies off with Horton's speck, Horton chases after him "with groans, over stones That tattered his toenails and battered his bones" (Dr. Seuss, 1954, p. 31) and after Vlad drops the speck into a patch of clovers "a hundred miles wide" (Dr. Seuss, 1954, p. 33) Horton searches clover by clover until he finds the one with his speck on the three millionth flower (Dr. Seuss,

1954, p. 37). The hero is someone who does not give up after extreme hardship to himself. He will protect those who cannot protect themselves, even if it means he himself will undergo extreme hardship.

The theme of the book—"a person's a person no matter how small"—had grown out of visits to Japanese schools, where the importance of the individual was considered an exciting new concept (Morgan & Morgan, 1995, p. 144-5). This illustrates the point that this is a uniquely American moral, or at least, not a Japanese one. To the Japanese children, the idea of protecting those who cannot protect themselves, that all individuals have equal rights, was a novel idea.

There is another hero in the story of *Horton Hears a Who!* (Dr. Seuss, 1954) that also exemplifies the American identity. At the end of the story, all the Whos must make noise to be heard by the jungle animals. The Whos make as much noise as possible beating on brass pans, blasting on musical instruments, and yipping and yapping (Dr. Seuss, p. 45-50). Yet, the jungle animals could not hear the Whos on the speck the way that Horton could. This is because a "very small shirker named Jo-Jo Was standing, just standing, and bouncing a Yo-Yo! Not making a sound!" (Dr. Seuss, 1954, p. 52). It is when Jo-Jo shouts out that the Whos are finally heard, "And their whole world was saved by the Smallest of All!" (Dr. Seuss, 1954, p. 56). Not only is a "person a person, no matter how small" but even the smallest of us can be a hero. The way to be a hero is to initiate your voice, and every voice matters. This idea, then, of every voice having an effect, is an aspect of the American identity. It is the foundation of American Democracy. But Seuss is also reiterating the point that every voice is needed. To be a hero, one cannot voice their opinion by not participating. To effect change, everyone needs to contribute no matter how much one believes in their lack of relevance.

The fact that American icon Senator Kennedy endorsed the moral of Horton is then not surprising. "In his remarks, Senator Kennedy further developed the theme of Seuss as activist-patriot. Standing near a statue of Horton, the senator said, "Horton is a very special elephant," and went on to name *Horton Hears a Who!* As his favorite Dr. Seuss book because it teaches us that "we should be compassionate to others," even if we cannot see them or others do not like them. Kennedy liked that it is the smallest Who that saves the day as he was the youngest of his siblings.(Nel, 2005, p. 2-3)

Horton Hears a Who! (Dr. Seuss, 1954) encourages us to see that being an individual and adhering to our individual beliefs are of great value. This is what Erikson suggested was an aspect of the American identity.

When the story was written. As with *If I Ran the Zoo* (Dr. Seuss, 1950), *Horton Hears a Who!* (Dr. Seuss, 1954) was also influenced by the times in which it was written and by what was going on for Theodore Geisel. Seuss did not enter life assuming he would be a children's literature writer. Before *Horton Hears a Who!*, Seuss had been making money through films. But even though there was a promise of far more money in Hollywood, Seuss rejected this lifestyle in favor of something more meaningful to him. He had more passion for children's books. This notion of doing what you believe in is reflected in the moral of the book *Horton Hears a Who!* (Dr. Seuss).

Those who have studied Seuss believe that Word War II had a profound influence over Seuss's writing. Philip Nel, a man who won an award for his book *Dr. Seuss: American Icon* (2005) writes,

> I argue that World War II transformed Seuss into America's First anti-Fascist children's writer, and inspired him to write activist books like *Horton Hears a*

> *Who*! . . . "The careful reader might argue that the influence of world events enters Seuss's works prior to September 1939; however, such influences are but echoes when compared to . . . later "message books"…Jo-Jo, the smallest of the Whos in *Horton Hears a Who!* (1954), needs to speak out in order to save *all* Whos from imminent destruction." (Nel, 2005, p. 47)

Dr. Seuss was affected by what was happening in the world around him, and he chose to communicate that in his children's stories.

Ted Geisel was invited to travel to Japan in the spring of 1953 (Morgan & Morgan, 1995, p. 136). This trip had a profound influence on him. In the *Zoo* chapter, I discuss how Seuss's drawings of Japanese people had racist overtones, and that his knowledge of Japan's actions in World War II and what had led up to that point influenced this racism. Yet, even the voyage to Japan changed some of his thinking about the Japanese, "During the ten day voyage to Tokyo the Geisels pored over research materials on postwar Japan and marveled at how little they understood of Japanese culture" (Morgan & Morgan, 1995, p. 136).

By that fall, Seuss began work on *Horton Hears a Who!* (1954), where it is posited that Seuss's experience with Japanese children influenced his main theme. "A person's a person no matter how small"—had grown out of visits to Japanese schools, where the importance of the individual was considered an exciting new concept" (Morgan & Morgan, 1995, p. 145).

Helping those who do not have the strength to help themselves was not a new concept for Geisel. His political cartoons were full of suggestions that it was the U.S.'s responsibility to fight to stop the atrocities he learned were happening in Europe immediately proceeding and during World War II. It was notable that these same

cartoons had overtones of fighting the Japanese, that they were not the small that Seuss believes needs protection, but the big that needed to be taken down. But Geisel thought differently when history changed things. The U.S. had bombed Hiroshima and Nagasaki, damaging small Japanese children that could not defend themselves. Geisel had urged the U.S. to join the fight against the Axis Powers of Germany, Japan, and Italy. Yet the extreme use of the atom bomb left Geisel feeling that the Japanese children also needed protecting. Geisel's concept of race and how he perceived "otherness" evolved during this time to have more depth and understanding.

The years between the time that Seuss wrote *If I Ran the Zoo* and *Horton Hears a Who!* was an interesting time in American history. The years between 1950 and 1954 were the time of McCarthyism. Senator Joseph McCarthy led hunts against Americans labeled as un-American, communist, or a communist sympathizer. *Horton Hears a Who!* is poignant in its illustration of this phase of history.

After World War II, the cold war between the U.S. and the Soviet Union encouraged fear of communists. The nuclear arms race left Americans terrified that, with a push of a button, everything American could be wiped out. McCarthy played on these fears. As I discussed in the *Horton Hears a Who!* (Dr. Seuss, 1954) chapter, Horton is a distinctly individual hero. There is nothing communistic about Horton. Indeed, he goes against his jungle community to stand alone. If communism is about the community and working towards the benefit of the community as a whole, Horton distinctly cares little for the jungle community and what it dictates as its values. He cares about his independent values, and he has an internal sense of what is the correct thing to do in the situation: protecting the small Whos at any cost.

So, in a sense the story of Horton plays into the same principles that Joseph McCarthy and the McCarthyism era was backing. However, this era had overtones of witch hunts to it. The McCarthy era is predominantly looked on by the American public as a shameful past, most notably due to how little evidence was required for Americans to be convicted of their alleged and supposed crimes. In the story, Horton is not hurting anyone, and certainly not the jungle community when he decides to make it his sole purpose to save and protect the Whos. Yet, at the end of the story, there is a lynch mob feel to what the Jungle characters do to Horton. They tie Horton up, and even though they do not believe they are physically killing Whos (because they do not believe they exist), they are quite aware they are emotionally torturing Horton.

The trials led by Senator McCarthy have been called "witch hunts." The era was notable for its accusing without evidence and its targeting of groups of people based on a perception that they were different, not because they were actually doing anything "un-American" or illegal. Horton was attacked by his jungle community for being different, for having ideas different from the community around him. His community attacked him for this. First they attacked his beliefs by multiple attempts to eliminate the clover he believed held live beings. They taunted, teased, and restrained him. These actions of his community seem to illustrate the McCarthy community, an aspect of the American community during this time. McCarthy would then metaphorically be the Kangaroo. Horton would be the victims brought to court, blacklisted and restrained by the laws placed on them during this time. Horton can then be viewed as a tale that simultaneously rejects communist ideals, but also those radical ideals of McCarthy era that were on the opposite end of the spectrum.

It is quite interesting how much the turmoil of that time is reflected in *Horton Hears a Who!* (Dr. Seuss, 1954). In regard to this, Seuss "thought of McCarthyism, when U.S. citizens were afraid to speak their minds; when he said they were scared of speaking their thoughts aloud" (Fensch, 2000, p. 113). This also relates to when the jungle animals cannot hear the community of Whos until Jo-jo, the smallest of Whos, lends his voice to the cause.

This is one of the reasons why Seuss is so interesting. All stories affect children and many of them portray American ideals, but because Seuss was so prolific, lasted so many decades, and chose to write political morals, we can see the political morals of the U.S. unfold in his stories.

The Sneetches (and Other Stories)

The story synopsis. *The Sneetches* is a tale within one of Dr. Seuss's books, *The Sneetches and Other Stories* (1961). It begins as an account of how there are two types of Seuss's Sneetches. The two types are identical in size and stature. In fact, they are identical in all respects except one type has stars on their bellies and the other does not.

Those with stars looked down upon those without stars. They wouldn't let them play in their games or invite them to their parties or picnics. They kept at bay the Sneetches without stars, away from all the good things those with stars got to enjoy (Dr. Seuss, 1961).

Now, in the story, Sylvester McMonkey McBean came to capitalize on the situation. He saw how despondent the Sneetches without stars were and offered them a solution to their problem. For a fee, he put stars on those Sneetches who before were without a star (Dr. Seuss, 1961).

But the Sneetches who originally had stars on their bellies were not pleased to lose their superiority over the Sneetches who didn't have stars. They wanted to be distinctive. So, although the stars were what originally determined dominance, they opted to pay McBean to change them to Sneetches without stars. They then decreed that this was the ideal form of Sneetch (Dr. Seuss, 1961).

This led to a cycle of continuingly paying McBean to either remove or put back on stars on their Sneetch bellies, depending on the current trend of dominance, until finally they had removed and put back on the stars so many times that no one knew what the idyllic form was. To boot, they had spent all of their money. McBean drove off with every last cent smirking that "a Sneetch will never learn" (Dr. Seuss, 1961).

But the Sneetches did learn. They decided that no Sneetch was better than the other and that whether you had a star on your belly, did not matter (Dr. Seuss, 1961).

The theme of otherness. This story illustrates Erikson's theories on identity in many ways. First, this is a story about group identities. Even though identity conveys the uniqueness of a given individual, groups of individuals have identities. The identity of the community develops in much the same way as the individual identity. *The Sneetches* (Dr. Seuss, 1961) shows us the theme of otherness between groups.

The problem is all pervasive and yet so hard to grasp, for we deal with a process "located" *in the core of the individual* and yet also *in the core of his communal culture*, a process which establishes, in fact, the identity of those two identities (Erikson 1968, p. 22).

Erikson (1974) used "pseudo-speciation" as a way to discuss national identities. This concept describes the human tendency to split our species into separate groups, even though our DNA can mingle and we can breed with all other humans. He

postulates that it is a part of the human psychology to create pseudo-speciation to give us the illusion that we are different from, and have superiority over others. Erikson explains:

> Far from perceiving or accepting a human identity based on a common specieshood, different tribes and nations, creed and classes (and, perchance, political parties) consider themselves to be the one chosen species and will, especially in times of crisis, sacrifice to this claim much of the knowledge, the logic and ethics that are theirs. (p. 28)

As a species of humans, we have grouped ourselves in ways that have no biological basis. It gives us a sense of pride to have a group to identify with that is based on a non-biological component. By definition, it taps into our thoughts and emotions; something that we have decided sets us apart from other animals. We may respect and enjoy others with whom we do not group ourselves, but giving into the categorization of pseudo-speciation makes sense to us. No matter how often we recognize the way in which we are all connected as a people, we fall back on ways in which categories define us (language, lifestyle, etc.).

The Sneetches, those with stars and without, are meant to be viewed by the reader as one species. This is clear because of how easy it was for one group to change into another. But any child can see right from the beginning that there is no real difference between the two types of Sneetches; they both have the same coloring, relative height, texture to their fur, white collar, roundness of belly, etc. The point of the story is for the reader to understand right from the start that the idea of the Sneetches with stars upon their bellies being somehow better than those without is completely arbitrary (and absurd). This illustrates Erikson's point about how people make arbitrary

and absurd distinctions within their own species to determine superiority of one classification over another.

There are times when we have been identified as something other than what we wish to be, and yet this still becomes part of our identity. This illustrates key aspects of identity that Erikson has recognized: identity is "not just 'mental,' then, and certainly not 'private,' but a deep communality known only to those who shared it and expressed in words more mythical than conceptual" (Erikson 1968, p. 21). We, the readers, know that there is no difference between the Sneetches with stars and those who went without. How, then, could we see something that was so obvious, yet the Sneetches couldn't see it? Those without stars could have demanded equal treatment for all Sneetches, but they didn't. Instead they chose to believe that being without stars was inferior and something that needed to be changed. Their identity was structured to make them feel inferior, and they internalized this from the beginning. The society in which they lived had such an effect on how they conceptualized themselves as individuals, that it dictated aspects of their personality. Intellectually, they might have understood that those with stars were no better, but somehow the social norms outweighed even their own sense of identity.

At the end of the story, the Sneetches, "got really quite smart on that day The day they decided that Sneetches are Sneetches And no kind of Sneetch is the best on the beaches." (Dr. Seuss, 1961, p. 24). It appears at this point that a new identity emerged for both sets of Sneetches. Their communal experience of being taken in by McBean equally gave them a common sense of belonging to one group. They equally had to deal with the same physical struggle of removing and regaining stars. This helped change their identities as feeling separate from each other. Erikson writes that to have an identity one has "a sense of being at one with oneself as one grows and develops; and it

means, at the same time, a sense of affinity with a community's sense of being at one with its future as well as its history—or mythology" (Erikson, 1974, p. 27). The Sneetches made peace with themselves and with their history of oppression. They believed in their future as equals and this evolved their identity as a group.

Erikson felt that these aspects of reality were the foundation for the national identity of the United States (Erikson, 1974). He pointed to the phrase from the United States' Declaration of Independence, "we hold these truths to be self-evident", as a statement about factuality. Actuality was shown in the structure of government in which the local community influenced the federated structures (Erikson, 1974). An American ideal is that all voices are created equal and that those voices matter. There is an expectation that American people influence each other and band together to have influence on the government. It appears Seuss wanted The Sneetches story to illustrate the point that all voices *are* created equal, even though historically separate groups within the U.S. have had different access to even basic rights, such as voting. The moral that one deduces is that it doesn't matter what you look like, or what group you were born to, all Sneetches deserve equal rights to pursue their idea of happiness (all that was wonderful in the Sneetch world: campfires and games).

Seuss communicates with his tale, that although all people may be created equal, this is not always how species develop. Erikson argues that identity is often reinforced by having someone to pit as the antithesis. "Man always needs an otherness to represent at the bottom of the social scale that negative identity of what he must not be" (1974, p. 36). The Sneetches with the stars used starless Sneetches to define their identity as somehow superior. This was reinforced when those Sneetches without stars changed to be identical to those with stars. Instead of embracing them as an equal, they chose

instead to continue to find some way of distinguishing themselves to maintain this difference, this otherness.

Erikson postulates that we need to have someone to belittle because it puts us at the center of the universe (1974, p. 31). Science and Darwin have taught us that we are not the center of the universe, but we have trouble letting those beliefs go. The thought that we are not favored with a purpose put forth by God leaves us without the same sense of right to our way of living (1974, p. 31).

Dr. Seuss's story illustrates this point. The Sneetches with the stars could not let go that they were glorified sect of the Sneetch species, so that even when their starless peers changed to look like them and join them, they were aghast. They changed to be without the stars to maintain a difference, not to maintain something they previously believed made them better. In the end of the book, it is implied that there was plenty of all the goods to go around. But it's possible that the Sneetches that originally had all the stars did not believe this was so. It is clear that the un-starred Sneetches looked longingly at the "roasts" and games as if they could not themselves find a way to obtain these items, at least not without stars. It seems that somehow a belief was started amongst starred Sneetches that to maintain their current livelihood, it was justified to exclude their fellow un-starred Sneetches.

According to Erikson, identity is anchored in three aspects of reality. The first is *factuality*: universal facts, data, and techniques that can be verified by observation and work techniques of the time. The second is the *sense of reality*, the unifying of all the facts and techniques. This energizes the participants into concrete tasks. And the third is *actuality*, the relating to each other, activating and invigorating each other in service of common goals (Erikson, 1974). The Sneetches illustrates these theories. First, the

Sneetches without stars integrated into their own identities that they were the lesser Sneetch by seeing that they did not get to be a part of the games and roasts. They used their observations of how they moved through the land of Sneetch to define their identities: Erikson's *factuality*. Secondly, they are motivated to give McBean money in order to change their lot. They were energized to concretely place stars upon their bellies: Erikson's *sense of reality*. Finally, at the end of the story, the identity of the all the Sneetches changed to have the common goal of being inclusive of one another and joining together for the common goal of making an accepting Sneetch world: Erikson's *actuality*.

Even though there were idealistic notions set forth by the U.S.'s Founding Fathers that all men were created equal, this was not how it always developed. This country was founded on pitting groups of people as lower than others. As previously discussed, Erikson argues that identity is often reinforced by having someone to pit as the antithesis, "man always needs an otherness to represent at the bottom of the social scale that negative identity of what he must not be" (1974, p. 36). America was founded by negating the rights of some to enforce the rights of others. Seuss recognized this and wanted a tale to illustrate the unfortunate aspect of the U.S. identity. He wrote the Sneetches so that a new generation of children would see the folly of viewing one's identity as what they are not. The stars, which defined the 'otherness' in the story, quickly became arbitrary. The moral outlined is that 'otherness' defined from physical attributes should be considered arbitrary.

The individual hero (and its negative side). Dr. Seuss's story *Horton Hears a Who!* (1954) also briefly illustrates the aspect of the American identity that places emphasis on the individual, but here it communicates some of its negative side. It is

also American to be those "bosses": to be the ones "running" the country. "'Bosses' are self-made autocrats and, therefore, consider themselves and one another the crown of democracy" (Erikson, 1963, p. 322). The "boss" takes advantage. He follows the laws that have already been established, but looks for innovations within those laws to manipulate them to his own personal gain. "He is the one who -- to speak in highway terms – passes and cuts in where others leave a little space for decency's and safety's sake" (Erikson, p. 322). This is Seuss' McBean character in *The Sneetches* (Dr. Seuss, 1961). McBean is the character who doesn't do anything illegal, but is still the bad guy of the story. He is not someone most mothers want their children to emulate, but yet they are there in American society at every turn. They are those who primarily think of themselves and their own financial gain, the negative side to America's individualistic hero.

> Here it is not a matter of taste or mere principle which makes me join those who decry a danger to bossium . . . "Bosses" and "machines", I have learned, are a danger to the American identity, and thus to the mental health of the nation. For they present to the emancipated generations, to the generations with tentative identities, the ideal of an autocracy of irresponsibility . . . They make "functioning" itself a value above all values . . . That they view the world and run the people as machinery becomes a danger to man. (Erikson, p. 322)

These men, although within the laws set forth by the American foundation, are corrupt. Their lack of decency is the ugly side of the aspect of the American identity that calls for individualism, and caring only about 'taking care of your own'. Yet this is a part of the American identity as with all other aspects. *The Sneetches* (Dr. Seuss) illustrates the negative aspects of individualism.

When the story was written. Seuss wrote *The Sneetches* in 1960. By this time, Seuss's fame and fortune were solidified. He had recently begun his "I Can Read" books (*Cat in the Hat* and *Green Eggs and Ham*) which were great successes. Seuss had never shied from taking a political stand in his writings and cartoons, and now he was at a point in his life where illustrating political points was not very risky to his career. Seuss used his books to communicate his ideals.

The year 1960 is a poignant year for the Civil Rights Movement. On February 1st, 1960, in Greensboro North Carolina four students from North Carolina A&T sit down at a "whites-only" Woolworth's lunch counter and ask to be served. This action, by David Richmond, Franklin McCain, Ezell Blair, and Joseph McNeil, ignites a wave of student sit-ins and protests that flash like fire across the South - a fire for justice that no amount of beatings, jails, or fire hoses can extinguish. Within days, sit-ins occurred in dozens of Southern towns, and in the North supporting picket-lines sprang up at Woolworth and Kress stores from New York to San Francisco (Hartford, B., 2010).

By writing *The Sneetches and Other Stories* (Dr. Seuss, 1961), he was taking action against the current injustices of segregation. He may not have taken the same magnitude of risk as those actually engaging in the sit-ins, but he may have been reaching individuals young enough to be open to extending rights. Erikson speaks of having no identity without action. Erikson quotes Gandhi as saying "God only happens to you in action" (Erikson, 1974, p. 44). Writing this book was Seuss's action. Seuss communicates through his story *The Sneetches* (Dr. Seuss) several of Erikson's theories in regards to how group otherness is understood and how actions of 'others' shape those identities.

Through *The Sneetches* (1961), Dr. Seuss communicates the negative aspect of innovation and newness that was having an effect on the American culture when he wrote the story. 1960, the year the story was written, was the end of a decade noted for its consumerism. The 1950s had marked a time of economic prosperity, with the introduction of the television into most US homes, commercials pushed products that were merely frivolous or comforting. With Seuss's introduction of McBean, and the Sneetches response of what essentially led to wasting their money on his superfluous product, Seuss was making a commentary on the absurdity of the consumerist society. This was another moral to take away from this story, that there is a flip-side to newness as well. It does not always give you a product that benefits society. McBeans new wonder product of giving a Sneetch a star on its belly was not an innovation that promoted their world.

This idea of the decade leading up to Seuss's writing of the Sneetches as being a consumerist society also has been argued as perpetuating this idea of conformity.

> A variety of factors in Americans' lives in the 1950s promoted homogeneity. The search for communists at home, a national consumer culture, giant corporations, and even the suburbs and television seemed to encourage homogeneity or at the very least discourage individuality and diversity. ("The Consumer Society," 2010)

Within 25 fully illustrated pages he was able to assess the current culture of the time and reflect America's identity back to itself. The fact that it was a children's story lent it to reading as benign and therefore much more palpable to another form of medium. With Sneetches it becomes clear that Seuss has begun to realize his power and responsibility with his children's stories. Seuss was active politically going back to

his writing for PM magazine during WWII (Minear, 1999). But he was never quite able to reach the mass of audience he accessed with his children's books. As long as he continued to write in a way that engaged young readers, he was able to put forth political ideals to future generations. Seuss's short little tale about the Sneetches was a commentary on the world around him.

Seuss wrote *The Sneetches: and Other Stories* in 1960. Between when Seuss wrote *Horton* and when he wrote *The Sneetches* was 1954-1960. This is the time in our history that is often heralded as the inception of the civil rights movement. This is due primarily because the poignant Supreme Court ruling of Brown vs the Board of Education (that determined that separate schools for black and white children was no longer constitutional) was decided in March of 1954, kicking off an 'official' start to the movement. This was the era of Rosa Parks and laws ending segregation in southern states. This was the time many blacks attended previously all-white schools and universities for the first time. Sit-ins were focused in the end of the era, gathering momentum for the movement during 1960, when Geisel published *Sneetches*.

Seuss almost abandoned this book when someone "he respected" (Morgan & Morgan, 1995, p. 173) told him it was anti-Semitic. It is not explained why that person got to that conclusion. The stars on their bellies could have brought to mind the stars worn by Jews during World War II in Germany and other parts of Europe, perhaps. But that doesn't explain why it would be read as anti-Semitic. Geisel had written the book with a moral in mind, "*The Sneetches* was Geisel's strong statement: he was against anti-semitism (sic). Against prejudice. Against bigotry. Against peoples vs. peoples" (Fensch, 2000, p. 146).

If Seuss's moral was intentional, then, it is reasonable to inferthat what was going on for the U.S. at that time was influencing Seuss's work. The civil rights movement happened because the US was ripe with a consciousness that treating black people, and any people, as less than equal citizens, was wrong.

There is more to be read into Seuss's story than just the basic moral that it is ridiculous to place someone beneath you because of an arbitrary characteristic. Seuss's story also manages to have a commentary about internalized racism. The Sneetches without Stars on their bellies coveted those stars that were on the others. They foolishly squandered their money on trying to obtain those stars. This means that instead of doing something, such as fighting for their equal rights to those with stars, they merely opted to change what they looked like to appear just like those who were privileged.

In a society where the distinction of one group over another is an arbitrary one, those with otherness have to fight the belief that the only way to gain privilege is to act, think, and look like those with privilege. In the end, Seuss's tale agrees that to try to simply look like those in privilege is foolish. All the Sneetches squander all of their money. It is this act of joining together in the foolishness of squandering their money that leads them all (those with and those without) to realize how silly and arbitrary those differences are. The moral is sound because the end result is that all the Sneetches abolish that distinction altogether. The suggestion of the story is that the way to initiate change is internally. Initially, the Sneetches without stars infiltrated those with stars by branding themselves with stars. The idea of internalized racism being an aspect of Seuss's intended moral is not found in any of his biographies, suggesting that Seuss himself had not grappled intentionally with this message. Just like American's Identity,

sometimes we struggle to understand something, and recognize that something is an issue without being able to formalize this understanding as an aspect of our identity.

Leonard Mlodinow (2004) put out an article where he reviewed studies on the idea of internalized racism and all internalized other-ness. He wrote about how even activists for the rights of individual groups found that they displayed unconscious negative associations towards their own group. This was surprising and disheartening to those in the study. In the article it references Dr. Seuss's *The Sneetches* (1961), and he suggests that the machine that McBean carries with him can be used as a metaphor for our unconscious. In the end, the Sneetches disregarded McBean's machine, in favor of something that was more fair and just (seeing all the Sneetches as equal). The article called for us to disregard our sub-conscious and suggested that the way to do this was to use the media to posit alternative views to the stereotypes we carry around (Mlodinow, 2004). Children's stories are media, and they reach an audience at an age where their unconscious is quickly gathering information to understand the world around them. Seuss's book laid the foundation to future generations to formally understand the constraints of unconscious bias within and toward "others."

Summary of Results

The results shown in Table 1 indicate that there is at least some minor presence of each of the three identified themes of Erik Erikson's: otherness, individual hero, and newness/innovation. Each of the three Dr. Seuss stories has one of the three themes as its primary theme, and the other two themes as secondary or minor themes. Each of the three Erikson themes is represented as a primary theme in one of the Dr. Seuss stories.

In *If I Ran the Zoo* (Dr. Seuss, 1950), the primary theme is Newness/Innovation because the premise of the story is that the boy creates a new and innovative zoo. The

theme of otherness is present in how we are encouraged to view the illustrations and descriptions of the distant lands and natives as others. The theme of the individual hero is present because the boy works alone to create this imaginary zoo and is praised individually for the hard work he does.

In *Horton Hears a Who!* (Dr. Seuss, 1954), the primary theme was the theme of the individual hero. This is seen in the character of Horton facing adversity and going against his community to trust his own sense of justice. The theme of otherness was a minor theme in the story in that Horton was viewed as other by his jungle community and the viewer is encouraged to view the kangaroo as the other, because Seuss illustrates that the kangaroo is not to be emulated. The theme of innovation and newness is present when no one believes there could be small people on a speck because there had never been before.

In *The Sneetches* (Dr. Seuss, 1961), the primary theme is the theme of otherness. This is seen through the base of the story being about how the Sneetches realize that their classifications of each other based on arbitrary characteristics were unfounded. The theme of the individual hero was also a theme with the character of McBean who emulated the negative side of the American hero by only caring about his own personal gain. The Sneetches also indicated that there was a negative side to innovation and newness by having McBean's new and innovative machine create and remove arbitrary characteristics that take all of the Sneetches money.

Table 1

Themes from Erikson's Work, Illustrated in Dr. Seuss Stories

The Theme of Otherness	The Theme of the Individual Hero	The Theme of Newness/Innovation
	If I Ran the Zoo	
Present in the racism associated with the text and drawings of other cultures	Story of a singular boy's dream of having everyone believe that he alone has saved the day	This is the primary theme of this story. The boy is displeased with the old traditional zoos and creates an entirely new zoo from his imagination
	Horton Hears a Who	
Horton is seen as other than the jungle community because he can hear something the rest cannot	This is the primary theme of the story. Against treacherous odds, Horton goes against the group to do what he knows is right becoming an individual hero	No one in the jungle community believes that there could be people on a speck, because they have never seen or heard of that before. The story shows them that there could be something they have never imagined
	The Sneetches and Other Stories	
This is the primary theme of the story. The Sneetches view each other as separate and different solely based on what the reader clearly sees as an arbitrary star	This theme is present when showing the negative side to individualism. McBean only cares about his own personal gain and it comes off looking selfish	Can be seen in the anti-consumerism message put forth when the Sneetches loose all their money to McBean. In the end of the story, the Sneetches realize how foolish this was

CHAPTER V

Discussion

A summary of the results confirms that Erikson's three theories: Otherness, Individual Heroism and Innovation and Newness, are present within American children's literature. In this case, it was found within all three of the Dr. Seuss books that were analyzed.

Erik Erikson wrote a lot about identity. He talked about otherness and how we as a species use what we are not to help us understand what we value and how we understand our own identity. This led him to the discussion of pseudo-speciation, something that he argued only humans did. This idea explores the placing of arbitrary characteristics as a way of grouping us into categories. This led to the discussion of dominant groups based on arbitrary standards. In this dissertation, it was confirmed that American children's literature does indeed reflect this concept. It is not just that we define ourselves by what we are not, which could be considered a benign form of social interaction, but that we also engage in placing arbitrary characteristics in our sub-categories. These sub-categories based on arbitrary characteristics lead us to make arbitrary decisions on who gets to be in the majority and powerful groups. This dissertation explored how this can lead to racism, one of the negative consequences of pseudo-speciation.

Erik Erikson also explored the idea that American's value a hero that follows his or her own individual heart, that what is highly prized is belief in your own self worth and values, regardless of what the community around you is saying. In the books discussed in this dissertation, by the American children's author, Dr. Seuss, we see this.

In Seuss's story, the hero was the one that struggled against the dominant community view. The hero trusted his own heart and beliefs no matter what the consequences.

The third main theme explored within this dissertation was Erik Erikson's theory that the American identity places high value on innovation and newness. This dissertation shows that this was also found in the American children's literature that was analyzed. Those values that Erikson targeted as how we as Americans define our identity, are in fact, reflected in the literature that we present to our children.

One of the ideas that came out of this dissertation is that these themes tend to have two sides. The individual hero can be seen in both a positive and a negative light, as well as with innovation and newness. Otherness, tends not to have much of a positive connotation to it, but at least it can be viewed as tepid when we realize that it helps us to understand what we do value about ourselves. This, the idea that these themes have more than one way of viewing them, also seems to be an aspect of the American identity. We seem to realize that our values and what makes up how we see ourselves as a community have both positive and negative connotations to them. This idea that we are permitted to acknowledge this also seems to be an aspect of our identity as Americans.

Why Seuss?

Seuss represents a writer who writes for the very young. His books have even been shortened and turned into "board books" a type of book designed specifically to be read to infants and toddlers. And Seuss is quintessentially American. Philip Nel (2005), whose book on Seuss argues that Dr. Seuss is an American icon, says: "Though his works have been translated into many languages, he is universally known only in the United States and much less recognized abroad" (p. 10).

Seuss was prolific, his books span five (plus) decades. This dissertation examines only three of his books and how much they reflect what was happening in American history and the American consciousness, but if we looked at all of them, I believe we would witness America reflected throughout the decades.

Children's literature reflects cultural identity. Dr. Seuss, uniquely American, reflects a truly American experience that we can gain information from about what it means to be an American. These messages do not always bring about American pride, but neither does our history. Because children read and are read these stories at such a young age, the identity that is being promoted affects their understanding a great deal. Understanding the messages children's literature promotes helps us to understand what messages we are incorporating into our group identity. This helps us understand who we are as a group, and what this means to us as individuals. Erik Erikson's work reflects three main themes when it comes to looking at the American identity: the use of otherness to understand what we are by deciding what we are not, the use of an individual hero, and the use of innovation and newness. These three themes are reflected in Dr. Seuss's works, showing that these messages of what it means to be an American are promoted to American children from very early on.

In the Seuss stories, Seuss glorifies that which defines the American identity. He has internalized the messages that the values that define us as Americans are something to be proud of and ideal. Yet, throughout his stories, the drawbacks of these values are also articulated. McBean was an individual. He was the anti-hero who illustrated what it means to only care about the individual, and not the community group. *The Sneetches* (1961) story illustrates the negative feature of the American identity of using otherness to define ourselves. This shows that like most thoughtful Americans, Seuss had not

fully bought into the American ideal as the ultimate rhetoric. Nor did he dismiss Americanism as essentially flawed and without value. His stories are quintessentially American because they battle through the layers of positive and negative traits that make up the American identity.

If Seuss were to write a book that would be written about today's era, it would undoubtedly be a cautionary tale. It would be sweet and full of rhyme, but underneath the cadence would be the message that we are isolating. It would challenge us to become involved in our communities, and believe in our fellow man. The character that would be the 'bad guy' would be the one who only cared to take care of oneself and put oneself forward. The message in *Habits of the Heart* (Bellah et al., 2008) suggests that we are losing our civic involvement and we are isolating. This is causing us to be more and more self-centered. We don't even perceive that the American identity involves community, only personal fame (Bellah et al., p. 167-271). One of our main sources of information and entertainment, social media, promotes this individual fame while feigning engagement in an actual community.

This leaves to question whether or not these attributes that identify the American identity (using otherness to define ourselves, and highly praising both the hero as an individual and innovation/newness) are, in the end, our downfall. Perhaps we as Americans need to question our current values. Perhaps we need to join in community organizations, focus on traditional means for entertainment (nature, books, etc), and remember how much we are connected as a human race. Then perhaps we can have a children's author of a new generation that promotes alternative ways of conceptualizing ourselves.

One of the things that this dissertation did not really address was to really examine what the values and morals of other countries children's stories are. It is my assumption that different countries have a different set of values, ones that perhaps place more value on the community than the individual, for instance. This would help to validate the findings that these values are unique to the American identity.

Identity Formation in Children

Parents and caregivers have an enormous amount of influence on the development of their children. A myriad of psychological theories reveal that how we relate to others as we grow is directly related to the examples shown to us by our parents. But parents and caregivers are not the only influences on children, and parents themselves are not working within a family vacuum. Identity is formed for children with a community and society influence.

Through this dissertation, I looked at identity formation for American children. There is basic identity formation, and then there is specifically an American identity and how it develops. There are three themes that Erikson pinpoints when he discusses identity formation in Americans: otherness, the individual hero, and innovation and newness. Otherness is not unique to Americans, Erikson argues that this is how all identity is formed. We need to understand what we are not to be able to understand what we are. The individual hero is this idea that to bravely stand against the community, to have a strong voice for what we believe in, even if it goes against everyone else, is a virtue. The individual hero incorporates the notion that the individual is not weak because they have little backing, they are brave because they have little backing and stand up for what they believe in anyway. The idea of innovation and newness is the American romanticization of all new inventions. It is the high merit

given to progress and originality. It rejects concepts such as tradition and that which is soothing and easy.

In this dissertation I examined how these three themes exposed themselves within Dr. Seuss's stories. An American's children's author was chosen to explore how American authors' communicate American ideals through the books that they publish. The three books: *If I Ran the Zoo* (1950)*, Horton Hears a Who!* (1954) and *The Sneetches (and other stories)* (1961) were chosen because it was expected that these stories would each capture one of the three themes. *If I Ran the Zoo* was expected to communicate the virtue of innovation and newness. *Horton Hears a Who!* was expected to communicate the virtue of the individual hero, and *The Sneetches* story was chosen to explore the theme of otherness. It turned out that because these themes are so prevalent within American identity and for the Americans who write moral stories for children, the themes were actually present in more than one, if not all of the three stories. What was also interesting was that with the positive spin for each of the themes, the negative side was also apparent within the stories analyzed for this dissertation. This helps us to understand that within our identity development, although we may think of a certain theme as being valued within the American identity, we also incorporate the negative side to that value within that American identity. At least within the American identity, we do acknowledge that these themes have both positive and negative implications, and this also seems to be an aspect of what American identity means.

Ted Geisel and Women

One of the limitations for this discussion is the fact that Theodor Geisel had some personal issues. Ted Geisel had a unique relationship to women. His personal feelings and how he conceptualized women also has a way of being communicated

within the text of his stories. Because this dissertation only looks at the one author, only the ways in which he conceptualizes the world and the community around him is explored within this dissertation. When Erik Erikson wrote his ideas of otherness, he intended to include women, "The Black, the young, and the female have one experience in common: They have been the other, where the adult white male has been 'it'" (Erikson, 1974, p. 114). Erikson even references Seuss's downfall, that when we are talking about groups in general, we make the assumption that women and their experiences is just generally included, but in reality, women as an other have their own relationship to identity development and what it means to be an American (Erikson, p. 115). Where Erikson thought about women in his writing, Seuss simply ignored them. This dissertation could have richer and more in depth analysis if author's who included the female experience and female characters were included. But Seuss's understanding of women lacked that depth.

For Geisel, the time when he wrote these three books was a mixed era for him. His books were taking off, most notably for *The Cat in the Hat* (1957), *One Fish Two Fish Red Fish Blue Fish* (1960), and *Green Eggs and Ham* (1960). These books were a new way of thinking about how to teach children to read, and millions were being sold in the US (Morgan & Morgan, 1995, p. 156). Geisel was in a solid place financially with a secure feeling that any future books would be a success. But his wife's, Helen's, health was failing. She was diagnosed as having a stroke that affected her memory and later led to depression (Morgan & Morgan, p. 157). Seven years after he wrote *Sneetches* (1961), she died "by her own hand" (Fensch, 2000, p. 19).

Theodor Geisel's relationship with Helen was complex. He met her in 1926 at Oxford and the way one friend recalls it, it was love at first sight (Morgan & Morgan,

1995, p. 45). He married her the following year. Books on Geisel recall her as a "loving spouse" (Fensch, 2000, p. 72) and "helpmate" (Fensch, p. 114). Ted respected her opinion enough to hire her when he did his stint in the film industry. Later, she was one of the partners with him for Beginner Books. When she first became sick, Ted realized just how much she had managed him,

> He really didn't know how to handle a checkbook – or even make coffee. "Helen had always shielded him from the real world," a friend, Elin Vanderlip said. Descriptions of their marriage appear to be both full of love and mutual respect. Helen's obituary in the New York Times reflected that, "her major activities…were centered on her husband for whom she was chief critic, editor, business manager and wife for forty years (Morgan & Morgan, p. 198).

Their secretary in business even described Helen's suicide as a "her last and greatest gift to him" (Morgan & Morgan, p. 198): the implication being that her debilitating illness and depression were a burden for Ted that she took upon herself to lift. Even after a stroke, it was believed that Helen took care of Ted and not the other way round.

His sister Marnie and he were close as children, particularly during World War I when German immigrants were viewed with suspicion, "Ted and his sister, Marnie, grew even closer, sharing advice on how to cope with taunts on playgrounds and sidewalks" (Morgan & Morgan, p. 18). But as an adult, she became an alcoholic and her daughter believed she had agoraphobia (Morgan & Morgan, p. 116). Marnie died at the age of forty-three from coronary thrombosis. "Her death was a subject so painful for Ted that he avoided talking about it for the rest of his life with a silent shake of his head," (p. 117).

His mother appears to be a warm beloved figure for Ted. "As a grandmother, Nettie Geisel rediscovered her magical playfulness, a warmth that crossed the generational barrier and, Ted reminded her, had cast a glow over his childhood" (Morgan & Morgan, 1995, p. 71). Ted also attributes his love and his comfort "for the rhythms in which I write and the urgency for which I do it" (p. 7). And at the age of twenty-seven, Ted, known for his stoicism, cried openly over his mother's death (p. 71).

There were two other main females in his life thought of fondly by Ted. Ted and Helen, "were charmed by their three-year-old niece" (Morgan & Morgan, 1995 p. 71). Peggy, whom Ted and Helen met in 1930, even had one of his books dedicated to her, (p.187). And for his second wife Audrey, " He lavished sentimental notes and Cat in the Hat drawings…with more elaborate ones on Valentine's Day and their anniversary" (p.218). Audrey also helped Seuss with his work, using sound advice, but relaying it to Ted through nonsense and playfulness: so that he could relate to it (p. 216-7). Like his wife Helen, Audrey managed Ted (p. 217).

Ted also had a made-up child. "Chrysanthemum-Pearl was the imaginary child that Ted had invented and discussed at every opportunity. When friends bragged about their children, Ted drew himself up and related with sober pride the most recent Olympian feat by Chrysanthemum-Pearl, ever clever and precocious" (Morgan & Morgan, 1995, p. 90). Helen had had to have her ovaries removed in their forth year of marriage and Ted reported, "It was not that we didn't want to have children" (p. 91). When inspired to create a mythical child, Geisel chose a female one. This indicates that there was at least some inclination towards preferring a girl, and it certainly indicates that he would not have been opposed or disappointed by one.

With all this, there is only one book Seuss wrote that features a little girl. This was published in 1995, four years after his death. In his life a female novelist charged him with sexism. Geisel addressed this by countering that he believed that most of the characters in his books were animals and "if she could identify the sex, I'll remember her in my will" (Fensch, 2000, p. 178-179). But although one can argue that such creatures as the Sneetches are genderless, most of his creatures are given names, Horton, Jo-Jo, Vlad are creatures from *Horton Hears a Who* (1954), but they have male names. In *If I Ran the Zoo* (1954), the main character featured is a boy, Gerald. Seuss's other famous books all either feature boys directly (Bartholomew Cubbins, Marco, etc.), creatures with male names, (Sam-I-Am, Thidwick, and even the Grinch) or with male associated clothing (the bow-tie of the Cat in the Hat, etc.).

It seems from Theodor Geisel's biographies, that he loved women. It gives the impression he even respected them and valued them and their contributions. He relied on women. It is frustrating that his books lack the strong female characters that he included into his real life. If he had actually had the daughter he made up, would he really want the images she saw to be only that of boys? His comment about his characters being genderless creatures is quite illuminating. Like the American consciousness, he was not really aware that his stories had an absence of strong female characters. He believed his characters were genderless because it was presumed that both boys and girls were able to identify with male characters the same way. When Seuss was writing his books, boy characters far surpassed girls. Children's books in general portrayed little boys. This did not change until the 1980s (Carole M. Kortenhaus and Jack Demarest, "Gender Role Stereotyping in Children's Literature: An Update," *Sex Roles: A Journal of Research* 28, no.3-4 (1993): 219.), after the vast majority of his

books had been written and published. Seuss then, was merely reflecting the American culture.

Seuss valued women in his life. He loved his niece. His fantasy child was a girl. Seuss broke barriers, wrote controversial texts (Fensch, 2000, p. 165). Somehow though, he missed the inroads of women throughout the 60s and 70s. There is an aspect of the American identity, which includes women gaining recognition, which Seuss simply misses. It looks from his biographies that he would have been at an absolute loss without the women in his actual life, but not in the world of his imagination. Luckily there was no Chrysanthemum Pearl, because he would have done her a great disservice.

From his relationship with women, it is almost as if he needed and loved women, but didn't fully see them. When his sister became physically and mentally ill, he could not face the problem and responded to it being brought up with punctuated silence. It is believed that his wife killed herself to continue to protect him, instead of Geisel seeing her as a whole person and taking care of her in her time of need. Even Geisel's make-believe female child possessed an unrealistic set of positive attributes and triumphs. It was almost as if he could not see women as whole individuals. When the women in his life had flaws and frailties that could not be ignored, they disappeared from his life. Seuss could not create women as characters because he did not appreciate that women had depth.

So, while Seuss is valuable in studying the American identity, he had some personal issues that made him less than perfect. If there were future discussions on other American writers of children's literature, such as Louisa May Alcott or Laura Ingalls Wilder, we would find that women are honored in children's literature. Even male authors of American children's literature have placed value on female characters, such

as *The Little Engine that Could* by Watty Piper that features a female train that is very tiny, but believes in herself enough to perform a very large task. Another good dissertation would be a look at a wider variety of American authors to get a better sense of what it means to be American.

Conclusion

Throughout time, literature has been used as a vehicle for individuals and communities to commentate on social climate, on historical and political events, to espouse certain philosophies and to question others. In the classics such as *Frankenstein*, *Pride and Prejudice*, and *Catcher in the Rye*, Mary Shelly, Jane Austen and J.D. Salinger wanted to communicate a unique perspective on an idea and place a mirror to society to act as a reflection of a societal identity or a way of thinking. It could be said that if one wants to learn historical facts they should read a textbook but if they want to have an emic understanding of a time in history they should read a book of literature.

Similarly, a unique understanding of development of a cultural identity, in this case the American identity, greatly benefits from the literary world. Although many literary works have commentated on and described the American identity, there is no current research that explores the ways in which American children's literature reflects the American identity. Literature has the capacity to teach us so much about ourselves, who we were, who we are, and perhaps who we may become. However, these lessons may often be difficult to swallow and to acknowledge and thus they can go unknown. Children's stories and fables are often weaved into the very fabric or our society; their messages seemingly innocuous and innocent can be more powerful and influential.

This is why giving individuals these stories when they are children is so vital. It is much easier to create hope in fresh young minds than the minds of adults who are

locked into a cycle of hopelessness, or perhaps more commonly mired in false hope (such as believing watching TV will create that same type of happiness). Although it is always possible to go through life without any challenges, and not have access to any test of persevering through adversity, most people have some challenge at some point in their life. If children learn through stories that even when things look bad there may still be hope, they have a better chance of becoming those people who triumph over adversity, tell their stories to future generations, and endorse a happier mood.

Thus, it seems that research is necessary to examine children's literature from a framework that can teach us about ourselves and our development in a way that we can internalize, in a way that feels as familiar as our favorite bed-time story. Erik Erikson was credited with being one of the originators of ego psychology, but more importantly in this case for proposing that the environment in which a child lived was crucial to providing growth, adjustment, a source of self-awareness and identity. Utilizing this lens to examine children's literature is similar to utilizing literature to understand history because it can allow us to understand our childhood and our place in society. This helps us to understand how the lessons we learn early on shape who we become, the values we adopt and the identity we share.

In this dissertation, I proposed that utilizing Erik Erikson's theories as a framework through which to interpret the works of Theodore Geisel provides both a unique and distinct perspective on the developmental trajectory of the American identity, specifically the evolution of social consciousness. Juxtaposing Erik Erikson and children's literature, and in particular the works of Dr. Seuss I was able to examine the impact of the environment on the formation of the American identity, to explore the concepts of individualism, newness and innovation and our understanding of “others.”

By utilizing children's works of fiction that are so beloved to us, it is as if we are told about the very fabric of our identity by an old trusted friend.

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