

# Alices adventures in wonderland: hunger, dominance, and undesirability



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Hunger, Dominance, and Undesirability Lewis Carroll's fairy tale, Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, written in 1865, fuels the stereotype of how girls are required to be petite, feminine, and submissive to men through Alice's eating habits, the contrast between young Alice and older women characters, male control, and Alice's behaviour at the end of the story. This influences the minds of young audience members who read Carroll's work instills the idea that in order to be beautiful, a girl must control her desire to eat and never overpower the men they associate with.

In Carroll's Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, the author targets the importance of a woman's size and how food consumption influences femininity and desirability. During the story, Alice is exposed to various situations involving food and beverages. Carroll's first introduction on the emphasis on Alice's size, is when she is falling down the rabbit hole and she sees a jar labelled " Orange Marmalade". When she grabs the jar, she finds that there is nothing inside. This is an early indication that unless Alice is instructed to satisfy her hunger, she must not indulge her desires or her level of perfection will decrease.

Throughout the story, Alice is then exposed to bottles and foods that are labelled " Eat Me" or " Drink Me. " Without hesitation, she ingests the products with labels. Alice's petiteness, and thus her beauty, come directly from her eating and drinking habits. Only when she is allowed to eat, does her body undergo positive changes. These positive changes lead her to experience new adventures and improve her education, which is another noticeable attribute in the tale.

Anna Helle-Valle and Per-Elinor Binder argue that “ the body is central to self-experience” and to Alice, the size of her body determines what she is able to do and how she sees herself (Helle-Valle and Binder 4). The Caterpillar in Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland, offers insight into the ideal of size. The extreme changes in size damages one’s self identity. Alice shares her confusion with the Caterpillar during their first meeting: “ I’m not myself, you see-being so many different sizes in a day is very confusing” (81).

The Caterpillar forces her to say who she is, but because of her recent changes in size, she is not able to say who she believes herself to be. Size is critical to one’s understanding of the self, and Carroll’s Alice struggles with understanding that a small size is important. In a societal context, Alice represents what a girl should be: petite and feminine. However, she expresses her concern for her small size during a conversation with the Caterpillar. The Caterpillar is the male authoritarian figure in the section and is furious with her concern. He then informs Alice that three inches is, in fact, a “ good height to be” (84).

The Caterpillar forces Alice to be comfortable with herself, for being any larger causes her to be less desirable to her new found dominant male figure. The Caterpillar’s statement offers no argument, and Alice’s perfect and submissive attitude cause her to listen to the dominant with no complaint. In Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland is the idea that female sexuality consists of the importance of curiosity and politeness, and a submissive attitude: this is due to Carroll’s desires and the Victorian beliefs.

In the story, Alice's character is that of an ideal girl, and her curiosity often leads to find new and exciting ventures in Wonderland.

The reason that Alice is able to experience Wonderland is because of her curious nature that led her to tumble down the rabbit hole. Jennifer Geer contends that Alice's manners, as well as the want to impress the creatures in Wonderland, comes from the moral implication of Victorian literature (Geer 2). The literature in the 1800s centers on politeness and manners, which Alice offers to all of the creatures and people in Wonderland. One of the most positive attributes that female sexuality should possess is a submissive female attitude.

Through the fairy tale, mature female sexuality is portrayed as "frightening and destructive" (Garland 2). This is evident through the Queen of Hearts and her influence on the King of Heart's behaviour. The Queen in Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, is in direct opposition of Alice's character. Where Alice is the ideal, polite and petite, the Queen is aggressive and large in stature. The 'suit' of hearts, that the Queen has cloaked herself in, is in no coincidence the colour red, for this is often associated with a tumultuous and confident sexuality.

In Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, the colour red is given a negative connotation by the Queen's negative attitude. She often thunders the expression "off with their head", and Garland explains that this is the Queen's desire of male castration (Garland 8). The dislike for female domination is evident in the literature of the time, as well as the ideas of Sigmund Freud. The Queen's concern with castration would be comparable

to the worry of female authority in society. The Queen, once again, expresses undesirability by her heavy weight and yearning for tarts.

It affects her personality, and makes her become evil and arrogant, thus making her unwanted and a threat to male competence. Her desire for male subordination and ugly nature, is the author's way to sway female readers to keep their aggressiveness at bay. An aggressive female not only creates shame for manhood, but does not correspond with the ideologies of those living in Mid-Victorian times when Carroll wrote Alice's Adventures in Wonderland. The effect of a dominant female is shown in the King of Hearts.

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Hearts' husband is constantly being forced to carry out her will and listen to her often violent demands. The King of Hearts, because of his treatment by the Queen, is weak and submissive and thus, has nothing to offer. The ideal for male dominance is expressed by the male superiors that control Alice. When she is instructed to take food or beverages, it is either done by no director or a male authoritarian figure. The King would never offer instruction to a female and simply just follows demands made by the Queen. In Mid-Victorian times, the latter was not acceptable behaviour.

Geer claims that in the Victorian era, the adult world belongs to the male whereas a woman's world should be entirely dedicated to motherhood (Geer 14). In Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, Carroll chooses the Duchess to be the antagonist to this position. The Duchess is characterized as a mother who continually causes harm to her child due to her aggressive nature and desire to eat. She often brings food into situations where it is not applicable,

and in Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, it is directly linked to why she is a neglectful mother and horrible woman.

The ideas that women lose their desirability and femininity when they are not submissive to their male counterparts and when their lives are not dedicated to the raising of a family are shown through the aggressive nature of the Queen and the Duchess, and ultimately Alice's fall into barbaric womanhood. Throughout Carroll's story, Alice is everything that a mature woman should be. She is polite, kind, submissive, and has control over her desire to eat. She would take direction from the Mouse, the Caterpillar, the Queen and the Duchess without hesitation.

However, during the trial scene of the tale, her fate of womanhood is foreshadowed. During the trial, Alice begins to take notice of the food that was in the jury room. She immediately begins to feel herself becoming larger. When her name was called to take the stand during the trial, the King politely informs Alice that she will not be able to take her seat due to her enlarged size. However, she refuses to entertain the meek King's instruction. Alice continues to grow and becomes more arrogant and the Queen is forced to order her execution.

In the beginning of the fairy tale, Alice is a petite and beautiful girl, but the desire for food turned her into a rude and undesirable woman. Carroll's Alice's Adventures in Wonderland not only is influenced by the beliefs of the people living in the Mid-Victorian era, but also by the belief that eating causes inferiority. In the twenty-first century, the image of beauty is causing women of all ages to be concerned with becoming large and undesirable, and Carroll's story only encourages the overwhelming concern by idealizing <https://assignbuster.com/alices-adventures-in-wonderland-hunger-dominance-and-undesirability/>

petite Alice, creating a grotesque image of large women, and how male authoritarianism should control womanhood.

Alice's fall from grace as she grows larger reinstates that belief and influences readers that to be feminine, one must never become too large and forget the role that Carroll had wanted for women in society. Brewer 6  
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