



Behind the Screen: Cultural Meanings and Subliminal Messaging in Children's Animated Films

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ABSTRACT

Subliminal messaging in children's animated films has made continuing debate about its potential role in determining cultural meanings, socialization developments, and audience understandings. Current study explored existence and thematic patterns of subliminal content in six widely watched animated films: Super Mario Bros., Minions: The Rise of Gru, Despicable Me, Minions, Frozen II, and Mr. Peabody & Sherman. Guided by semiotic theory, qualitative content analysis conducted within constructivist and inductive framework. Visual signs, symbols, and coded imagery considered as cultural texts. Five major themes emerged such as Romantic and Intimate Depictions which included subtle depictions of affection and symbolic references to romance. Nudity and Suggestive Content which reflected implicit sexual undertones through partial nudity, adult-oriented visuals, and humor-based concealment. Commercial and Product Placement Messages which highlighted consumerist symbolism, product promotion, and alcohol-related references. Historical and Cultural Allusions which involved symbolic references to notable figures, coded signs, and culturally embedded meanings. Symbolic and Dark Imagery which encompassed occult symbolism, abstract sexual references and genital-related imagery. Findings suggest that children's animation can function as medium through which ideological, commercial, and cultural messages are subtly embedded. Furthermore, it underscoring the importance of media literacy, ethical content production and continued scholarly attention to subliminal influences.

Introduction

Animated films occupy a central place in the contemporary children's media cultures (Thompson, 2010). Their functioning not only as entertainment but also as influential symbolic environments that shape learning, emotions and imagination (Batool et al., 2021). Their multisensory design such as combining music, humor, visual environment and narrative cues produces affective experiences that children hardly interpret consciously (Ramadan, 2010). Within these mediated spaces, subliminal messages are theorized as subtle communicative elements which operates below perceptual thresholds and shapes the meaning through imagery and symbolic cues that dodge deliberate awareness (Klimov, 2003). The subliminal cues remain a recurrent concern in literature on media effects, consumer culture and emotional socialization while debates persist regarding their empirical impact (Borovac-Zekan & Zekan, 2022)

Children spend an average of three to four hours daily with screens which making media a key site of individual development and cultural learning (Anderson et al., 2020; Aral & Ceylan, 2011). Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory beside its techno-

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subsystem addition, conceptualizes the children's media environment as nested socio-technological contexts shaping development in ways often overlooked by caregivers (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Johnson, 2010). From this perspective, animated films function as cultural texts encoding wider ideological messages about gender, family, consumerism, morality, and global imaginaries.

Animated media offer numerous developmental benefits such as language acquisition, prosocial behavior, problem-solving, and emotional learning (Batoool et al., 2021; Diehl & Toelle, 2011; Habib & Soliman, 2015). Some researchers also highlights their potential to normalize violence, stereotypical portrayals and adult-oriented content (Potter & Warren, 1998; Smith & Kendal, 2018). Western-oriented narratives may transmit culturally specific values that conflict with local traditions. Exposure to sexual content, profanity or other objectionable material can subtly influence morality of children and their social development (Malik & Saini, 2025; Smith & Rogers, 1994). Among these concerns, subliminal messages are predominantly contested as these messages that manipulate unconscious responses. These are embedding symbolic or ideological cues that may influence behavior of children without obvious recognition (Thompson, 2010).

Contemporary researches suggest subliminal messages (stimuli presented below conscious detection) can influence cognition, mood, and preferences under certain conditions particularly among audiences with limited media literacy (Habib & Soliman, 2015; Hassin, 2013; Verwijmeren et al., 2011). Subliminal messaging has historically served political, commercial and ideological functions across media (Marchman, 2016; Vokey & Read, 1985). Early examples include wartime propaganda in Daffy Duck (Stern, 2015) and Vicary's 1957 cinema experiment which sparked public and academic debate despite questions of its efficacy (Rogers & Smith, 1993). These insights emphasize that subliminal content in media of children is not merely incidental. It constitutes a deliberate semiotic strategy embedded within the cultural production.

Theoretical frameworks illuminate underlying mechanisms through which subliminal messages operate. Priming theory conceptualizes these messages as triggers which activates associated cognitive schemas (Bargh et al., 1996). Implicit Association theory highlights their role in unconscious attitude formation (Greenwald et al., 2003). Dual-Process theory emphasizes peripheral as heuristic processing of indirect stimuli (Strahan et al., 2002). Freudian perspectives position subliminal messages as attractive contents to the latent desires (Greenwald et al., 1991). Cultivation theory situates repeated media exposure as mechanism for shaping attitudes, behaviors, norms and even worldviews over the time (Oliver & Raney, 2011). At level of representation, subliminal imagery can be embedded through masked visuals, rapid exposures, figure-ground reversals or background manipulations (De-Saussure, 2011; Klimov, 2003). Semiotic theory provide tools for decoding these symbolic layers of hidden meaning (Chandler, 2022; Peirce, 1974). From a cultural-media studies perspective, the subliminal messages are not merely psychological stimuli. These messages are ideological and semiotic constructs circulating the customs, commercial interests and ethical messages.

Critical analyses of the subliminal messages in existing children's animation remain limited despite of its widespread concern. Prior researches often polarizes between dismissing such messages as myths and framing them in conspiratorial positions (Batoool et al., 2021). Current study adopts a balanced and culturally grounded approach as it does not assume deterministic effects. It examines how subliminal messages are encoded in animated films as cultural artefacts, identifying thematic and symbolic configurations that appear.

This study extends existing literature beyond psychological or behavioral effects by examining subliminal messages in current animated films through a cultural-media lens. It positions these messages within semiotic, ideological, and commercial frameworks. Current research also foregrounds cultural work that performed by animated films in shaping symbolic world of children. Furthermore, it provides a methodologically robust approach for decoding hidden structures of meaning embedded in children related media.

Research Questions

The current study addresses the following questions:

1. How do children's animated films embed subliminal messages within their visual and narrative design?
2. What cultural meanings, ideological messages and thematic patterns emerge from semiotic analysis of these subliminal messages?

This study contributes to media studies by shifting attention from psychological effects of subliminal messaging to its cultural, symbolic and ideological dimensions. This research also illuminates how hidden imagery conveys norms, commercial interests, and moral values, thereby shaping symbolic environments of children. The study demonstrates that subliminal messages operate as sites of cultural work (embedding ideological, commercial and moral meanings) while it also providing semiotic framework for decoding such content. In doing so, it advances critical discussions on media literacy, cultural socialization and politics of depiction in globalized entertainment media of children. Given these theoretical and cultural considerations, a

methodology that emphasis the textual and visual interpretation is required. The following section outlines sampling strategy, analytic procedures and interpretive approach employed to examine cultural and ideological work of subliminal messages in six selected animated films.

Methodology

Research Design

Current research employed qualitative content analysis (QCA) within semiotic framework which enabling examination of how signs, symbols, images and textual elements convey meaning (Peirce, 1985). QCA provided systematic method for identifying recurring patterns, themes and sub-themes while semiotic analysis facilitated interpretation of visual and textual components, (Krippendorff, 2018). This study explored the presence and nature of subliminal messages in children's animated films guided by constructivist philosophy and inductive approach. The combined approach allowed themes to emerge organically from films without imposing pre-existing categories. The focus was not on hypothesis testing but on revealing the symbolic representation, exploring their potential cultural and ideological implications for children and also interpreted in relation to existing literature.

Movies Selection and Sampling

This study analyzed full-length animated films with international reach and popularity to examine the existence and nature subliminal messages. A purposive sampling strategy was used to capture animated movies, moving beyond Disney-centric focus to include films from studios such as *Universal Pictures*, *Illumination* and *DreamWorks Animation*. Selection criteria considered global audience targeting and box office performance with reference to Internet Movie Database (IMDb) and Rotten Tomatoes ratings (see Table 1). This approach ensured that analyzed films reflected current trends in children's media production and distribution.

Table 1

Detail of Selected Movies

Movie Title	Production Studio	Runtime (min)	IMDb Rating	Rotten Tomatoes (%)
The Super Mario Bros. (2023)	Universal Pictures	92	7.1/10	58
Minions: The Rise of Gru (2022)	Universal Pictures	88	6.5/10	70
Despicable Me 3 (2017)	Universal Pictures & Illumination	96	6.2/10	59
Frozen II (2019)	Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures	103	6.8/10	77
Minions (2015)	Universal Pictures	91	6.4/10	55
Mr. Peabody and Sherman (2014)	DreamWorks Animation	92	6.8/10	81

Analytic Procedure

Each selected film was viewed multiple times to ensure thorough familiarity with its visual and textual content. The analysis focused on subtle cues including imagery, symbols, dialogue and background details that might convey subliminal meanings. These cues were systematically documented, categorized by type (such as visual, textual, symbolic) and coded into themes and sub-themes to identify recurring patterns (Krippendorff, 2018; Mayring, 2014). Semiotic principles guided interpretation, emphasizing how signs/symbols construct meaning and how hidden messages were embedded within films' narrative and visual design (Booker, 2012).

The analytic process concluded with comprehensive synthesis of themes, highlighting their contextual significance and potential cultural implication. This approach ensures both methodological rigor and critical engagement with the ways subliminal messages operate as cultural texts and ultimately shaping the children's symbolic environment.

Ethical Considerations

The study relied exclusively on publicly available animated films and involved no human participants so posing minimal direct ethical risks. Nevertheless, ethical rigor was maintained by interpreting subliminal content objectively and reflexively by acknowledging the inherent subjectivity of the semiotic analysis. Care was taken to avoid overgeneralization and to discuss findings within academic and responsible framework particularly given the sensitive nature of themes such as sexualized imagery and occult symbolism in children's media (Rahayu et al., 2022).

Results

Findings

Analysis revealed 39 examples of subliminal messaging embedded within visual, textual and symbolic elements. Using QA within semiotic framework, these messages were systematically examined and organized into five overarching themes along with 15 subthemes. The themes reflect recurring symbolic patterns and communicative strategies while subthemes capture nuanced variations (see Table 2).

Table 2

Themes, Subthemes, and Frequency of Identified Subliminal Messages

Theme	Sub-Theme	Frequency
Romantic and Intimate Depictions	Inappropriate Kissing	4
	Romantic Symbolism	3
	Misplaced Affection	1
Nudity and Suggestive Content	Partial Nudity	3
	Adult-Oriented Visuals	3
	Humor Masking Sexual Suggestion	3
Commercial and Product Placement Messages	Product Placement	4
	Consumer Culture	3
	Alcohol-Related Subliminal	5
Historical and Cultural Allusions	Famous Figures & Icons	3
	Symbolic Numbers & Codes	2
	Complex Symbolism	1
Symbolic and Dark Imagery	Abstract Sexuality	1
	Occult Rituals	1
	Sexual/Genital Symbolism	2

Table 2 summarizes themes, subthemes, and frequencies of subliminal messages identified across six animated films. A total of 39 subliminal messages were categorized into five major themes where each theme or subtheme reflecting distinct symbolic patterns and communicative intentions. First theme, *Romantic and Intimate Depictions*, consisted of subtle portrayals of affection including inappropriate kissing ($n = 4$), romantic symbolism ($n = 3$) and misplaced affection ($n = 1$). Second theme, *Nudity and Suggestive Content*, highlighted implicit sexual undertones with partial nudity ($n = 3$), adult-oriented visuals ($n = 3$) and humor masking sexual suggestion ($n = 3$).

Third theme, *Commercial and Product Placement Messages*, emphasized the integration of marketing and consumer culture within narratives including product placements ($n = 4$), consumer culture ($n = 3$) and alcohol-related subliminal ($n = 5$). Fourth theme, *Historical and Cultural Allusions*, reflected use of famous figures and icons ($n = 3$), symbolic numbers & codes ($n = 2$) and complex symbolism ($n = 1$). Finally the fifth theme, *Symbolic and Dark Imagery*, encompassed more abstract and potentially disturbing elements including abstract sexuality ($n = 1$), depictions of occult rituals ($n = 1$) and sexual/genital symbolism ($n = 2$). Collectively, these findings reveal how subliminal content manifests through explicit visual messages and indirect symbolic encoding, and raising potential implications for children.

Distribution of Subliminal Messages across Films

Frequency of subliminal messages varied considerably across six films (see Table 3). *Minions: The Rise of Gru* contained highest number of subliminal messages ($n = 17$) followed by *Mr. Peabody and Sherman* ($n = 6$) and *Minions* ($n = 5$). *Despicable Me 3* and *Frozen II* each contained four subliminal messages while *Super Mario Bros.* had fewest ($n = 3$). Results suggested subliminal content is neither uniform nor incidental but rather strategically inserted and often clustering within franchises that blend humor, action, and promoting.

Table 3

Name of Movie and Frequency of Subliminal Messages

Name	Frequency
Minions: The Rise of Gru	17
Minions (2015)	5
Mr. Peabody and Sherman	6
Despicable Me 3	4
Frozen II	4

Themes and Subthemes

QA of six selected children's animated films revealed five major themes of subliminal messages where each theme encompassing three subthemes. These themes revealed how subliminal messages operate within animated films and delicately conveying romantic, sexual, commercial, cultural or symbolic content.

Theme 1: Romantic and Intimate Depictions

First major theme comprises romantic and intimate messages implanted across examined films ranging from brief visual gestures to more symbolic representations. Such portrayals often appear incidentally in rapid sequences and delicately inserting romantic suggestions without forming central plot focus. These depictions include unpredicted kisses, suggestive gestures and form of misplaced affection that may pass overlooked during casual viewing. Three subthemes were identified: *inappropriate kissing*, *romantic symbolism*, and *misplaced affection*.

Subtheme 1.1: Inappropriate Kissing

It involves fleeting or concealed moments that suggest romantic or sexualized contact often presented between characters in ways that deviate from expected social norms. Examples include male-to-male kissing, exaggerated or cannibalistic kissing gestures and human-to-nonhuman interaction (see Figures S1-S4). While delicate, these moments contribute to overarching pattern of intimate content subtly integrated within story environment.

Subtheme 1.2: Romantic Symbolism

It encompasses visual or textual cues that induce romantic feelings without obviously referencing the plot progresses such as suggestive text, symbolic imagery or contextual references to romance embedded within visual field (see Figures S5-S6). Such symbolism operates semantically and appealing associations with love or courtship while remaining peripheral to the primary storylines.

Subtheme 1.3: Misplaced Affection

It refers to intimate or romantic subliminal occurring in contexts that are ambiguous, awkward/seemingly distinct with storyline. These occurrences delicately suggest emotional/relational dynamics that may exceed or distort the intended story content. These are represented by fleeting gestures or unexpected character interaction (see Figure S7).

Theme 2: Nudity and Suggestive Content

The second theme encompasses subliminal cues that involve partial nudity, adult-oriented imagery or humor masking the sexual suggestion. These elements appear briefly often within fast-moving or comedic sequences and blending visual subtlety with narrative playfulness.

Subtheme 2.1: Partial Nudity

It refers to brief visual exposure of private body parts of animated characters such as Gru emerging from bath, minions' hips visible in precarious positions or clothing partially removed during action sequences (see Figures S8-S9). The fleeting nature of these depictions suggests deliberate subliminal placement within animation environment.

Subtheme 2.2: Adult-Oriented Visuals

It involve subliminal representations of imagery evocative adult-oriented content in neutral or fast-moving sequences such as minion observing adult (18+) content on partially obscured television screen or bird's neck resembling male genitalia during climbing scene (see Figures S10-S12). These scenes delicately introduce an adult-oriented imagery within children's media which have no direct relation with movie plot.

Subtheme 2.3: Humor Masking Sexual Suggestion

It refers to instances where sexualized content is inserted within comedic/playful context. Animated films obscure explicit nature of imagery and reducing conscious awareness by pairing adult-oriented subliminal with humorous action. For example, minion watching partially concealed nudity while eating popcorn or visual pun of the neck of bird (see Figures S11-S12).

Theme 3: Commercial and Product Placement Messages

Third theme highlights subliminal commercial content such as product placement, consumerist and alcohol-related subliminal. These subliminal messages typically appear briefly within speedy scenes or background scenes which may delicately reinforce brand awareness and consumer habit.

Subtheme 3.1: Product Placement

It involves brief and elusive appearances of branded goods or commercial messaging such as fleeting advertisements for *platform shoes*, street-side coffee sign *Mountain Beans Coffee*, or delivery vehicle exhibiting *Tastykake* (see Figures S13-S15). These examples demonstrate subliminal inserting of commercial content within storyline and visual space.

Subtheme 3.2: Alcohol-Related Subliminal

It include brief depictions of alcoholic beverages or brand orientations such as billboard displaying *Pine Storm*. This subliminal resembling the *Smirnoff Pine Storm Twist* which visible in background as a character rides across hills (see Figure S16).

Subtheme 3.3: Consumer Culture

It encompasses subliminal messages promoting consumption habits, brand awareness or materialist values without drawing overt attention. For Example, rapid signage, promotional displays and product branding embedded within background (see Figures S13-S15) which reinforce consumerist reasoning within children's animation.

Theme 4: Historical and Cultural Allusions

This fourth theme comprise subliminal messages of distinguished figures, events, and symbol/abstract codes with cultural or historical significance. Three subthemes were identified: *famous figures and icons*, *symbolic numbers and codes*, and *complex symbolism*.

Subtheme 4.1: Famous Figures & Icons

It includes subliminal related to culturally/historically significant personalities such as *Evel Knievel* name on bike route or name of *Robinson* on baseball player's shirt (see Figures S17-S18). These subliminal enrich visual storyline by embedding cultural and historical recognition within momentary images.

Subtheme 4.2: Symbolic Numbers & Codes

Symbolic numbers and codes appear as subliminal visual elements conveying hidden meanings or cultural positions. For example, angel number 2230 at Gru's house or Roman numerals MDCCCXL (1840) on a map (see Figures S19-S20). These subliminal invite interpretive engagement and enrich story depth.

Subtheme 4.3: Complex Symbolism

It encompasses multi-layered signs combining cultural, abstract or spiritual orientations such as Octagram on church wall (see Figure S21) which might conveys spiritual renewal and interconnectedness. These cues are subtle yet contribute to semiotic complexity of the films.

Theme 5: Symbolic and Dark Imagery

Fifth theme reveals subliminal messages conveying abstract, occult and sexualized content through visual/symbolic passages. Subthemes include *abstract sexuality*, *occult rituals* and *sexual/genital symbolism*.

Subtheme 5.1: Abstract Sexuality

Abstract sexuality refers to cues subtly evoking sexual connotations through the color, shape or composition. Examples include rainbow colored racetracks which resembling reproductive imagery (see Figure S22). Such cues create ambiguous and interpretively rich visuals embedded within otherwise neutral narrative sequences.

Subtheme 5.2: Occult Rituals

Occult rituals involve subliminal elements referencing mystical/esoteric practices. These cues embedded briefly in background or fast-moving scenes, add a darker symbolic layer to narrative (see Figure S23).

Subtheme 5.3: Sexual/Genital Symbolism

Sexual/genital symbolism includes visual cues that subtly reference reproductive anatomy or sexual content. Examples include partially exposed body parts, ritualistic imagery and abstract reproductive forms integrated into background (see Figures S12, S22-S23). These cues underscore covert integration of sexualized imagery within the children's animated films.

Discussion

This study examined subliminal messages embedded in the six contemporary children's animated films. It identifying five major thematic domains and fifteen subthemes through qualitative content and semantic analysis. The findings reveal how these films operate not merely as entertainment but as cultural texts, embedding visual, symbolic and narrative messages. These messages communicate delicate social, ethical and ideological cues to young viewers. This study underscores pervasive and complex ways in which animated media transmit cultural norms, consumer ideals and historical references by analyzing films beyond Disney Canon.

Romantic and Intimate Depictions

The first theme, *romantic and intimate portrayals*, explains how momentary visual and textual messages such as brief kiss, symbolic positions and inappropriate gestures convey normative ideas about relationships, intimacy, and gender role. These subliminal inclusions subtly reinforce romantic scripts and societal expectations which blending notions of affection with humor or narrative distraction. For example, depiction of XXX in window grills or romanticized text such as *Macho Bello: The Best of Romance* reflects convergence of traditional masculinity and idealized romance. It highlighting the cultural work of animated films in encoding gender norms (Kimmel, 2008). Such messages may influence children's perceptions of relationships and social behavior and raising questions about ethics of embedding adult-oriented relational ideals in the media for child audiences.

Nudity and Suggestive Content

The second theme highlights subtle sexualized imagery including partial nudity, adult-oriented visual, and the humor-masked sexual cues. These fleeting representations often embedded in fast-moving or peripheral scenes which operate as subliminal pedagogies. Furthermore, these depictions exposing children to concepts of adult sexuality without the explicit context. Scenes such as Gru's brief exposure or minions' accidental nudity exemplify blurring of the boundaries between age-appropriate content and adult-oriented visual cues. From cultural-media perspective, these instances exhibit how humor and speedy sequencing can serve as vehicles for hidden messaging, raising critical questions about the media literacy, developmental susceptibility and ethical content production (Brown et al., 2006; Smith & Kendal, 2018).

Commercial and Product Placement Messages

The third theme illustrates embedding of consumerist ideology within the animated narratives. Subliminal product placements, alcohol-related subliminal, and consumer culture places are subtly integrated into the visual and textual settings often within fleeting or background scenes. Examples such as the *Pine Storm* billboard or fleeting brand signage reflect how animated films operate as outlets for early brand familiarization, shaping children's attentiveness, preferences and consumption patterns. These findings align with broader media studies critiques which emphasizing how commercial essentials interconnect with children's traditional consumption (Patrick & Margaret, 2022) and further producing complex ethical dilemmas regarding targeting of vulnerable audiences.

Historical and Cultural Allusions

Fourth theme reveals subliminal references to the historical figures, symbolic numbers and complex codes related to culture. Subliminal messages such as *Jackie Robinson's* shirt or *Roman* numerals enrich visual and cognitive situation. These messages offering delicate pedagogical elements that link entertainment to historical/cultural literacy (Walter, 1998). Complex symbols such as Octagram introduce layered meanings that may nurture symbolic thinking or reinforce culturally specific narrative (Shabani et al., 2018). These findings demonstrate the capacity of animated films to function as cultural repositories and encoding knowledge/ideology in ways that require interpretive literacy to fully access. It also highlighting intersection among entertainment, pedagogy and symbolic familiarization.

Symbolic and Dark Imagery

Finally, the fifth theme includes abstract sexuality, occult symbolism and genital imagery which often appearing fleetingly or in peripheral scenes. These visual elements perform ambiguous cultural work which blending playfulness with hidden and potentially transgressive meanings. For example, racetracks with rainbow shades evoke joyful imagery and reproductive symbolism while occult rituals delicately encode mystical or ritualistic descriptions. These findings extend prior literature by emphasizing layered semiotics of animated films where playful aesthetics and darker symbolic indices coexist to influence perception, interpretation, and cultural understanding (Klimov, 2003).

In summary, current findings revealed children's animated films are complex cultural texts. These animations conveying multiple deposits of meaning that influence identity formation, normative understandings and consumer behavior. Subliminal messages operate as ideological instruments, embedding social, commercial or cultural scripts beneath the entertaining narratives. These results underscores the importance of critical media literacy, encouraging scholars/educators and parents to interrogate cultural work of children's media.

Limitations

This study has several limitations that warrant consideration. First, fleeting and subtle nature of subliminal messages (lasting < one second) may have led to some subliminal being overlooked particularly those embedded in extra fast-moving sequences. Second, analysis focused primarily on textual and visual signs which cannot fully capture the audience response or cognitive interpretation despite careful coding. Third, selected films predominantly reflect Western cultural production which limiting the generalizability of findings to global children's media. Finally, semiotic and qualitative content analysis is inherently subjectively interpretive so, different researchers might identify alternative meanings or importance. Future research could employ mixed-method approaches including audience reaction studies, cross-cultural comparisons, and experimental designs. It will support to deeply understand the subliminal messaging and its influence on cultural socialization of children.

Implications

Current findings have significant implications for multiple stakeholders. For parents and educators, awareness of subliminal messages can inform media literacy practices and guiding critical discussions about cultural and ideological meanings embedded in animated media. For filmmakers and content creators, underscores ethical responsibility of ensuring that animated content communicates age-appropriate values while considering broader cultural and symbolic narratives transferred. For scholars, findings provide a framework for investigating how media operates as ideological agent and how it influencing children's understanding of romance, consumerism, history and morality. Collectively, these insights encourage refinement of more responsible, ethically mindful and culturally reflexive animated media for children.

Conclusion

This research highlights pervasive inserting of subliminal messages in children's animated films and their potential to delicately shape cultural, social, and consumer perceptions. Five main thematic domains emerged: romantic/intimate depictions, nudity and suggestive content, commercial and consumerist subliminal, historical and cultural allusions, and symbolic/dark imagery demonstrating the layered ways in which animated media communicates meaning through qualitative content and semantic analysis. These findings underscore cultural and ideological work of children's media and emphasizing dire need for critical media literacy, ethical content formation, and scholarly attention towards subliminal messaging. Current research contributes towards broader understanding of media influence on childhood socialization and cultural learning by examining how symbolic and semiotic elements operate beneath surface of entertainment, It ultimately, offering a foundation for future studies on ethics, pedagogy and audience response in children's media.

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Supplementary Material

Figure S1

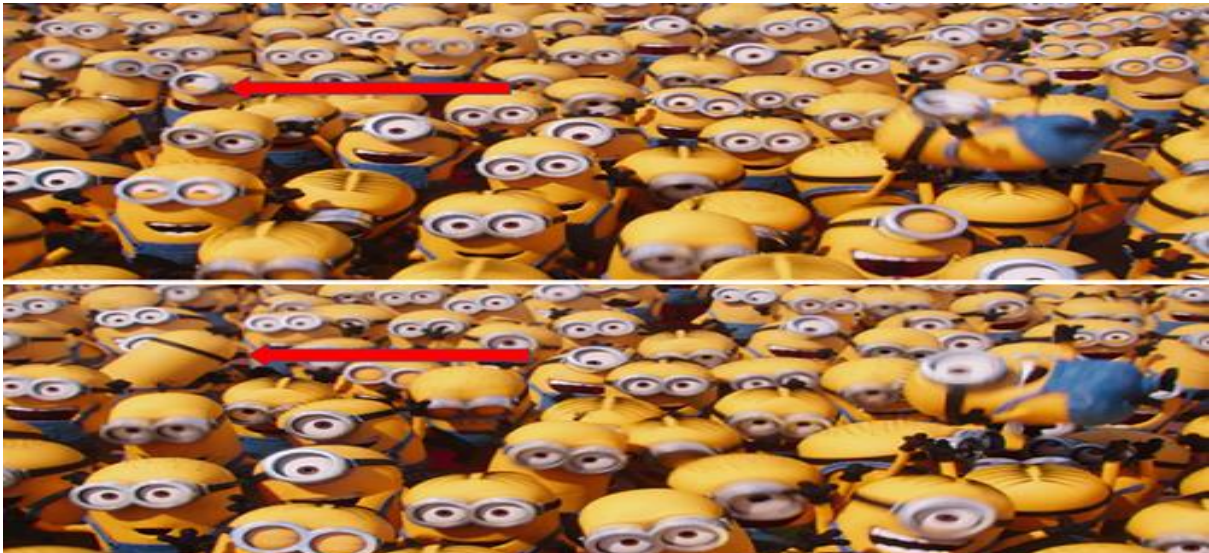
Subliminal Depiction of Inappropriate Kissing in Minions: The Rise of Gru



Note. In *Minions: The Rise of Gru*, a subliminal message lasting less than one second depicts a male and female character engaging in a romantic kiss on the left side of the cinema hall's front row (Figure S1).

Figure S2

Subliminal Depiction of Inappropriate Kissing in Minions (2015)



Note. In *Minions* (2015), during a celebratory scene with the Queen, a fleeting subliminal moment depicts two minions kissing. The image is presented briefly within a busy sequence of characters, making it less immediately noticeable (Figure S2).

Figure S3

Subliminal Depiction of Inappropriate Kissing in Frozen II (2019)

Note. In Frozen II (2019), a brief scene shows Anna kissing Olaf on the lips, leaving him



visibly surprised. The moment appears subtly embedded within the sequence and can be interpreted as a form of subliminal romantic suggestion (Figure S3).

Figure S4

Cannibalistic-Style Kiss in Mr. Peabody and Sherman (2014)



Note. In Mr. Peabody and Sherman (2014), a female character marries a bodybuilder dressed as a soldier. During the sequence, she spins him around, lifts him on her hand, and kisses him in a manner that appears cannibalistic (Figure S4).

Figure S5

Romantic Symbolism in Minions: The Rise of Gru (2022)



Note. In *Minions: The Rise of Gru* (2022), a subliminal image appears several times for less than one second, showing a man with an open shirt holding a girl on both arms with the caption “Macho Bello: The Best of Romance.”

Figure S6

Romantic Symbolism in Frozen II (2019)



Note. In Frozen II (2019), a scene shows Queen Iduna tucking Elsa and Anna into bed while singing a lullaby. As she carries Elsa toward the window, the grill design briefly forms the letters “XXX,” serving as subtle symbolism (Figure S6).

Figure S7

Misplaced Affection in Frozen II (2019)



Note. In Frozen II (2019), a scene shows Olaf holding a ring and gazing at Anna meaningfully, suggesting a proposal. At the same moment, Anna bends down awkwardly to pick something from the floor, creating an impression of misplaced affection (see Figure S7).

Figure S8

Partial Nudity in Minions: The Rise of Gru (2022)



Note. In *Minions: The Rise of Gru* (2022), two brief scenes reveal characters' hips. In one, Gru steps out of a bath with a towel, exposing part of his hip. In another, a minion clings to a metro train while another hangs below, momentarily exposing the hip area (see Figure S8).

Figure S9

Partial Nudity in Minions (2015)





Note. In *Minions* (2015), two brief scenes reveal partial nudity. In one, a minion is shown heading toward a bathtub unclothed, and in another, a minion hangs onto another's underwear, momentarily exposing the hip area (see Figure S9).

Figure S10

Partial Nudity in Despicable Me 3 (2017)



Note. In *Despicable Me 3* (2017), two brief scenes show partial nudity. In the first, the villain Balthazar Bratt uses a guitar to generate musical waves that rip Gru's clothes as he clings to a handle. In the second, Gru uses the same weapon on Balthazar Bratt, causing

the villain's clothes to be partially stripped. Both moments are fleeting and visually subtle (see Figure S10).

Figure S11

Adult-Oriented Visuals in Minions: The Rise of Gru (2022)



Note. In *Minions: The Rise of Gru* (2022), a brief scene in Gru's secret basement shows a minion seated on a platform ladder, watching a TV displaying nudity and sexual content. The minion's genital area is partially obscured by a popcorn bowl, and the moment is fleeting, suggesting a subliminal placement within the scene (see Figure S11).

Figure S12

Adult-Oriented Visual in Minions (2015)



Note. In *Minions* (2015), a brief scene shows the minions climbing a boundary wall, during which the neck of a bird appears in a shape resembling a male reproductive organ. The moment is fleeting and visually subtle, suggesting a potential subliminal depiction (see Figure S12).

Figure S13

Product Placement Subliminal Message in Minions: The Rise of Gru (2022)



Note. In *Minions: The Rise of Gru* (2022), a brief subliminal message appears for less than one second, displaying the words “Bicentennial 1976 Platform Shoes; Big Sale,” promoting a product in a fleeting manner (see Figure S13).

Figure S14

Product Placement Subliminal Message in Minions: The Rise of Gru (2022).



Note. In *Minions: The Rise of Gru* (2022), a brief subliminal message appears on a road sign reading “Mountain Beans Coffee” as the minions follow Gru into San Francisco. The sign is visible for only a fleeting moment (see Figure S14).

Figure S15

Product Placement Subliminal Message in Mr. Peabody and Sherman (2014)



Note. In *Mr. Peabody and Sherman* (2014), a brief subliminal message appears on a delivery vehicle displaying the brand name “Tastykake” as the taxi driver reacts to a pedestrian crossing the road. The moment is fleeting, embedded subtly within the scene (see Figure S15).

Figure S16

Alcohol-Related Subliminal Message in Minions: The Rise of Gru (2022).



Note. In *Minions: The Rise of Gru* (2022), a brief subliminal message appears on a billboard displaying “Pine Storm” as Stuart rides his tricycle across the hills. The visual closely resembles the “Smirnoff Pine Storm Twist” brand, suggesting a subtle alcohol-related subliminal placement during the fast-paced scene (see Figure S16).

Figure S17

Famous Figures & Icons Subliminal Message in Minions: The Rise of Gru (2022).



Note. In *Minions: The Rise of Gru* (2022), a brief subliminal message appears during a fast-paced scene as Stuart rides his tricycle. The name “Evel Knievel” flashes momentarily on the bike route while Stuart performs a long jump between hills, appearing and disappearing within an instant (see Figure S17).

Figure S18

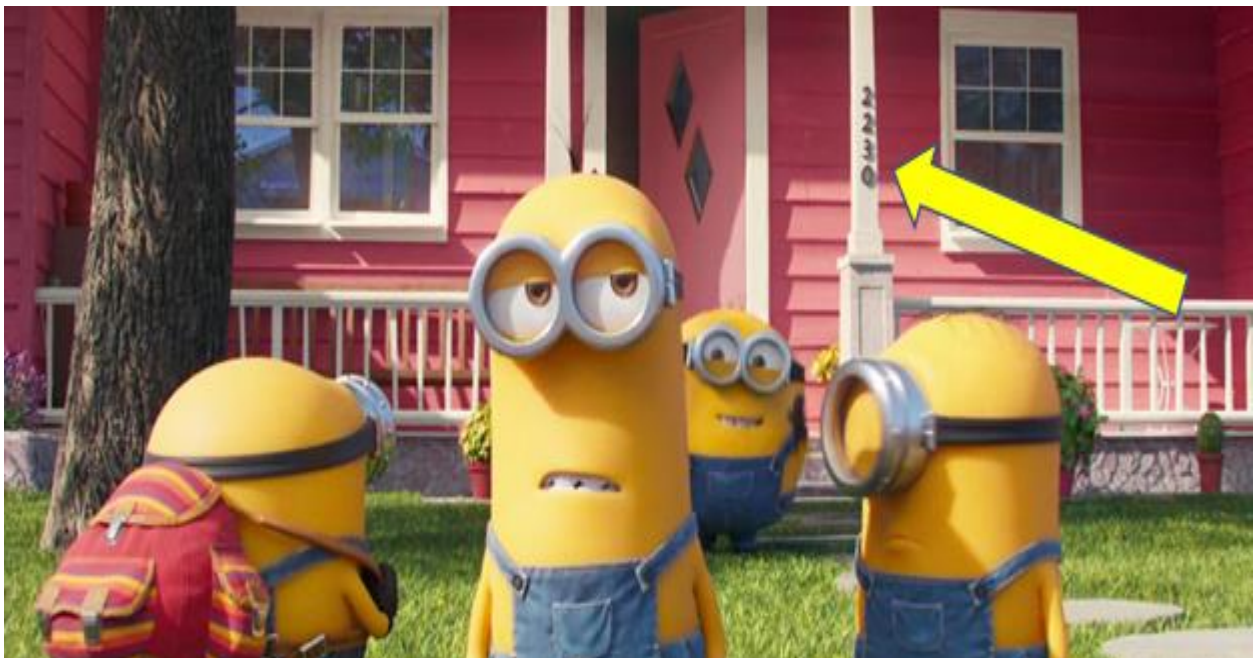
Famous Figures & Icons Subliminal Message in Mr. Peabody and Sherman (2014).



Note. In Mr. Peabody and Sherman (2014), a brief subliminal message appears during a baseball game, displaying the name “Robinson” on the back of a player’s shirt. The moment is fleeting and embedded within the scene as the ball leaves the stadium and reaches Sherman, providing a subtle historical allusion (see Figure S18).

Figure S19

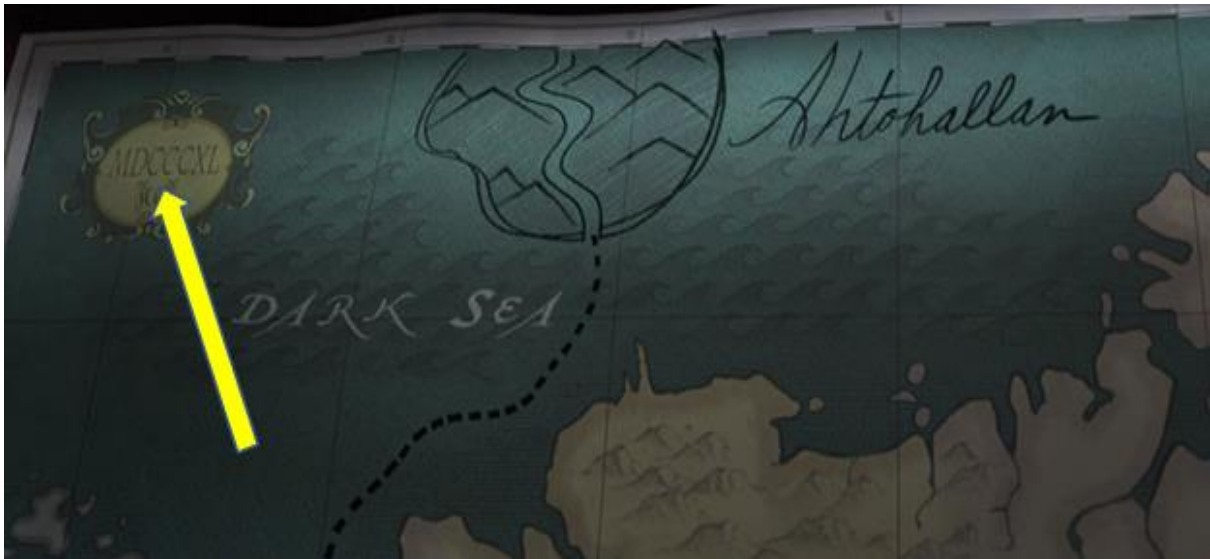
Symbolic Numbers & Codes in Minions: The Rise of Gru (2022)



Note. In Minions: The Rise of Gru (2022), the number “2230” briefly appears on the front pillar of Gru’s house, serving as a subliminal message (see Figure S19). The number is fleeting and may carry symbolic meaning open to interpretation.

Figure S20

Symbolic Numbers & Codes in Frozen II (2019).



Note. In *Frozen II* (2019), a subtle subliminal message appears on a map discovered by Elsa and Anna, featuring the number “MDCCCXL” discreetly etched in one corner. The number is fleeting and not explicitly noticed by the characters, adding a layer of symbolic meaning open to interpretation (see Figure S20).

Figure S21

Complex Symbolic Subliminal Message in Mr. Peabody and Sherman (2014).



Note. In *Mr. Peabody and Sherman* (2014), a subliminal message appears during a time-travel sequence set near a church. The characters encounter a detailed Octagram with inner and outer circles, containing a four-leaf flower on the church exterior (see Figure S21). This intricate symbol is briefly visible as the characters fly past, blending the visual of their airborne journey with spiritual imagery.

Figure S22

Abstract Sexual Subliminal Message in Super Mario Brothers (2023) and Minions: The Rise of Gru (2022)



Note. In *Super Mario Brothers* (2023) and *Minions: The Rise of Gru* (2022), rainbow-colored racetracks appear briefly as subliminal messages. In *Super Mario Brothers*, the track, featuring Mario, Peach Princesses, and King Bowser's party, visually resembles the female reproductive system, creating an ambiguous symbolic layer. The use of rainbow hues emphasizes the imagery while the structural resemblance conveys covert sexual symbolism, allowing multiple interpretations within the scene.

Figure S23

Occult Ritual Subliminal Message in Mr. Peabody and Sherman (2014)



Note. In *Mr. Peabody and Sherman* (2014), a fleeting subliminal message appears during a scene where the Vizier reveals a prophecy to Princess Penny. A brief image shows a masked figure performing a ritual on a prone woman, with symbolic representations of male and female genitalia appearing momentarily in the corner of the image (see Figure S23).