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Waiting for Prince Charming: Gender Expectations in the European Fairy Tale

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Waiting for Prince Charming:

Gender Expectations in the European Fairy Tale

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“If you want your children to be intelligent, read them fairy tales. If you want them to be more intelligent, read them more fairy tales.”

–Albert Einstein

Once Upon A Time: Fairy Tale Foundations

Fairy tales have existed ever since imagination and wonderment first blossomed in the human mind. They are present in societies worldwide, though sometimes disguised under the titles of folk-tales, myths, fables, and legends. Fairy tales are stories of the supernatural, with heroes and heroines who rise to the occasion, defeating any evil that crosses their paths. These stories are traditionally read to children but they speak to everyone, no matter what age. Fairy tales “are narratives that have been shaped over centuries of retelling and that have achieved a basic narrative form that is a distillation of human experience. Their popularity is a confirmation not only of their aesthetic appeal, but also of their ability to speak to the human heart” (Jones 5). European fairy tales were given the form that they exist in today by three men, the fathers and founders of modern fairy tales, a powerful triumvirate composed of Charles Perrault, the Grimm brothers, and Hans Christian Andersen.

Fairy Tale Origins

Fairy tales are folk tales with fantastical or mythical elements. They usually contain enchantments or some other supernatural component, and include any sort of story that has been passed down through time, from one generation to the next, with little change. Often thought to be an example of “fiction in its childhood” (Yearsley 16), fairy tales list “the use of fantasy” as their primary characteristic (Jones xiv). These tales are essentially implausible in a corporal world. They deal with imaginary heroes and heroines. Usually the characters are portrayed as good or evil with no middle ground; there is no moral ambivalence. Fairy tales are “engaging fictions [that] reflect [sic] our ability to laugh at ourselves as well as... express our deepest dreams and fears” (Jones 9); they express our essential humanity.

The term “fairy tale” first came into popular use with the stories of folk writer, Madame d’Aulnoy. Her stories were translated from French into English in 1699 and given the title Tales of the Fairys (Opie 18). Despite the title, “a fairy tale is seldom a tale about fairy-folk, and does not necessarily even feature a fairy” (Opie 18). In fact, at the time, especially in Britain, fairy-folk were half believed to be real. The prevalent attitude towards fairies was “one of awe and supernatural acceptance of [greater] powers” (Jones 10) and no one wished to chance offending them by labeling fantasy stories as fairy stories. Fairy magic was “not to be taken lightly, but rather to be regarded with respect and even some trepidation” (Jones 10). Over the next century, belief in the fairy myth declined and use of the term “fairy tale” became an acceptable part of the vernacular. It first made an appearance in the Oxford English Dictionary in 1749 (Opie 17). By this time Charles Perrault’s tales had made their way to England and the launch of the fairy tale’s popularity had begun.

A key element of any fairy tale is that it shows a “predominance of imagination over reason” (Yearsley 17). Logic can only ruin a good fairy tale. Accepting without question is necessary to truly enjoy a good story. This suspension of disbelief is one reason why it is easier for children to accept fairy tales on their own merits. Fairy tales require their reader to “accept [the] magical elements in the narratives at face value, as truly and legitimately occurring in the stories” (Jones 10). They call for their readers to acknowledge “magical or marvelous events or phenomena as a valid part of the human experience” (Jones 9). The logical adult knows that animals cannot talk and that fairies cannot grant wishes, but the wishful child has not yet seen enough of the real world to doubt the existence of magic.

The historical scholar, Macleod Yearsley, indicates that differences exist between the true fairy tale and the invented fairy tale. A true fairy tale is a “genuine folk-tale which can be traced back through the ages and has its variants in many countries” (Yearsley 3). These are the types of tales that the Grimm Brothers and Charles Perrault collected. Literary fairy tales use the same layout as the true fairy tale. Hans Christian Andersen is a master of this form, using the old fairy tale template, with its elements of fantasy, for his own literary purposes. True fairy tales were “invented to account for natural phenomenon, to soothe children, [or] to fire the imagination” (Yearsley 19). The ideas, customs, and beliefs in these fairy tales—fairy god-mothers, love at first sight, the code of chivalry—can be traced back centuries to early human civilization, “the remote past of savagery” (Yearsley 16).

One of the key characteristics of the modern fairy tale is that it has evolved beyond its original form. Andrew Lang, one of the first scholars of folklore, suggested the following manner of classifying a fairy tale’s descent or evolution: a fairy tale begins as an original tale, probably of savage origin which would then move to become a popular tale among peasants, which then goes on to become either the ancient heroic myth, such as those told by Homer, or the modern literary stories by Perrault (Yearsley 22).

Any given fairy tale is composed of multiple historical and mythical components. Each layer is added to the story as it is told from one age to the next through the “ongoing and evolving process of oral transmission” (Jones xi). The first layer comes from the very beginnings of civilization, composed of concepts like magic and immortality. These ideas “may be traced back to a time when they were by no means inconsistent with existing thought and life” (Yearsley 18). Since these ideas were considered to be commonplace, they often showed up in

stories. A modern audience would be expected to understand what is referenced if a car appears in a story; this parallels how primitive audiences would have understood and expected stories containing witches and magical marvels.

Another layer results from the poverty of the lower class. Many of these tales originated among and were very popular with those who lived simple lives. These aspects of the fairy tale are composed of “jeweled caves, golden palaces, gardens with fruit unknown to the botanist, and the accustomed wealth of barbaric pearl and gold” (Yearsley 18). Such aspects awed “the ignorant classes among whom the stories were told, and who were easily impressed by pomp and splendor, which at the same time they magnified and non-naturalized” (Yearsley 18). The stereotypical Cinderella story in which a young girl is lifted from a life of squalor to become a beautiful princess exemplifies this point. The reason so many of these stories were told of princesses, princes, fairies, witches, and other larger than life figures is that they were the most impressive beings that the story tellers could think of.

The practice of adding additional layers to old stories almost ceased when stories began to be written down. It is much harder to change a tale that has been set down in ink, not merely in someone’s memory. When written down the tales became more vivid and retellings could not improve on them. When this occurred, the tales “ceased to be stories whose survival depended on cottage memories” (Opie 25) and they transformed into literature. Since these tales began to be recorded, their evolution has slowed drastically. Now stories rarely evolve in and of themselves, but rather through other texts, such as parodies.

The desire to travel beyond oneself, to experience a different life for a time, even if only for the length of a story, is universal. Fairy tales favor imagination and fantasy over logic and

reason. Everyone has dreams; everyone has said “If only...” at some point in their lives. Fairy tales are the expression of those dreams; stories which have been told over and over, becoming entrenched in the public consciousness. Some of the best known stories were told by the popular European authors Perrault, the brothers Grimm, and Andersen.

Charles Perrault

Charles Perrault, a French writer in the late 1600s, is one of the fathers of the modern day fairy tale. He was the origin of the Mother Goose Tales, first publishing a collection of tales in 1697 titled Histoires ou Contes du temps passé: Avec des Moralitez which translates to Histories or Tales of Times Past: With Morals. The English version of the book was published in 1729 and was advertised as “being ‘very entertaining and instructive for children’” (Opie 30). This volume contained eight tales, including *Cinderella* and *Sleeping Beauty*. Perrault said that he wrote down the tales exactly as he had heard them, first as a young child, then later as an adult. Although he was of the upper class, he used language that was simplistic for the time and was of middle and lower class origins. He was known for ending each tale with a rhymed moral (Opie 26).

Perrault was a very modest man who tried to downplay his achievements, even attempting to credit his son with authorship of the tales. Despite this, he is widely acknowledged as the first father of the fairy tale. Perrault was the first to accept fairy tales at their own level, with merit, recounting them “without impatience, without mockery, and without feeling they required any aggrandizement” (Opie 26). Perrault’s one fault, in terms of scholarship, is that he did not note where he heard each tale, otherwise he might have become the father of the study of folklore as well.

One of Perrault's most treasured stories is *Sleeping Beauty*, or as it is known in French, *La Belle au bois dormant*. A beautiful rendition of an old tale, Perrault's story is rich with details, creating an exquisite physical world. The one place which lacks significant detail is the character of the Prince. All we know of him is that he is "the son of the King" (Opie 111). The Prince later gains three more adjectives once he has rescued the Princess. He is assigned the stereotypical "young," "amorous," and "valiant" (Opie 112). Perrault makes his Prince Charming accessible to his readers by not describing him at all and leaving the rest of his features to the readers' imagination, thus allowing them to envision a character embodying their own preconceived notions of the Prince Charming character.

In contrast, Perrault's depiction of the noble Prince coming upon the sleeping Princess is composed of layer upon layer of detail:

At last he came into a chamber all gilt with gold, where he saw upon a bed, the curtains of which were all open, the finest sight that was ever seen, a Princess that appear'd [sic] to be about fifteen or sixteen years of age, and whose resplendent beauty had somewhat in it luminous and divine. (Opie 112)

Perrault uses very flowery language here to describe the Princess and her surroundings. Unlike the Prince, the Princess, with her innate beauty, is given more and more descriptors the longer she is awake. This leads the reader to wonder if her "resplendent beauty" (Opie 112) really was so obvious, why Perrault felt the need to add to her description with the following: "She was drest [sic] like my great grandmother, and had a point band peeping over a high collar; she looked not a bit the less beautiful and charming for all that" (Opie 114). He also makes sure to point out to readers that "her cheeks were carnation, and her lips like coral" (Opie 110) as well

as her “neck as white as snow or alabaster” (Opie 116). Instead of allowing his readers to use their imaginations to conceive of the Princess as he did with his Prince Charming, Perrault uses these details to narrowly define the Princess. The reader is not supposed to be making an effort to envision the Princess but instead should be focusing on visualizing the Prince. Although the Princess is the character with the most descriptors, by forcing the reader to focus on Prince Charming, Perrault is clearly identifying who the most important character is. This technique of using a lack of descriptors to focus the readers’ attention to a particular character is known as covert detail divergence.

Perrault’s work is also imbued with an essential humanness. His characters have emotions and come alive on the page. His description of the meeting between the Prince and Princess is breathtakingly beautiful as well as enchantingly romantic:

The Prince... knew not how to shew [sic] his joy and gratitude; he assured her that he lov’d [sic] her better than he did himself. Their discourse was not well connected, they wept more than they spoke, little eloquence, a great deal of love... In short, they talked four hours together, and yet they did not say half the things they had to say. (Opie 114)

Although Perrault was known for using lower class language, he utilizes upper class morals and modes of behavior. The Prince is too well bred to even kiss the Princess to awaken her. He will not even kiss her hand, only briefly helping her to rise (Opie 114). The physicality of the story changes very quickly after that as the Prince and Princess are swiftly married and it is noted, “They slept very little” (Opie 114). Even this small comment is explained with “the Princess had no occasion [to sleep]” (Opie 114).

Perrault has sanitized the story to make it more suitable for younger readers. Previous versions of the story had the Prince raping the Princess and her awakening during the birth of the resulting child (Opie 103). Perrault makes sure to marry his Prince and Princess before anything sexual occurs. He even makes sure to mention that the Prince “was of another family from that of the sleeping princess” (Opie 111). There is no incest in Perrault’s story making everything suitably proper. The Prince does not even kiss the Princess to awaken her as his mere presence is enough. Perrault does include the second half of the story, which details the events after Sleeping Beauty awakens. His version of “happily ever after” includes giving the Princess a flesh-eating Ogress for a mother-in-law who attempts to eat her and her children (Opie 115).

Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm

The true fathers of folklore were the Grimm brothers who published a collection of stories in 1823 (Opie 32). This volume, titled German Popular Stories, allowed fairy tales “to become, almost overnight, a respectable study for antiquarians, an inspiration for poets, and a permissible source of wonder for the young” (Opie 32). The Brothers Grimm, as they are fondly known, collected fairy tales from the common folk, stories that up to that point had been transmitted orally from generation to generation.

This setting down of folklore, making it permanent in writing, was revolutionary. As Peter and Iona Opie said in praise of the Grimms, “Their collection... stands as the pre-eminent commendation of the traditional tale; the work that was to inspire the serious collecting of folk and fairy tales..., the work that laid the foundations of a new discipline, the scientific study of folklore and folk literature” (32-33). All modern scholars are deeply indebted to them. The

Grimm Brothers were “the first substantial collectors to like folktales for their own sake; the first to write the tales down in the way ordinary people told them, and not attempt to improve them; and they were the first to realize that everything about the tales was of interest, even including the identity of the person who told the tale” (Opie 32).

Perhaps one of the best known tales first collected and popularized by the Grimms is *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*, originally titled *Snow-Drop*. This story was told to the Grimm Brothers by sisters Jeannette and Amalie Hassenpflug (Opie 227). The story was well known in Germany at that time, though originally it was much crueler than the story set down by the Grimms. It had the queen demanding Snow-Drop’s heart for her consumption, a detail which the Grimms felt unnecessary to include in their collection.

Snow-Drop brings to life many of the stereotypes regarding women. Snow-Drop’s stepmother is portrayed as a vain and cruel woman. Her vanity is the defining aspect of her character. She is described as “very beautiful, but so proud that she could not bear to think that anyone could surpass her” (Opie 230). To ensure that the readers understand this important detail, the Grimms repeat it, saying “She could not bear to think that any one lived who was more beautiful than she was” (Opie 232). The word “envy” is also repeated several times in reference to the queen.

Poetry plays an important role in the plot of the story. The famous magic mirror responds to all queries with simple verse. When the mirror is asked, “Tell me, glass, tell me true!/ Of all the ladies in the land,/ Who is fairest? tell me who?” it responds with “Thou, queen, art fairest in the land,” or more fatally “Thou, queen, may’st fair and beauteous be,/ But Snow-drop is lovelier far than thee!” (Opie 230-231). That the poetry is being recited to and

about women portrays the art itself as feminine. This is added to when poetry is used to describe Snow-Drop's beauty: "her skin was white as snow, her cheeks as rosy as the blood, and her hair black as ebony" (Opie 230).

Similar to Perrault's treatment of the Prince in *Sleeping Beauty*, the Grimms are equally reserved when describing Snow-Drop's prince. He is given no name and no description save that of his royal birth. The readers are told, "At last a prince came... and he saw Snow-drop" (Opie 236). Within seconds of glimpsing Snow-Drop, the unnamed prince is convinced he has fallen in love, an instance of the love at first sight phenomenon popularized by these fairy tales. Once again a parallel to Perrault's prince is easily seen; Snow-Drop's prince wakes her without the use of a kiss. Instead all he does is move her coffin and she is brought back to life. He quickly tells her, "'I love you better than all the world: come with me to my father's palace, and you shall be my wife'" (Opie 236). The reader is left to wonder what it is about this unnamed prince that inspires such instant trust and acquiescence from Snow-Drop. By purposefully withholding a description of the prince, through covert detail divergence, the Grimms have directed the readers' imagination and thought to the prince rather than Snow-Drop.

Hans Christian Andersen

Hans Christian Andersen differed from the Grimms and Perrault in one key aspect: "He was a creator not a collector" (Opie 34). From a lower class family rich with oral traditions, Andersen wrote in a style that reflected that legacy: "even when he used traditional themes for his tales he made the stories his own, putting into them his own life and personality" (Opie 34). Andersen said that he wrote his stories "the way he would tell them to children" (Opie 34).

Andersen's first collection was published in 1835; a small booklet, it contained only four stories and was wildly popular. His collections reached England in 1846 (Opie 34), and "with the arrival of Andersen's tales in the English language came an unfreezing of men's minds, an appreciation of fantasy literature and its limitless possibilities.... Imagination which had formerly brought terror to mankind, had become a source of delight" (Opie 34). Many authors owe the success of their fantasy stories to Andersen, who first made the genre acceptable in society.

One of Andersen's highly regarded tales, and one of the first he ever wrote, is called *The Tinder Box*. Based on an old Scandinavian folktale that Andersen loved as a child (Opie 270), its entrancing beauty and appeal is all Andersen. It tells the tale of a soldier who suddenly finds himself in possession of riches and a magic tinder box. This tinder box can be used to summon and control three enormous dogs, and the soldier uses the box to meet a sleeping princess and later save himself from being hanged. Andersen was poor when writing the following scene from *The Tinder Box* and the audience can easily imagine his longing:

What heaps of gold he saw! He could have bought all Copenhagen, all the sugar-plums, all the games of soldiers, all the whips and rocking-horses in Europe, with the money! At the first sight of such rich treasure, the soldier... stuffed his pockets, knapsack, cap, and boots, so full of gold pieces, that he could but just move with the weight. Now he had money in abundance. (Opie 275)

There is an excitement in Andersen's writing, and a truthfulness that comes across very easily. This truth is shown in the interesting list Andersen has compiled. When thinking of all that money can purchase, he lists property, candy (or food), gambling debts, and children's toys.

Except for the last item, these are the stereotypical desires of men. A man is supposed to have property, money, and power. In this section Andersen is perhaps revealing what he wants most. The only stereotypical desire not listed in this section is a woman. The woman of the story, the sleeping princess, enters the soldier's life after he has fulfilled his other needs. The princess is a secondary consideration.

Such consideration is given weight by the next actions of the soldier, seeking out a beautiful princess. The princess "was so indescribably beautiful that anybody who saw her would know directly she was a Princess. The soldier could not help it; happen what might, he must give the Princess a kiss, and so he did" (Opie 277). Once again readers are presented with a princess in possession of innate beauty. Andersen differs from both Perrault and the Grimms in this characterization; he lets the princess's beauty stand for itself. He feels no need to further describe her. Unlike the Grimms and Perrault, Andersen focuses more on describing the character of the soldier than the princess. He inverts the technique of detail divergence used by his predecessors and instead of making the lack of description about the princess an object of the readers' curiosity; he uses it to dismiss her entirely. This reversal is termed overt detail divergence. Once again the princess character is not deemed worthy of attention from the reader.

The fantastical element to this story, and what makes it a fairy tale and not simply a tale, is the tinder box. This magical implement changes an ordinary story of a man discovering treasure into something from the "intriguing, enchanting, and ever disingenuous realm of fairy tales" (Jones xiv). The tinder box is magical because it can summon supernatural beings who aid

the soldier in whatever he wishes. The soldier's discovery of the magical properties of the tinder box happens as follows:

Suddenly he remembered that, in the tinder-box which he fetched up from the bottom of the hollow oak, there were a few matches. He therefore took it, and began to strike a light; but as soon as the sparks flew about, the door of his room was thrown open, and the dog with eyes as large as tea-cups walked in, and said, 'What do you please to command?'... Now he perfectly understood how to employ the tinder-box: if he struck with the flint and steel once, then the dog with the copper money appeared; if twice, the one with the silver coin; and if three times, then the dog that guarded the chest of gold. (Opie 276-277)

Andersen's soldier has discovered something more intoxicating than treasure: supernatural power. Through the use of these supernatural dogs he gains access to the forbidden princess. These dogs later save his life at the end of the tale when the soldier uses them to avoid being hanged for having the audacity to kiss the princess. His "three frightful dogs fell on the judge and councilors, seized one by the leg, another by the nose, and tossed them up in the air, so that in tumbling down they were dashed to pieces" (Opie 280). The dogs do the same thing to the King and Queen until "the soldiers grew frightened; and the people called out, 'Good soldier, you shall be our King, and you shall have the beautiful Princess for a wife!'" (Opie 282). That so-called "good soldier" has received everything he could have ever dreamed of possessing. He has obtained that which is most important to him: power.

Conclusion

Fairy tales are the natural result of humankind's imagination and curiosity. The human passion for the unknown and the need to explain the mysterious and peculiar has given rise to this form of communication. Fairy tales are "the attempts of primitive men and savage races to clothe their impressions of the universe, their ideas and beliefs, their customs and manner of living, in romantic garb, and in the form of a story...They owe their birth in great part to that universal human desire to listen to a story" (Yearsley 16). That desire to listen to a story has led to the creation of the fairy tales so prevalent in Europe. These founding fathers of European fairy tales are storytellers of the highest order. Their stories have lasted for generations and have been used to reinforce gender stereotypes and behaviors. However, this stereotyping complicates communication between modern men and women due to their varying levels of exposure to these portrayals of gender roles. The fairy tale ending remains unrealized.

“Someday you will be old enough to start reading fairy tales again.”

–C.S. Lewis

The Prince Charming Effect: An Exploration of Gender Roles and Stereotypes in Fairy Tales

Methods and Data

From October to December 2011, I recruited undergraduate students from Pacific University. Both the design and implementation of this study were reviewed and approved by my university's Institutional Review Board. Respondents were recruited according to a "snowball approach" (Biernacki and Waldorf 1981; Marshall 1996), denoting that the sample grew as respondents referred me to others who would potentially be interested in participating in my study.

Respondent Profile

The sample for this study consisted of twelve respondents, including seven men and five women. All participants were undergraduate students at Pacific University at the time of their interview. Participants represented a wide range of academic disciplines including Math, History, Business, Exercise Science, Creative Writing, and Literature. Their ages ranged from twenty to twenty-three years and the mean age was twenty-one years.

Interviews were conducted in person and lasted between twenty and thirty minutes. Interviews were tape recorded and then transcribed. Both recording and transcription included no identifying information except for participant number. Interviews were initially structured around a schedule but in many cases were allowed to take on an informal, conversational tone. To keep data outcomes consistent, the initial interview schedule was the same for each participant.

I analyzed the interview data following many of the principles of grounded theory (Glaser 1978; Glaser and Strauss 1967; Strauss and Corbin 1990). I first categorized the raw interviews according to an “open coding” procedure (Glaser 1978:55), which helped to harness a preliminary set of themes in the data. I followed the open coding stage by “selective coding” (Glaser 1978:61) in which I scrutinized the larger themes to identify small and more defined trends.

Results

Masculinity

My study revealed that the concept of masculinity has rather mixed connotations in our modern day society. This one term embodies physical strength, chivalry, and independence. From the responses given by my participants it was obvious which aspect of masculinity was most important to them: physical strength. Some of the descriptors mentioned were “muscles” (3), “broad shoulders” (5), and “hairy chest” (1). A common phrase used was “tall, dark, and handsome” (6). These stereotypical thoughts on physicality were mentioned before any personality traits.

Both the men and women in my study agreed on the physical traits related to masculinity though they differed somewhat on what aspects of the masculine personality were most important. The men mentioned features such as “responsibility” (10), “bravery” (2), and “leadership” (10). These attributes contributed to the overall feeling that masculinity, for most men, was seen in the interaction with or protection of others. As one man stated:

I've always thought masculinity was a lot dependent on making a living for yourself and providing for your family. And being a good husband. Being able to provide for those who are depending on you without having to rely on others. (1)

This fit with the idea of "just being able to step forward and get something done" (10). Being responsible for others was an important part of masculinity for the men in my study though it came secondary to ideals of physicality.

Although the women in the study also thought physicality was important, and physical characteristics were among the first traits to be mentioned, the women focused on masculinity being more about a "presence" (12). This presence involved "being handy around the house" (6), "very driven" (7), and "aware of themselves" (12). One participant described this masculine presence as "a sense of comfort. You know, [if] you kind of need a big hug, you [can] just like collapse into him" (6). Though this idea of a "presence" (12) is similar to the men's conception of masculinity involving protecting and providing for others, it differs in that the men felt masculinity was about interacting with others and the women focused more on masculinity as an individualized self-concept.

While the men talked about masculine traits and characteristics, what made a man 'masculine,' the majority were thinking about their fathers. For most, this was because their fathers were their first introduction to masculinity; their fathers served as role models in how a man should behave. One participant said their father was "where I got all the aspects of what a man should be and how he should act" (2). There was cohesion between how the men described their fathers and the characteristics they had identified as masculine. In identifying his father as masculine, one man said:

My Dad, because he's never been the kind of person to go out of his way to ask for help from other people; always been able to work as much as necessary and do whatever it takes to make sure my sister and I could succeed, and get everything that we either wanted or needed to be successful later in life. And like I said before, that's probably, that's the big of [what] masculinity [means] to me. (1)

The women in my study did not look to their fathers as male role models. While the men used their same gender parent as a template for gender characteristics; the women did not follow this same pattern, mainly talking about actors as portraying masculine characteristics.

Femininity

In today's society femininity has both positive and negative connotations. Young girls are taught by parents and elders that they should emulate feminine behavior while their peers disdain femininity as a weakness. The male respondents all gave several stereotypical views of femininity. Some of their responses included: "clothes" (3), "long hair" (5), "cooking" (1), "fragility" (10), and "timid" (8). While these responses are typical of modern stereotypes, it was the lack of independence attributed to femininity that stood out. A male participant explained that:

Feminine means like the opposite of masculine. [Masculine means] you can fend for yourself, you can do it all for other people. And feminine, you have to have someone do it for you. You need help with stuff. (11)

This dependence on others led to the most common trait associated with femininity, "motherly" (10).

The ties between femininity and motherhood were quickly established within my interviews. One respondent described femininity in the following manner: “Femininity to me is a lot like the inherent bond between a mother and a child, the nurturing, loving, unconditional love. That’s a lot of what femininity, what that word makes come to my mind” (1). Both men and women seemed to agree on this description. The difference being that the women depicted motherhood as a positive characteristic.

Most of the participants, both men and women, felt that their mother was most responsible for their early introduction to fairy tales. They stated this as if it was obvious fact and most did not elaborate. One woman explained her answer by stating, “She’s a woman [the mother] so she would always I guess, she’d rather watch the *Little Mermaid* over, something a little boy might like to watch” (6).

Women focused on feminine meaning “willing to help” (4), “caring, kind, [and] more loving” (7). These characteristics that the women mentioned were not focused on the weak dependent woman that the men described; the women felt that these attributes did not display dependence on others for survival but rather a choice to go out of their way to connect with others on an emotional level. An example of the positivity with which the women viewed motherhood and femininity is shown by the following description by one of the female participants: “I just think of like a mom. She has like her feminine side that’s warm and comfort[ing] but at the same time discipline and can be hard when she needs to be, can be tough if need be” (6).

When the women were describing feminine characteristics and traits many of them focused on the idea of a mother. Despite this focus of mothers being feminine, none of the

women talked about their own mothers as embodying femininity. They instead mentioned actresses and friends. One of the examples given was the actress Rachel Bilson from the popular TV show, “The OC.” One woman explained this choice by saying, “She’s very feminine. She’s always in girly colors. Just very, she acts like a girl. She doesn’t try to be out in front or be obnoxious or anything. Just very polite and cordial” (7). These traits conflict with the previous descriptions of femininity that the women had described. The examples of feminine women were very stereotypical, “the perfect little housewife” (9), and clashed sharply with the feminine traits that the women had discussed before.

Stereotypes

This listing of stereotypes from the women continued when they discussed who embodied masculinity. They all chose characters from popular Disney movies to represent masculinity. The overwhelming majority picked the character Gaston from *Beauty and the Beast*. No lengthy explanations were given as the women felt that the character needed no additional descriptors. In the movie the descriptions of Gaston focus on his muscular physique which does fit with the masculine traits mentioned by the women earlier; however, Gaston is also described as a fighter, hunter, and schemer. None of these traits are positive. Gaston does have a presence, which had been brought up by the women as an essential trait of masculinity, but it is a very domineering and arrogant presence as opposed to the aura of comfort specified by the women. The women seemed to describe both masculine and feminine in one way but then chose something completely opposite when applying these characteristics to actual people or characters.

Selecting characters from Disney movies to describe masculine and feminine traits was common with both the women and the men. The classic Disney fairy tale movies—*Cinderella*, *Sleeping Beauty*, *Snow White*— were responsible for most of the participants' early exposure to fairy tales. The participants all had a "very Disney run childhood" (5) and felt that their "generation was built on Disney" (5) movies and storybooks. As many of these movies portray both their female and male characters in a rather stereotypical fashion, these stereotypes were passed to the children who watched them. One participant described a Disney Princess as being feminine because "she sings to the animals, does stuff in the home, and is the perfect soul mate for Prince Charming" (7). These movies not only influenced the participant's views on gender roles but also their conceptions of what it means to fall in love.

When asked to consider possible stereotypes that men might have about falling in love there was a clear split between the women and men whom I interviewed. The men found coming up with these sorts of stereotypes to be a difficult exercise. The phrase "I don't know" (1) was repeated multiple times along with sentiments like "I hadn't thought about stereotypes before" (8) and "I guess I don't know exactly what you're looking for" (3). After some thought the men were able to provide responses such as "You just sort of expect that it's going to happen at some point, rather than something we're always driving for" (8) and "He [the man] becomes happy to be around her. He wants to spend as much time with her as possible" (3).

The one major stereotype that the men were able to come up with was that love is considered by many to be a "weakness" (2). This was explained in the following manner:

Guys aren't supposed to have emotions where love requires a lot of emotion. You have to care deeply about someone, expressing that. Being in love with someone would require expressing your feelings which isn't generally a popular sentiment with guys. (2)

This argument was furthered when another participant stated in agreement that guys are "a lot more about kind of the physical aspects of falling in love more than actually explaining his emotions and kind of you know, explaining himself and disclosing how he's really feeling" (10). This came close to describing the sentiments that the women in the study expressed.

The women found it easy to come up with stereotypes about male thoughts on falling in love. In all of their answers there was one major agreement: that for men feelings were not the important aspect of love. As one woman said, "I think of what he will do for her rather than feelings that he has" (4). It was evident that the women believed that falling in love lacked importance for the stereotypical male. Some of their responses included: "It's something to do way in the future. It's not as much of an importance to them; it's just kind of a thing they know will happen" (7) and "It doesn't happen [until] later. Umm, I guess some guys wouldn't think it exists" (12).

According to the women, love was not about feelings for men; it was about sex. Every woman in the study mentioned sex as being an important part of falling in love for the stereotypical male. "Sex. Endless amounts of it" (6), was one woman's snap response and another quickly agreed with, "They just want to do it [sex]. They don't want to fall in love" (9). The overall sentiment was summed up by saying: "They're definitely more in it for the physical relationship than for the love part" (12). Sex, as an aspect of falling in love, was not mentioned

by any of the men in my study but the women all seemed to agree on this specific stereotype of the male conception of love.

The male participants struggled with defining female stereotypes of love, saying they had not really given any thought to these stereotypes before. While after some consideration they could discuss male stereotypes, they were very uncomfortable when the discussion turned to stereotypical femininity. One source of this discomfort was that they were being interviewed by a woman. Perhaps if I had been a male researcher they would have been more at ease when discussing feminine stereotypes. They all felt the need to qualify their answers with statements like: "I don't want to say the stereotypes because that will make me sound like a jackass" (1) and "I feel like I constantly need to say again that this is only justified because they're only stereotypes" (10). They felt that coming up with stereotypes was "tougher, being a male" (3).

Fairy Tale Definitions

I found that the men in my study viewed fairy tales as moralistic stories. They perceived them to be "a story of fiction that usually tells some sort of moral,... has some sort of moral aspect to it" (3). The male participants thought of fairy tales as a means of indoctrinating children with moral values. Some of the definitions given were:

A fairy tale is a story that has a purpose of teaching a lesson whether it's [a] moral one or some other life lesson that needs to be passed down. It has a definite point to it, for some specific and important message. (2)

I also think of a fairy tale as usually possessing underlying messages or themes that are more aimed towards adolescents and a younger audience. Kind of a tool in the culture that it arises from to teach morals. (10)

This tendency to view fairy tales as lecturing stories explains why the men were not enamored with the stories. When thinking of fairy tales they did not have any emotional response or connection. The men felt that “they’re not anything really profound” (1) and “never really just clicked with them” (8). They felt no connection to fairy tales. The men also explained that they never sought out fairy tales on their own: “I never necessarily read them voluntarily” (3). After being exposed to them in childhood the men never pursued any further sort of connection.

The women’s view of fairy tales was sharply contrasted with that of the men. The women thought of fairy tales as magical love stories. One participant defined a fairy tale in the following manner: “When a man and a woman... meet some cute unique way that makes you go aww, and then they fall in love and then they beat the odds and then they live happily ever after!” (6). The love aspect of the fairy tale was deemed most important.

The women also had strong emotional responses regarding fairy tales. Nostalgia was a large part of those feelings. One woman described her feelings toward fairy tales as:

Definitely nostalgia... if I sit down to watch a fairy tale, I’m looking for a very specific emotional response from it. It’s like an ‘aww’ or ‘see it can be happily ever after.’ I’m not looking for any kind of gripping [plot], I can just sit there and mindlessly follow the story that elicits these very specific emotions in me, about love and like happiness... like finding a soul mate and getting through all these troubles and still love conquers all. (4)

Hope was another feeling that fairy tales elicited in women. Fairy tales brought up the possibility of the impossible, which the women viewed in a positive manner. One woman said, "It's nice kind of to escape from reality. And kind of have the hope that maybe it would happen... like it'll happen one day even though, you know like a pumpkin isn't really going to change into a carriage for me. It's still kind of nice to have that fantasy" (12). This hope allowed the women to strongly identify with the female characters in the fairy tales. Identifying with the female heroines allowed the women to live in that fairy tale world; "I think every girl wants to live a fairy tale in one way or another" (6). One woman explained her feeling of hope by saying, "I always picture myself as a princess and hope that someone like Prince Charming comes along. It's like it happened for them so it'll happen for me" (7). The women all had a strong emotional attachment to fairy tales which came from their viewing fairy tales as happy love stories rather than moralistic tales.

This strong attachment was due to the exposure to fairy tales that women received early on in childhood. Fairy tales were the books that they learned to read from and the stories that were read to them at bedtime. They were also exposed to fairy tales through toys and games, mostly Disney merchandise. One female respondent said, "I had like Disney bed sheets with all the Princesses on them; you know, dolls, play sets. You name it I probably had it" (6). Toys were used to keep young girls connected to fairy tales. One woman remembered "having a lot of *Beauty and the Beast*, *Sleeping Beauty* Barbie dolls and I always played with them" (7). Playing dress up was another manner in which the women were exposed to the fairy tale princess growing up. One woman said, "I would like go to the stores and get the outfits and dress up and thought I was a princess" (9). These childhood games increased the women's

feeling of nostalgia when thinking of fairy tales because the stories were such a large part of their childhoods.

The men did not have as much exposure to fairy tales in their youth as the women did. They did not have games and toys related to fairy tales. They did watch the movies but were not as interested in them as the women. Those women with younger brothers confirmed this boyhood lack of interest in fairy tales. One woman said that her younger brother “watched all the movies with me but he wasn’t read the same books. He was more read like Thomas the Tank Engine or Arthur books” (7). She went on to describe how even though her brother was around when she was watching fairy tale movies he did not enjoy them and much preferred watching other movies. Another woman said the same thing about her brother: “He wasn’t as interested... We would be watching them [fairy tale movies] together but he would kind of be playing with toys at the same time” (9). Although the women with male siblings were aware of how much exposure their brothers had to fairy tales, the men with sisters were mostly unsure about their siblings’ level of fairy tale exposure. The men guessed that they probably had the same level of exposure as their female siblings but they could not answer definitively. The reason for this could be that the men chose not to pay attention to their sisters interacting with fairy tales because they were not interested themselves.

Prince Charming

The stereotype of Prince Charming riding in on a white horse to save the day has become a staple of society’s romantics. This stereotypical perfect male is composed of qualities taken from books, movies, and fairy tales. Who and what Prince Charming represents is

different for each individual person though the greatest divide in opinion lies between men and women.

The men in my study spoke of Prince Charming in a slightly derisive manner. They viewed him as a stereotypical “good guy” from the movies and it was obvious that emulating Prince Charming was not something to aspire to. The men described him in very blunt physical terms including “muscular” (5), “studly” (1), and “tall” (11). Interacting with women was also viewed as a characteristic of Prince Charming. He’s a “knight in shining armor” (1) and “always has the trick to save the day” (11). This propensity to defend and protect others fit well with the way that the men talked about masculinity. As with the term masculine, describing Prince Charming was done first in terms of physicality and then personality traits.

There was not thought to be much more to Prince Charming other than the physical. He was not described as an intellectual or congenial person. One man described him as “witty and charming, obviously, [a] really smooth talker with women and... quick with his mind” (1). This “fast talking” (5), “smooth” (8) character was someone to be resented. The men felt that Prince Charming is “that guy that at least most women probably want” (10). This ideal of perfection was something that the men resented being held up to. One male participant felt that women “get the idea of being... rescued, by their perfect guy that they’ve always been dreaming about. That they’re going to find this guy one day instead of looking around at who and what they actually know and accepting that nothing can be perfect” (2).

The women in my study had a lot of fun describing Prince Charming. They chose not to dwell on the stereotypical representation of Prince Charming as much as the men had. The women described Prince Charming in more modern terms, how they personally viewed him.

Just as when describing masculinity, the women focused on the physical aspect of Prince Charming before anything else. The phrase “tall, dark, and handsome” (6) was mentioned several times. Other physical descriptions included “ripped” (4), “sun-kissed” (6), “blond, blue eyed” (7), and “very athletically adapt” (12). Another way in which the women’s descriptions of Prince Charming and masculinity meshed was in terms of his “presence” (12). When describing masculinity women focused on this idea of a comforting male presence; this presence was described as essential to the Prince Charming character. Some of the phrases used to describe Prince Charming included: “know[s] when to kind of comfort you” (12), “someone who is a best friend” (7), and “will give you everything” (9). Prince Charming, for the women, was a man who inspires the following sentiment: “All the girls when he walks by go ‘Aww’” (6).

Textual Responses

I presented the men and women in my study with three different fairy tale quotes. These quotes were from *Sleeping Beauty* by Charles Perrault, *Snow-Drop* by the Grimm brothers, and *The Tinder Box* by Hans Christian Andersen. Each of these quotes described the first meeting between the Princess figure and her Prince Charming. I asked the men and women to respond to these quotes, in particular, how they felt these quotes represented the characters and their relationship. My participants had already engaged in a discussion of masculine and feminine characteristics and had described their own definitions of the Prince Charming stereotype. This background information influenced the way they responded to the individual quotes.

Sleeping Beauty

The first quote from Perrault's *Sleeping Beauty* described the Prince's discovery of the sleeping Princess and her awakening. The description was as follows:

At last [the Prince] came into a chamber all gilt with gold, where he saw upon a bed, the curtains of which were all open, the finest sight that was ever seen, a Princess that appear'd [sic] to be about fifteen or sixteen years of age, and whose resplendent beauty had somewhat in it luminous and divine. He approached with trembling and admiration, and fell down before her upon his knees.

And now, as the enchantment was at an end, the Princess awaked, and looking on him with eyes more tender than the first view might seem to admit of; is it you my Prince, said she to him, you have waited a great while.

The Prince charm'd [sic] with these words, and much more with the manner they were spoken in, knew not how to shew [sic] his joy and gratitude; he assured her that he lov'd [sic] her better than he did himself. Their discourse was not well connected, they wept more than they spoke, little eloquence, a great deal of love. He was more at a loss than she, and we need not wonder at it; she had time to think on what to say to him... In short, they talked four hours together, and yet they did not say half the things they had to say. (Opie 112-114)

Throughout the story Perrault consistently gives more detail to the Princess and declines to give the Prince many descriptors. Through this use of covert detail divergence he encourages his readers to turn their attention towards the Prince. In this particular quote the Prince is given

most of the action and the Princess is merely a recipient of his attentions. Both the women and the men commented on this disparity between the two characters.

Although the men had not been enthusiastic or effusive about the Prince Charming character, they seemed to respect Perrault's Prince. They focused on how shocked he seemed to feel at discovering the Princess. They said that he seemed "obviously amazed at this younger princess and her beauty" (1) and he "was just really caught off guard" (8). One man mentioned that the Prince seemed to be "just falling out of his regular personality" (8) which was supposed to be "charming" (3). The men were impressed that although the Prince "fell in love very quickly" (2), his love seemed to be real and his emotions were about "more than just that she was beautiful" (2). Another man mentioned that it "seems like he's actually pretty humbled and honored to be there. Instead of feeling like he owned or deserved to be there he... wasn't sure what to say but he loved her and was glad to be in her presence" (11). The men all agreed that there was a real attraction on the part of the Prince and that his response to the Princess was not false in any way. One man said, "That aspect of caring about her more than he cares about himself would tell me that he fell in love quickly and that it actually meant something" (2).

While the men had talked about the upstanding character of the Prince and the sincerity of his love, the women focused more on the emotional aspect of the first meeting between the Prince and Princess. The Prince was perceived to be "very in touch with his feelings, which is surprising. That he will weep and talk so much with her for four hours, and yeah he seems very in touch with his emotions" (4). One woman said that she felt like "the fact that he was more emotional was just off... Not at all what a fairy tale I feel like would be" (12). This discomfort with the emotionality of the Prince came through in the women's lack of admiration for the

Prince's character. The men had felt that the Prince was sincere in his adoration and had pure motives for his attraction to the Princess. The women felt otherwise. The women mentioned that the Prince seemed "kind of forward" (9) and that he was "going off of looks and not personality" (6). One woman felt that the Prince seemed to be "a little bit obsessed with the Princess" (6). This highly emotional Prince, quick to give out his devotions, was not what the women felt the Prince Charming character should be.

This detachment from the characters was also present in the women's responses to Perrault's Princess. In this quote the Princess's physical appearance was described yet the women focused more on her lack of action to represent her character. They strongly felt the discrepancy between the Prince's actions in the quote and the Princess's. This lack of action or presence caused one woman to remark that the Princess "seemed less there" (4). None of the women identified with the Princess. They had previously mentioned that they usually strongly identified with the fairy tale Princess character yet they were unable to summon the emotion necessary to connect with Perrault's Princess.

The men also responded to the absence of presence that the Princess's character emitted. They were more reserved in their impressions of her. The men had strongly praised the Prince for his emotions yet were disinclined to focus on the receptivity of the Princess. The Princess was described as "more contemplative of what's happening" (10) and that "she seemed to love him as well" (11). Overall the men felt that "there wasn't really much that made her stand out as a character" (2).

Both the men and women agreed that the Prince and his actions were the main focal center of the quote. In this first meeting between the Prince and Princess, the Prince was

responsible for most of the emotion and all of the action. By focusing on him, the men and women all came to a consensus that this quote was indeed romantic. The men found the sharing of emotions to be the most romantic aspect of the quote. Several mentioned the line where the Prince “assured her that he lov’d [sic] her better than he did himself” (Opie 114). This “intimate sharing, talking for hours” (8) was a romantic ideal. The part of the quote saying that “they talked four hours together, yet they did not say half the things they had to say” (Opie 114) was thought by the men to be romantic. One man called it:

The [most] romantic part of this entire thing. Nothing to do with their beauty, nothing to do with how wonderful the room is or that they finally found each other, but that in the end, after all this they still have enough interest in each other to talk and that they’re never going to be able to fully express how they’re feeling. (2)

Another man agreed by saying that this particular line would be romantic “because he was so caught up in her beauty and how much he had looked forward to this moment he couldn’t say how he felt and that seems romantic to me a lot” (1).

The women also felt that this sharing of feelings was romantic. One woman said that “they talked for so long and yet had more to say... that sounds like happily ever after” (4). The emotionality of the Prince that had been previously disdained by the women was also mentioned as being romantic. One woman said, “I like the whole last part... I like when a guy is able to let himself show emotion, and if that’s through crying then I think that can be really romantic... that to me shows intimacy” (12).

This intimacy between the characters was not enough to create an affinity between the readers and the text. Although the men and women were able to view the interaction between

Perrault's Prince and Princess, they felt that the Princess's lack of participation in the exchange hindered their identifying with the characters. The Prince received respect for his actions and emotions even though those were not the traits that the men and women had identified as integral for the Prince Charming character. The expectations of masculinity and femininity that the men and women brought with them to this quote were not sustained by the characters' interaction.

Snow-Drop

The second quote was from the Grimms *Snow-Drop* and again described a Prince coming upon a sleeping Princess and falling instantly in love with her. The quote occurred as follows:

At last a prince came and called at the dwarfs' house; and he saw Snow-drop, and read what was written in golden letters. Then he offered the dwarfs money, and earnestly prayed them to let him take her away; but they said, 'We will not part with her for all the gold in the world.' At last however they had pity on him, and gave him the coffin: but the moment he lifted it up to carry it home with him, the piece of apple fell from between her lips, and Snow-drop awoke, and said, 'Where am I?' And the prince answered, 'Thou art safe with me.' Then he told her all that had happened, and said, 'I love you better than all the world: come with me to my father's palace, and you shall be my wife.' And Snow-drop consented, and went home with the prince; and everything was prepared with great pomp and splendor for their wedding. (Opie 236)

The Grimm brothers followed a similar model to Perrault in their treatment of the Prince. The Prince is not described at all and the character is given no background except for that of his

royal birth. Once again this lack of description, covert detail divergence, is meant to grab the readers' attention. In this the Grimms definitely succeeded; the men and women in my study were at once both intrigued and repulsed by the Prince. They focused on his actions more than his emotions. The Princess's lack of control was also noted. The men and women did not personally connect to these characters, just as with Perrault's Prince and Princess. They instead were extremely disgusted by the character of the Prince and found his behavior to be unworthy of the fairy tale Prince Charming.

The men were repulsed by the Prince in *Snow-Drop*. He was described as "creepy" (2) and "cowardly" (1). They felt that the Prince was "more focused on gold and money" (3) than he was on romance and that it "seemed like he just wanted to buy himself a wife" (11). There was a lack of logic to his actions that the men found disconcerting. One man said that "I don't really follow his reasoning here" (8). Another stated that he was "confused why he wanted her in the first place. What was he going to do with her dead body?" (5). This raised the question of necrophilia. Several men mentioned this and one elaborated on this conundrum by saying:

He wants to buy an assumed dead body... because I'm assuming he thinks she's beautiful... that's just odd. Really, I mean if you think about it, he's going to some people asking them if he can take this coffin with this dead woman in it. He's offering to pay for it and the only reason he's doing that is because she's pretty? That's just odd. There's not a lot of romance there. (2)

The lack of logic behind the Prince's actions and the discomfort of the situation prevented the men from focusing on the emotion, little that there was, in the quote.

The women also zeroed in on the strangeness of the Prince's behavior. None of them mentioned any emotion in connection to the Prince. The women felt that the Prince came across as "kind of creepy" (12). This was not Prince Charming as they had envisioned him. Despite the lack of description the women felt that the character of the Prince was "very powerful" (9) and demanding. It was thought that "he wouldn't take no for an answer" (7) and that "he would do anything to get her" (9). The Prince's forceful nature overpowered the character of the Princess.

The men's perceptions of the Princess were rather dismissive. One man said that "she doesn't really do anything" (5). The Princess was described as "naïve" (1) and "submissive" (11). Several of the men focused on the use of the word "consented" (Opie 236). This stood out to them because "other than that we don't really get much of an idea of who she is or what she's thinking" (10). The men noted that the Princess "didn't question" (3) and "just accepted" (3) what was happening to her. The docile nature of the Princess caused the men to dismiss her character as unimportant.

The Princess's inaction also drew the women's attention. Though there was not much said about the personality of the Princess in the actual quote, the women were able to infer personality traits. These traits were mostly negative in nature. In describing her, the women used terms such as "powerless" (7), "trusting" (12), and "naïve" (12). The women had very strong feelings about this Princess and expressed them in harsh terms, calling the Princess "an idiot" (4) and "a dummy" (6). As one woman said, "She didn't really say much but, I'd be asking a lot more questions if I was her" (12). The complacency of the Princess was viewed by the

women as almost offensive. Although they had mainly negative feelings about this Princess, the women were able to establish her as a character much easier than they had Perrault's Princess.

This quote was not considered to be romantic by either the men or the women. The seemingly strange and illogical actions of the Prince prevented this first meeting between the Prince and the Princess from being viewed with anything other than disgust. While the emotions of Perrault's Prince had been lauded by the men and women, the physical concerns of the Grimms' Prince were disdained. As one man said, "All of the comparisons are to money... [he] just assumed he could marry her" (3). This forceful seizing of the Princess by the Prince was also displayed in Andersen's *Tinder Box*.

The Tinder Box

This third quote from *The Tinder Box* by Andersen describes the first meeting between a soldier, who will later become a Prince, and a sleeping Princess. Their meeting went as follows:

'Well,' thought the soldier one day to himself, "'tis very strange that no one may see the beautiful Princess! They say she is a great beauty; but what good will that do her, if she is always to stay shut up in the brazen castle with the numerous towers! I wonder if it really be impossible to see her!...

'It is midnight, it is true,' said he; 'but I should like so much to see the Princess only for a moment!'

In a moment the dog was out of the room, and before the soldier thought it possible, he saw him return with the Princess, [she] ...was so indescribably beautiful that anybody who saw her would know directly she was a Princess. The soldier could not help it; happen what might, he must give the Princess a kiss, and so he did. (Opie 277)

In contrast to the stories by Perrault and the Grimms, in this instance the Princess is unaware of her first meeting with the soon to be Prince. She stays asleep throughout the entire encounter. This allows Andersen to devote all of his descriptive abilities to the soldier. He takes the opposite route from his fellow writers and uses overt detail divergence to draw his readers in through description rather than leaving them to imagine their own details. The Princess is not described because in her slumber she is irrelevant. This was picked up on by the men and women.

The men had mixed feelings about this Prince, though in this quote he has not yet become a prince and is still a simple soldier. Some felt that the soldier's "persistence" (5) and his ability to "be proactive and solve the problem" (3) were commendable. The soldier knew what he wanted, the Princess, and did everything in his power to get her. In this way he is very similar to the Grimms' Prince. The men were not repulsed by the soldier because unlike the Grimms' Prince, he does not attempt to use money to solve his problems. He relies on his wits and the tools he has at his disposal. This ability to problem solve was admired but some men but others felt that the soldier "just suffered from curiosity... [and] I don't see anything noble or impressive about that" (2). He was "acting more on kind of physical attraction, external more than internal" (10). One man summed this up by saying that the soldier was "going after his prize" (8). The Princess was a prize to be won, a conquest to be attained. To the men this showed that "he knows exactly what he wants and he's kind of willing to do whatever it takes" (1). There was no nobility to his character.

This sentiment was echoed by the women. They were not fond of the soldier's character. One woman described him as "kind of a douche" (12). The women focused on the

fact that the soldier seemed “more lust driven” (4). He was only attracted to the Princess because of her great physical beauty. The soldier only wanted to see the Princess “because he had heard that she was so beautiful” (6). One woman stated her feelings on the soldier by succinctly saying that he’s “kind of like normal guys, just wants to get in her pants” (12). A hero that would “fall in love because of beauty” (9) was not what the women were looking for in their Prince Charming.

The Princess is barely present in this quote. The men picked up on that and focused on the one line describing the Princess as “so indescribably beautiful” (Opie 277). Using this line as evidence one man stated that he believed that the Princess had “more beauty than just physical beauty. In my opinion for that kind of longing and needing to kiss someone the first time you see them, there’s something, you think there’s something more than just physical beauty. So there was more to her than just prettiness” (1). Despite this, most of the men mainly ignored the Princess claiming that in this quote “she’s not even... pertinent” (3).

The women agreed with this conception of the Princess. They were disappointed in the lack of description regarding her. Unlike the Princess in *Snow-Drop*, the women were unable to infer personality traits based on actions because in this quote the Princess has no action. Without description, dialogue, or action, this Princess is the least visible of the three. She has the least amount of influence on her situation. The women understood this and expressed disappointment in her predicament.

Due to this lack of participation on the part of the Princess, the women did not find this quote in any way romantic. They claimed that for the quote to have been romantic there would have had to be more interaction between the two characters, putting them on more even

footing. The men also noted the lack of romance in this quote. They claimed that since in the quote “there’s no interaction; there’s just thoughts” (3) if there was any sort of romance “it’s a sad kind of romantic” (10). One man differed from his peers and claimed that it was indeed romantic. He said:

The most romantic part is ‘The soldier could not help it; happen what might, he must give the Princess a kiss, and so he did’ (Opie 277). I’d say that’s romantic because it’s kind of like everything else in the world just kind of disappeared and he was in love with this princess and had to show it somehow and whether he intended to or not, he kissed her. (1)

The pursuit of the Princess over all else was thought to be romantic. However, another man pointed out that “simply because it’s a fairy tale... his persistence is kind of romantic but in a real world setting it’s kind of creepy” (5).

The soldier is focused on his goal of seeing and then attaining the Princess. He is more about action than emotion. The men could identify with this and with the soldier’s problem solving ability. Yet they also recognized that the soldier was in effect forcing himself on the Princess and her opinion did not matter. The women also saw this and were unable to move past this fact to any sort of respect for the soldier. Since the Princess was not involved in the interaction either emotionally or via any actions, the women had a hard time identifying with her.

In all three stories the Prince is pursuing a sleeping Princess. Her level of involvement in the interaction varies, and with it the ability of female readers to identify with the Princess.

They commented on the Princess's lack of action and participation in her own life. This affected the way that the women viewed the character of the Prince. Many of them expressed disappointment in the presented Prince Charmings. Their idealized versions did not make an appearance in these stories. On the other hand, the men who had expressed a dislike for the stereotypical Prince Charming found the Princes in these stories to be more relatable. They expressed admiration for the Princes' determination though they did not approve of his methods at all times. The definitions of masculinity and femininity, as well as the definition of a fairy tale, affected the way that the participants in my study viewed and responded to these quotes. They found that the background stereotypes that they carried with them were incompatible with the reality of these fairy tale texts.

“Fairy tales are more than true; not because they tell us that dragons exist, but because they tell us that dragons can be beaten.”

—G.K. Chesterton

Conclusions

As I discovered through my study, men view fairy tales as moral stories which lecture them on the proper behavior for society. They feel that the men in fairy tales, especially the Prince Charming character, are held up as paragons of virtue which they are supposed to aspire to. They resent being compared to these Princes and thus come to hold the fairy tale genre in contempt. Men are uninterested in reading and listening to these stories which they believe are intended to educate them on the morals of society. The men in my study were not alone in their feelings.

Several male fairy tale critics also share the view that fairy tales are intended as moralizing stories. Jack Zipes, a prominent critic in the field, feels that fairy tale stories “were often treated as transmissions of morals and ethics that contributed to the building of character” (Zipes 170). He also argued that “the special attributes of the artistic fairy-tale forms make... children more receptive to the moral content” (Zipes 190). By putting lessons of morality in the magical packaging of fairy tales, children are more likely to absorb the intended teachings. Steven Swann Jones contends that the simplicity of the magical fairy universe is one of the greatest tools in convincing children of the benefits of moral living: “Fairy tales affirm a belief in the morality of the cosmos, and they simplistically depict a polarization of good and evil in the world in order to show the benefits of adhering to the good” (Jones 63). He says that in fairy tales “the happy ending serves to illustrate the moral dominion of this magical realm and the benefits of living one’s life in harmony with it” (Jones 45).

The happy ending disguises the fairy tale’s true purpose which is “to instruct the young about who they are, how they relate to others, and what they should know of the world” (Jones

18). Popular children's author, Maurice Sendak, believes that all fairy tales contain "that little sneaking desire to teach and to moralize, to pass on to children what we think of our world" (Tatar 212). That most fairy tales contain some sort of moral is clear once one looks. This moral can be disguised in any fashion. Perhaps Gregory Maguire, author of the revamped fairy tale Wicked, summed up the multiplicity of the moral best:

What moral? What is all this for? The moral, about which we may argue long after we go home— we may argue for centuries— is sometimes a couplet, stapled upon the end like a gospel amen, and sometimes a secret, coiled and arbitrary and encoded within the syllables of the script, the syllables of what is said and left unsaid. (Maguire xxvii)

Morality smoothly slips on its sheepskin coat of magical disguise, wandering into the unconscious.

The Brothers Grimm agreed with the point of view given by the critics above. They intended their fairy tale collections to serve as a "manual of education" (Neumann 27). The Grimms called their fairy tales "'tiny fragments of a burst gemstone,' the vestiges of a belief that reaches back into most ancient times" (Kohler-Zulch 44). Fairy tales were seen as a part of the national history and heritage. This contributed to the Grimms' firm belief that fairy tales give "to everyone who heard them as a child a golden moral and a happy memory for life" (Neumann 26). Charles Perrault was also known for including morals in his tales although he would come right out and state what the moral was. He ended most of his stories with a rhymed couplet emphasizing the lesson meant to be taken from that particular story. In fact the title of his book stated outright that the stories contained within were moralistic. This

concept of fairy tales as overtly moralistic, although common among men, is not shared by women.

The women in my study saw fairy tales as happy, hopeful love stories. This sentiment is not unique. Fairy tale critic and Grimm scholar Shawn Jarvis, found that women viewed the “compensatory nature of fairy tales as a world of wish-fulfillment” (Jarvis 105). The fairy tale fantasy served as a method of escape from gritty reality. As I discovered through my interviews, most young girls grow up wanting to be princesses. This wishful longing is the feeling that women come to associate with fairy tales. Fairy tales allow women the “possibility of playing out roles that seemed or were impossible in real life” (Jarvis 105). These playful possibilities are what have endeared fairy tales to generations of young girls.

Due to the dichotomy of this “ambiguity between the wishful world of the fairy tale and the reality of everyday life” (Mieder 150), and the contrast between the male and female view of fairy tales, the understanding of the tales varies by gender. For women, a fairy tale is “speaking at one level to a total culture, but at another to a sisterhood of readers who will understand the hidden language, the secret revelations of the tale” (Haase 237). This sisterhood of understanding is passed down from mother to daughter. Women pass on fairy tales because they see them as benefiting a happy and fulfilling life:

The treasures which you accumulate for your spirit and your soul,... no person can take them from you and they are independent of time and place. But you must protect them, you must always work to increase them, and as you increase them, your inner happiness will increase too, not only in this life, but for all eternity. (Jarvis 121)

This belief reflects the effect that fairy tales had on young women and girls, on all young people.

Fairy tales not only influence a child's moral development but also their ideas of appropriate gender conduct. These childhood texts "represent 'internalized' formulas for social— and by extension, gender— behavior" (Jarvis 120-121). Impressionable children absorb these lessons and begin to shape their own life around them. Gender norms of today are not those of the Grimms where "boys are rewarded for transgressing a prohibition, while girls are punished with towery [sic] isolations; [and] girls are abjured to silence and passivity, while boys bluster and threaten their way to power" (Jarvis 108). Despite this discrepancy between time periods, there are still gender inequalities in our society today. This was made obvious through the responses that the men and women had to my study.

The gender inequalities revealed in my study were not about issues of power or free will as in the Grimms' texts. The men and women had different definitions of ideas such as masculinity and femininity. They also had different conceptions of what was romantic or not and what traits were most appreciated in a romantic partner. These contrasting ideals stemmed from varying amounts of exposure to fairy tales in childhood. By looking at these differences we can see that fairy tales have both a "hazardous and liberating potential... as agents of socialization" (Haase 235).

The hazards of fairy tales lie in the divisive quality of the gender and social norms they promote. Despite the messages contained within, for many people fairy tales are a beloved part of childhood and hold the power to "impact us profoundly... and become an enduring part of our lives" (Haase 10). The magical nature of the fairy tale world is liberating and opens the mind

to previously unknown possibilities. These tales break invisible social and mental barriers allowing children, and adults, to “regale themselves with that mild food which will enliven their imaginations” (Alderson 64). Empowering the imagination with fairy tales “gets people used to the unusual, and it is of great importance that this happens because mankind suffocates from the usual” (Mieder 150). Indoctrination is only a secondary characteristic of fairy tales; their primary purpose is to liberate the mind.

As John Ruskin once said, “Let him know his fairy tale accurately, and have perfect joy or awe in the conception of it as if it were real; thus he will always be exercising his power of grasping realities” (Opie 11). The fairy tale world is as real to the devoted reader as a warm, comforting lap is to a child who curls up to listen to a beloved story. The magic and wonderment of the tales never quite leave us:

We recognize faerie from a long time ago in a galaxy far away. We recognize faerie vitally alert on the island of Ariel and Caliban and the magician Prospero. We know faerie even when it goes viral, as we encounter it in Hollywood’s Cindergirl of the hour, caught this very moment on today’s blogs and tabloids. But put away that cell phone and stop Googling her. We’re attending deeper mysteries than Hollywood generally knows how to handle. (Maguire xxix)

The ability to imagine, to think, to dream, gave life to the fairy tale which in turn nurtures the society that birthed it. The fairy tale compels the reader to “search consciously for meaning, to interpret” (Haase 18) and in doing so allows generations of children to experience the joy of that mysterious, magical world.

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Participant 1. Interview. 01 December 2011.

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