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Recommended Citation

McCarley, Hannah, "From Once Upon a Time to Happily Ever After: Grimms' Fairy Tales and Early Childhood Development" (2017). *Senior Projects Spring 2017*. 288.
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From Once Upon a Time to Happily Ever After: Grimms' Fairy Tales and
Early Childhood Development

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Social Studies &
The Division of Languages and Literature
of Bard College

by
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Annandale-on-Hudson, New York
May 2017

Acknowledgements

First, I would like to express my sincere thanks to my two wonderful advisors, Franz Kempf and Stuart Levine, whose doors have always been open to me, and whose continuous motivation and encouragement have made this project a pleasure to write.

I would like to thank my friends – those at Bard and those far away – who have always pushed me to be my best and who have picked me up when I am at my worst.

I would also like to thank my parents, Melanie and Phil, who have always supported me in whatever I do and whose unconditional love and guidance continue to be my foundation.

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From Once Upon a Time to Happily Ever After: Introduction

Fairy Tales and Early Childhood Development

Fairy tales have long been associated with childhood and the experiences of growing up in an 'adult world.' Grimms' fairy tales in particular consist of much more than simple lessons of right and wrong; they enhance imagination and play, they develop critical thinking skills, they provide models for emotional situations, and they instill many truths about the world – one being that it is not always a just place. Jack Zipes (2002) aptly describes fairy tales as a unique art form which “stays with us from infancy into old age” (p. 63). Given all of this, it is no surprise that fairy tales would be an extremely informative tool in the study of child psychology. One of the most notable names in this regard is Bruno Bettelheim – known best for his 1976 work *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*, concerning Freudian psychoanalysis and fairy tales. Following in this tradition, the majority of psychologically focused research about fairy tales and childhood have been psychoanalytic in nature – focusing primarily on Freudian or Jungian schools of thought. Fairy tales have certainly not declined in popularity or cultural significance, and in fact, are playing more of a social role than they did in past decades. This is due in part to the creative efforts of Disney, and the resurgence of modern fairy tale media – examples of which can be seen in movies and TV shows that have premiered in the last few years. Despite this resounding social influence, the research into the actual *effects* of fairy tales on the developing mind has yet to break past its psychoanalytic roots.

The aim of this paper is to explore the developmental consequences of fairy tales through a variety of lenses; including cognitive, social, and behavioral. Previous works have primarily focused on very specific areas of development, making it difficult to grasp a full picture of the true impact that fairy tales have during early childhood. By introducing an analysis, which does

not limit itself to one area of development, and leaves open the path to continue explorations in other areas of development, the hope is to spark interest for further, more in-depth research surrounding the deep impact of fairy tales throughout the lifespan – from childhood throughout adulthood.

Fairy Tales as a Form of Literature

The genre of fairy tales has a fascinating history, and the timeless quality of these well-loved stories have retained a loyal following throughout the centuries. Traditional fairy tales derive from a long oral history, which makes identifying the origins nearly impossible. Fairy tales, throughout their many forms, have long allowed children and adults to connect more deeply to the world around them – providing an ideal tool for simultaneously structuring the complexities of the social world, and allowing young readers to feel a sense of freedom and empowerment. Though fairy tales are not the only types of stories read by children, there are many unique qualities which set them apart from other types of children's literature. For instance, the form and structure of fairy tales – particularly those of the Grimms' fairy tales – are much more accessible to children on a cognitive level because of their logical and methodical formulaic structure, and emphasis on rhyme and repetition. This makes them easier to understand and memorize, and also makes them more stimulating and enjoyable for young children. In addition, the Grimms take care to include descriptive imagery which extends beyond the mere expository facts. A wonderfully colorful example of this can be found in the tale *The Brave Little Tailor*:

“‘Hey, who invited you?’ the little tailor said, and chased the unwelcome guests away. But the flies did not understand German, nor would they let themselves be deterred. Rather, they kept coming back in even larger numbers. Finally the little tailor had been needled enough, as they say, and he grabbed a piece of cloth from under his worktable. ‘Wait, I’ll give you something!’ he said, swinging at them mercilessly. When he let up and

counted, there were no less than seven flies lying dead before him with their legs stretched out.”

(Grimm & Grimm, 1857/2003, Location no. 2132)

~

„ ,Ei, wer hat euch eingeladen? ‘ sprach das Schneiderlein und jagte die ungebetenen Gäste fort. Die Fliegen aber, die kein Deutsch verstanden, liessen sich nicht abweisen, sondern kamen in immer grösserer Gesellschaft wieder. Da lief dem Schneiderlein endlich, wie man sagt, die Laus über die Leber, es langte aus seiner Hölle nach einem Tuchlappen, und ,wart, ich will es euch geben! ‘ schlug es unbarmherzig drauf. Als es abzog und zählte, so lagen nicht weniger als sieben vor ihm tot und streckten die Beine.“

(Grimm & Grimm, 1857/1957, p. 87)

This passage goes far beyond what is necessary to inform the reader that the tailor killed a few flies. It is illustrative in such a way that it is nearly impossible *not* to imagine the scene before you. In addition to using this type of vivid description, the Grimms' mixture of metaphorical, and at times, blatantly vague language frees children to project themselves, and their unique experiences, onto the protagonists. This tailor does not have a name, nor an age – he could be anyone, and likewise, anyone could be him.

For the purposes of this paper there are a few key names within fairy tale literature which are particularly relevant. The first of these is Charles Perrault – the man accredited with being the father of fairy tales. Perrault (1628-1703) was a member of the Académie Française who published a collection of what are considered today some of the best known fairy tales – *Le Petit Chaperon Rouge* (Little Red Riding Hood), *Cendrillon* (Cinderella), *Le Chat Botté* (Puss in Boots), and *La Belle au bois Dormant* (The Sleeping Beauty). His writing laid the foundations for the emerging literary genre of fairy tales, which prior to his publication, existed primarily as oral folk tales. Perrault's versions of these stories have had a resounding impact on the establishment of fairy tales as a form of literature and popular culture.

The next names of relevance are those of the Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, who published their book of fairy tales more than 100 years after Perrault (though the influence is still very much tangible). It is the Grimms' tales, which are of specific interest for this paper due to their continuing cultural impact and unique contents. The name *Grimm* is familiar to virtually everyone who has encountered fairy tales, however few know much about the brothers beyond this simple association. In order to truly grasp the lasting cultural and social significance of the Grimms' Tales, it is imperative to have an understanding of the history behind the stories and behind their deliberate curation.

The Brothers Grimm

Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm were the two eldest children in their family, and were described as being bright and hardworking students who had a distinct fondness for country life and the traditions, superstitions, and customs of the peasantry (Zipes, 2002). After the death of their father (Phillip Grimm) in 1796 the two brothers had to bear the responsibility of caring for their family, and due to these heavy responsibilities they in a sense lost some of their childhood. It was also the death of their father which led Jacob and Wilhelm to better understand the rampant class injustice and exploitation and allowed them to develop a close identification with the common hard-working folk.

The Grimm brothers dedicated themselves to the study of ancient German literature and folklore in an effort to encapsulate and preserve what they felt to be the "natural essence" of Germans and old German society – a goal well stated when Wilhelm remarked: "Not only did we seek consolation in the past, but it was also natural for us to hope that the course we were taking would add something toward the return of better days" (Zipes, 2002, p. 7). It could be said that their true motivation behind their arduous studies was a deep-seated wish for the unification of

the German state and the defeat of the French. This tangibly manifested itself in the utopian symbol of Germany's medieval past which can be seen throughout their tales – echoes back to what they felt was a more authentic Germany. For the modern reader to truly understand the depth of the motivation and drive, it is important to remember that at the time there were over 200 German principalities which were often at war with one another – far from being a unified people. Keeping all of this in mind when reading the Grimms' tales helps to uncover many of the more subtle motives and themes.

The Collection of the Grimms' Tales.

When the Grimms began their initial collection of tales and folklore in 1805 it was at the behest of Clemens Brentano – a close friend of the brothers who wanted to publish a continuation of his work following *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* (The Boy's Wonder Horn¹) At this point the brothers had no plans to publish a collection of tales themselves, and were more concerned with the potential scholarly breakthroughs which could help them further uncover the “natural poetry” of the German people. Between 1806 and 1810 Jacob and Wilhelm systematically gathered materials related to folklore, and by 1810 when it was clear that Brentano had no imminent plans to publish the collection, the brothers gained his permission to publish it themselves. The first volume of *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (Children's and Household Tales) was published in 1812 and contained a total of 86 tales. (Zipes, 2002)

This initial publication was never intended for children, and was presented as a purely scholarly work containing notes and annotations. This work was an addition to their larger long-term project concerning the *natural poetry* and essence of the German people and state (Zipes,

¹ The Boy's Wonder Horn is a collection of old German folk songs and poems published in 1805 by Clemens Brentano in partnership with Achim von Arnim

2002). This is perhaps why many people are under the misconception that Grimms' fairy tales were *never* intended for children, and that their popularization was due to misuse. This is in fact not the case as there were many more revised editions of *Kinder und Hausmärchen* published after 1812. There were a total of two volumes published in 1812 and 1815 respectively, a second edition consisting of only one volume and 170 texts, and a total of 5 more volumes published after 1819. Throughout these various revisions there were 39 new texts added and 8 omitted. By the time the 7th edition appeared in 1857 there were 211 texts in total. It was in these later editions – especially the 1857 version – that the revisions were geared towards making the tales 'appropriate' for children, and it is this version which is cited in this paper.

The Grimms' tales were collected and revised over a number of years and many of them were of French origin², hence the many connections to Perrault's earlier works. This may seem counterintuitive seeing as one of the major aims of the Grimm brothers was to capture essential truths about the *German* people. It was through the Grimm brothers' revisions – or in literary terms *contaminations* – through which these truths were brought to light however. This is an important element to remember about the Grimm brothers – that they were not the *authors* of the tales themselves, but rather the creative collectors and interpreters. As Zipes explains it, *contamination* is in no way a derogatory term, but rather a literary term meant to explain the mixing of different variations of a known works into a new *ideal* form – to give new life and revive an old tradition (Zipes, 2002). The Grimm's were not concerned so much about the purity of the tales themselves, but *were* concerned about the purity of the inner messages and how they related to the German culture. Their aim was to recapture the 'truths' woven into the original

²The Hassenpflugs were of a family of Huguenot ancestry with whom the Grimm brothers met regularly to hear tales recounted from old nursemaids, governesses, and servants

tales and to make the texts appealing to the middle-class majority (by eliminating erotic and sexual elements).

Whatever changes the Grimm brothers made were certainly effective as their collection of fairy tales become one of the continuously best-selling books in German history. This unprecedented popularity has amplified the cultural impact that these fairy tales have had over the decades, and is part of what makes them such an integral aspect of childhood.

Development during the Preschool Years

Development is a continuous never-ending human event, however development during childhood is particularly interesting as it portends many of the changes and events which take place throughout adolescence and adulthood. Development during the preschool years is especially vital given the rapid changes in Theory of Mind development. The term was coined in 1978 by David Premack and Guy Woodruff in their research into primate intelligence and gained popularity as a research topic in child psychology through the work of Heinz Wimmer and Josef Perner, who studied the child's concept of deception (Astington, 1993). Simply stated, Theory of Mind (here on out abbreviated as ToM) is the ability to attribute different mental states to different individuals outside oneself (Calero et al., 2013), and it is closely related to belief-desire psychology (*folk psychology*) which aims both to explain *why* people act the way they do and to predict future behavior (Astington, 1993). ToM research is a means through which psychologists are able to speculate about the reasoning and motives behind the often indecipherable behavioral choices that children make. Preschoolers are at an age where they are able to make more independent choices and act by their own volition. This is due largely to their greater physiological competence (being able to complete tasks on their own and freely interact with their environment), as well as their rapidly increasing mental flexibility. Up unto this point in

development, young children are mentally unable to process the concept that other individuals have perspectives different from their own – this is referred to as *egocentrism*. The preschool years are when children are in the midst of realizing their place in the social world as individuals. Along with this realization comes many other developmental consequences which help to determine many of the aspects which are typically seen as ‘defining’ in one’s personality and life-course. These include gender, ideas concerning morality, approach to social relationships, and many others. Given the many changes occurring during the preschool years, it follows to reason that the many social elements children are exposed to at this age would have a profound impact on several areas of development. Fairy tales are an integral part of the childhood experience, both in the home and in school environments, and as such, their potential impact is amplified.

Young children are often underestimated in their ability to understand subtle complexities, like those in the Grimms’ fairy tales, and parents and educators alike speculate on how much of a psychological impact literature can really have at such an age. It is this underestimation which leads to certain inconsistencies in ToM research, a phenomenon well explained by Astington when she detailed the criticisms surrounding Piaget’s work with children. Piaget was known for making deductions based off of children’s answers to his scripted questions, however with younger children especially, it is vital to have an established context to properly understand their train of thought. Piaget would often ask questions such as: *Where do dreams come from? How did the sun begin? and Does a bicycle know where it is going?* One can see how the answers to these questions could vary in extreme ways! Many of the children’s responses lent support for his ideas concerning *egocentrism*, however his interpretation may have been limited as he was analyzing the answers based on expectations an older child or adult

would be held to. Later researchers such as Margaret Donaldson and Rochel Gelman tested some of Piaget's experimental tasks and found that preschoolers are much more competent in their own thinking than would be expected based off of Piaget's work (Astington, 1993). The key is to frame questions the children are presented within contexts which are geared toward their own thinking and are comprehensible to them – when this is done, and their answers are examined within the same context, there is a much clearer logic to their thinking. This same scenario can be applied to how adults choose to mediate the interaction between the fairy tale and the child – should children be left to their own devices, or can the presentation of and reactions to the fairy tale be placed within a context which makes it assessable to the child?

Through the research presented in this paper it will become clear that fairy tales have the potential to influence behavior and cognition in meaningful and lasting ways. Specifically, this paper will examine the connection between fairy tales and the development of gender identity, as well as the relationship between fairy tales and concepts of moral thinking and behavior. These are only a couple of the many developmental areas which have the potential to be greatly impacted by fairy tales.

As mentioned earlier, the current existing psychological works dealing with fairy tales and childhood have been primarily centered on psychoanalytic schools of thought. The vast majority of other psychological works related to fairy tales are Jungian in nature, strongly emphasizing the role of symbols and their effects on the unconscious mind. Though these areas of research have contributed greatly to the persisting popularity and public fascination with fairy tales, the focus of this paper is to highlight areas of research which may yield more empirical results and open doors to new advanced theories surrounding the effects of fairy tales on children.

Just as children would not be expected to independently describe their own mental schemas or levels of perception, it cannot be expected of them to understand and articulate what occurs during ToM development, much less what happens on a mental level when they encounter new stimuli (such as fairy tales). This of course makes measurable assessment much more difficult than it is with adults who are able to take surveys and fill out scales, so child psychologists often make do with observation and experimentation: watching children in their natural social environment, and watching them react to crafted scenarios in a controlled setting. This method of research is often difficult to organize, and perhaps is why there is a limited number of behavioral studies which are focused on fairy tales. The hope is that through providing evidence of the impact of fairy tales across the spectrum of development, the demand for research will be greater and there will be more progress in discovering how vital this kind of social model is for young children.

Fairy Tales and Gender Development

The Beginnings of Gender

What do fairy tales teach children about gender identity, social roles, and expectations? Do they inform how children grow to define themselves as either a boy or a girl? These are questions of particular interest, given the popularity and pervasiveness of classic fairy tales and the current climate surrounding gender issues. Fairy tales have become synonymous with childhood, and by consequence, they have also become synonymous with growing up and maturing. Childhood is a time of growth, formation, and change. Though development is lifelong, the early childhood years play a particularly formative role in shaping *who* children become later in life. Perhaps one of the most important and substantial developments is that of defined gender identity.

Gender development has been studied from multiple perspectives; however, the controversial question as to whether or not gender is learned behavior or biologically determined has yet to be answered. Sex and gender are often blended, and as such become interchangeable terms in everyday vocabulary; however, to appropriately analyze the development of gender roles and gendered behavior, the sex of a child needs to be viewed as a separate, purely biological, variable. Binary sexes are uniform across all cultures, meaning that there are biologically only two sexes: male and female – but this is not the case for gender. Gender roles vary greatly from culture to culture, and this flexibility of expected and exhibited behavior supports the notion that gender is largely *learned* (Beal, 1994).

Nature vs. Nurture, though an argument not without merit, is too simplistic to be of any substantial use when studying child development. It is preferred to view the two factors as continuously interacting forces. *Nurture*, insofar as gender development is concerned, is of

particular interest, however, as the formation of gender roles seems to be more closely related to environmental and social influences than to biology alone. From the moment of their birth, a child is subject to gendered socialization. Whether the parents are aware of it or not they treat their child differently entirely based on biological sex. Though many parents would be quick to deny this behavior, one fascinating study by Rubin, Provanzano, and Luria (Weitzman, 1979) found that parents, who were interviewed shortly after the delivery of their child and asked to describe their children on an 18-item bipolar scale, described girls and boys in contrasting terms. For instance, a parent of a newborn boy was more apt to describe their child as “firmer, larger featured, better coordinated, more alert, stronger, and hardier,” while a parent of a newborn girl described their child as “softer, finer featured, weaker, smaller, prettier, more inattentive, more awkward, and more delicate” (Weitzman, 1979). What makes these findings particularly interesting within the investigation of gender socialization is the fact that the sample of newborns were all similar in length, weight, and Apgar scores (Weitzman, 1979, p. 2). In other words, there were no striking observable differences between the newborns, yet parents perceived contrasting differences based solely on biological sex. This predilection to cast children in prescribed gender roles the moment they are born is perhaps one of the reasons young children hold such ridged expectations insofar as gender is concerned – for them there is very little grey area between proper “girl” behavior and proper “boy” behavior. Recognizing the tendency to dictate prescribed behavior may prove to be an invaluable asset for parents who want their children to grow up without the constraints of outdated stereotypes and prejudices.

The development of gender is multifaceted, complex, and continuous across the lifespan – though flexibility in gender consistency fluctuates as children age. Children go through periods of flexible understanding and rigid understanding when it comes to gender expressions, and

though there is no *critical* period for the implementation of gender roles, there is a period of maximal development during the toddler and preschool years when children are actively building schemas as a means of understanding their social world. Transitional points in a child's social life coincide with the development and emergence of new abilities and behaviors. As a child is on the cusp of realizing their own natural autonomy as an individual, specific learned social behaviors become more evident. An understanding of the social world develops parallel to cognitive gains in childhood, as described by Kohlberg's 1966 cognitive developmental approach to understanding gender (Martin & Ruble, 2004), which separates gender development into stages of *identity*, *stability*, and *consistency*. In addition to the cognitive developmental approach, gender development can also be further understood through the gender-schema theory. This theory maintains that children form organized knowledge structures – *schemas* – which influence self-conception, as well as thinking and behavior. Preschool children search for social cues to guide their behavior, and these cues are ultimately what play into the construction of schemas and extend to how children come to understand gender expectations, making observations during early childhood especially important (Martin & Ruble, 2004).

Both of these theories describe gender development as an active process dependent on the child and their surroundings. Children *actively* search for ways to find meaning in their worlds, and one of the most easily accessible traits used to differentiate and group people is their gender. When one feels a connection to a particular group, that group is then seen as generally more positive – and gender is a prime example of this, especially when it comes to young children who have a striking tendency to segregate by sex when choosing activity or play partners (Martin & Ruble, 2004). Membership to social groups acts as a motivator to learn about and conform to gender norms, and the emergence of peer groups during preschool sparks the need for children to

gather gender-specific information. The internal motivation to conform to sociocultural standards and stereotypes (Levy & Carter, 1989) and to organize information into *appropriate* categories makes exposure to gendered material and media particularly important. Lorber (1994) describes the concept of *gender imagery* – “the cultural representations of gender and embodiment of gender in symbolic language and artistic productions that reproduce and legitimate gender statuses” (p. 30-31) – and it is this *gender imagery* which is important to consider when drawing connections between media exposure and development. Given the evidence that gender organization becomes uniform and more rigid during the elementary years (Carter & Levy, 1988), specifically hitting peak rigidity at ages 5-7 (Martin & Ruble, 2004), the formation of schemas and patterns surrounding gender during the preschool years is paramount to all future gender development.

When schemas are extremely rigid and limited, the acquisition and integration of new, conflicting information, and the necessary ability to be flexible enough in one’s thinking to accommodate the conflict becomes immensely difficult. In other words, the more inflexible a schema is, the harder it becomes to progress to the next stages in development. It stands to reason that if young children are introduced to varying definitions of gender, and given many contrasting examples of behavior, their ability to integrate other types of new information and adapt to social changes will be much better. Contemporary research on children’s literature has shown that it contains explicit and implicit messages about the power structures in society – especially those concerning gender (Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz, 2003). Key amongst the types of children’s literature examined were classic fairy tales, which have continued to serve as social templates even through the changing social climates throughout the decades.

Fairy Tales and Gender Development

The Grimms' tales are an excellent tool for providing examples of contrasting examples of behavior, as they are famously inconsistent in their depictions of gender. There are tales where the entire premise is centered on the power of the male – portraying him as honorable, powerful, and superior, and then there are tales which give way to the demonization and sexualizing of women – making them evil witches or temptresses. There are also tales, however, which are surprisingly devoid of a male presence, allowing for the heroine to assert herself as an independent, resourceful, and intelligent individual. There is no absolute mold in the Grimms' work, which is one of the many reasons why their tales have remained so accessible, and retained so much meaning for so many populations across the centuries. Given all these factors, a detailed examination of how fairy tales inform gender schemas and overall gender development during the preschool years has the potential to shed light on later adolescent and adult outcomes, and perhaps even provide direction for how to address the changing climate surrounding gender roles, specifically the evolving cultural expectations of girls and women.

For centuries, fairy tales have acted as “gendered scripts,” serving to authenticate and support the dominant gender system (Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz, 2003). In today's high-tech mass-media culture, surrounded by the marketing efforts of Disney, fairy tales have lost their long-held importance in children's education. Teachers have reported that fairy tales are “not an integral part of children's culture” (Westland, 1993); however, because of the perpetuation of romantic ideology and the societal stress on beauty standards, it has become increasingly important to begin discussions of gender roles early on. Parsons describes fairy tales as “sites for the construction of appropriate gendered behavior” (Parsons, 2004, p. 135), and part of this is the strong emphasis on qualities such as women's passivity and beauty (Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz,

2003). The feminine beauty ideal is one of the most ubiquitous paradigms in the manufacturing of and maintenance of modern gender norms. The association between physical attractiveness and social status has a ripple effect which can foster unhealthy impressions of gender expectations in children. This association is, unfortunately, present throughout popular children's literature. Insofar as classic fairy tales go, *Cinderella* is one of the most popular and one of the most reproduced tales in the Grimms' collection. Bruno Bettelheim (1976/1989) cites *Cinderella* as the best-known and most-loved fairy tale as it is one with over 700 variations. Since *Cinderella* is a tale which virtually all children are familiar with in some form or another, and which provides a fascinating outlook on gender norms, as well as having one of the most well-established and detailed heroines in the Grimms' collection, it will be a main focus of this chapter.

Cinderella and Understanding Femininity

Perrault's *Cendrillon*.

The version *Cinderella* with which most children are intimately familiar was originally written by Charles Perrault in 1697, and published in *Histoires ou Contes du Temps Passé avec des Moralités* (*Stories and Tales of the Past with Morals*). This was the same version which was later adapted by Walt Disney, further bolstering its popularity among children, and solidifying it as canon in contemporary Western culture. The Grimm brothers didn't publish their first version of *Cinderella* until 115 years later in 1812. It can be assumed that the universal popularity of Perrault's version over the Grimms' version is due in part to Disney's 1950 film and subsequent marketing efforts. Both the Grimms' version and Perrault's version of *Cinderella* have the potential to enlighten modern understandings of gender roles; however, because of its greater impact on young children today, we must begin with an examination of the 1697 Perrault text.

Fairy Tales – such as the ones popularized by Perrault – were in great fashion within the court of Louis XIV. In the later part of the 17th century this trend manifested itself through displays of ornate excess; illustrated well in the descriptive elements and detail in Perrault's writing – the gilded chambers, elegant clothes, and ornate guards are all taken from Perrault's own world – the world of the court. Perrault's reworking of the tales are reflective of his aim to make Paris into a place of sensibility, reason, and enlightenment. This can be seen especially in the augmentative moral additions at the end of each of his stories, which transform the fairy tales into moral parables – reducing any possibilities for individual interpretation. (Carter, 1977)

Cinderella is one of the most 'gendered' fairy tales in today's popular culture. Here, 'gendered' can be understood as a deviation from the typical desexualized or masculine centered tales. *Cinderella* has a notable lack of prominent male characters and, at least in regards to the Perrault version, is aimed towards a primarily female audience. These factors are what make *Cinderella* pivotal to the exploration of early gender development. The striking lack of lead female characters in the field of children's literature makes stories with female leads particularly relevant and important, as gender is built upon shared societal assumptions and perpetuated stereotypes. In a cyclical manner, these assumptions influence perception of culture and society, and society, in turn, reinforces stereotypes. This is why it is so important to recognize when children are being exposed to negative stereotypes, or when they are being limited in their exposure to the range of gender roles. Perrault's *Cinderella* is a piece of literature which embodies traditional female stereotypes and thus is an excellent source to look towards when exploring their effect on modern gender development.

Cinderella; or The Little Glass Slipper tells the story of a girl who is exploited by her stepmother and stepsisters and ignored by her father, yet never loses her innate civility and

modesty. The beginning of the tale immediately severs Cinderella's relationship with her mother – an important detail to note when considering later the Grimms' version of the tale. This lack of relationship between the departed mother and her child eliminates the emotional drive which would spur deeper character development. There is no grief or anger serving as motivators for personal agency. Because of this, the actions of Perrault's Cinderella come across much more self-serving than they perhaps are. This feeling of self-serving motivation is reinforced by the literary emphasis placed upon descriptions of the setting and wardrobe, rather than descriptions of the characters themselves.

“She slept on a wretched mattress in a garret at the top of the house, while the sisters had rooms with parquet flooring, and beds of the most fashionable style, with mirrors in which they could see themselves from top to toe.”

(Perrault, 1697/1961, p. 55)

The traditional feminine stereotypes in Perrault's *Cinderella* are perpetuated through a variety of literary means, however, as in the example above, they are most clearly illustrated through Perrault's visual emphasis on the contrast between beauty and opulence and destitution. Just as the stepsisters' rooms were described in lavish detail, every element of all the fashions and clothing were described as well:

“... ‘For my part,’ said the elder, ‘I shall wear my dress of red velvet, with the Honiton lace.’

‘I have only my everyday petticoat,’ said the younger, ‘but to make up for it I shall wear my cloak with the golden flowers and my necklace of diamonds, which are not so bad.’

They sent for a good hairdresser to arrange their double-frilled caps, and bought patches at the best shop... They were so excited in their glee that for nearly two days they ate nothing. They broke more than a dozen laces through drawing their stays tight in order to make their waists more slender, and they were perpetually in front of a mirror.”
(Perrault 1697/1961, p. 56)

These vivid descriptions are the most available characteristics of *Cinderella* for children and, especially for girls, they are a primary source of both aspiration and anxiety. Baker-Sperry observed children's behavior and play while being read a Disney adaption of *Cinderella* and noted that while the girls in the reading groups were notably more engaged with the plot, the boys' reaction to the story also revealed much about male gender patterns and the role of peer groups in social development. The boys, while clearly as familiar with the tale as the girls in the group, tended to react negatively toward any boy who showed a strong interest in the tale – citing that it was a *girl's* story. Their lack of responses did not stem from a personal animosity toward the story of *Cinderella* (it was clear that some still quite enjoyed the story), but from a presumed fear of disapproval from the other boys in the group. (Baker-Sperry, 2007)

The different ways that the children form and interact with their peer groups are illuminating when it comes to early gender development. Peer groups act as a template for mature social interactions, and the acting out of gender within these groups provides a template for further gender development. The girls in Baker-Sperry's reading groups interacted with the character of Cinderella herself, superimposing the fairy tale onto their own lives and molding it to their realities. They would talk about finding their own prince charming at a lavish party or ball that they would surely attend when they were older, and they lamented at times that they were not as pretty as Cinderella (notably comparing aspects of their appearance rather than their expressions of outward 'graciousness'). The boys, rather than interacting directly with specific elements of the story, used it instead as a template for seemingly unrelated play. They would go off to slay dragons before the ball, but otherwise interacted very little with the written plot. Though these markedly polar types of interaction it becomes clear how 'gendered' of a story *Cinderella* is. (Baker-Sperry, 2007)

As mentioned earlier, children reach surprisingly rigid conclusions about gender roles by elementary school age. This suggests that the formation of gender roles and expectations begin at an earlier age than previously assumed, meaning that what children are exposed to during their preschool years impacts the trajectory of their development during their elementary years. Observational studies, such as Baker-Sperry's 2007 study, focusing on children in the first and second grade reveal that learned gender-roles play a dynamic part in peer relations and social exchange. The prevalence of gender-roles in peer relations at this age suggests that exposure to gender 'norms' at an early age helps to determine the course of development and the relation between gendered behavior and peer relations. Key among these exposures are classic childhood fairy tales.

What children are exposed to at an early age has a resounding effect throughout their later development – this is especially true when children idolize popular characters. The character of Cinderella is a model of perfect femininity for little girls, as illustrated by common dreams of finding one's prince charming and becoming as beautiful as a princess. It is the desire to ascribe to and uphold exacting beauty standards which is especially harmful to young girls. A striking example from Perrault's Cinderella of the harsh beauty standards is presented here:

"...They were so excited in their glee that for nearly two days they ate nothing. They broke more than a dozen laces through drawing their stays tight in order to make their waists more slender, and they were perpetually in front of a mirror."

(Perrault 1697/1961, p. 56)

Here, specifically, Perrault's description of typical feminine beauty is focused on the figure – a source of great anxiety for many adolescent girls. Though the stepsisters are meant to be portrayed as shallow and superficial, this writing still glorifies the 'thin' aesthetic rampant in today's media and advertising which has been linked in correlation to a rise in eating disorders in young girls (Harrison, 2000; Field et al., 1999). Perrault links the romance and excitement of the

impending ball with the stepsisters starving themselves, and at no point in the tale are these standards of beauty questioned or outwardly criticized (even though it is a tale meant to highlight the importance of graciousness over beauty). The stepsisters in Perrault's tale *are* beautiful (the familiar connotation of the "ugly stepsisters" coming from the Disney adaptation), and every description of their behavior perpetuates the notion that despite their cruelty, they uphold all standards of beauty.

In an observational study similar to Baker-Sperry's model, Paterson performed a slightly more structured study in which questions were posed to the children about the material in a version of *Cinderella* translated from Perrault's original (as opposed to the adapted Disney version Baker-Sperry used). One of the instances in the story that Paterson chose to highlight was the corset scene – she asked the children why they thought the stepsisters used a corset, and one of the young girls replied: "Because maybe they were fat and needed to get thin so they could be pretty for the prince" (Paterson, 2014, p. 485). This, combined with other girls expressing anxiety over how they could become as pretty as Cinderella, and children in groups who designated certain girls to be the stepsisters in their games because they didn't have blonde hair or weren't *pretty* enough to play the part, are both symptoms of the harmful effects of obsolete gender stereotypes on today's children.

Some might think that the solution to combat negative stereotypes would be to limit exposure to such material, however, this task is impossible given the climate of today's media. So rather than fight a losing battle of censorship, it should be considered that these instances of unhealthy portrayals of body image can be used as learning tools –a way to combat unrealistic societal expectations from an early age. Certain classic fairy tales (such as *Cinderella*) will always remain popular, and will continue to perpetuate outdated gender stereotypes, however

these instances of 'unhealthy' depictions of gender stereotypes can be used as discussion points. Along with the story of *Cinderella*, teachers could ask prompting questions much like Paterson, and allow the children to discuss some of the more *questionable* aspects of the fairy tale. With younger children especially, having an adult explain certain passages could go far in preventing many of the polarizing thoughts and behaviors children bring into their elementary years (an example being the girls in Baker-Sperry's classroom not allowing their 'less pretty' peers play the part of Cinderella, and the young girl in Paterson's classroom who thought the stepsisters might have been "too fat" for the prince).

The effects of fairy tales, and specifically *Cinderella*, on early gender development is not limited to issues of appearance and is certainly not constrained only to girls. Even though it is a *feminine* story it has the capacity to inform male gender-roles as well. As mentioned earlier, there is a distinct lack of lead female characters in popular children's media, making the presence of lead male characters a more routine phenomenon. Boys in general are less flexible when it comes to their gender expression, meaning that while it is socially acceptable for girls to emulate more masculine behaviors, boys who exhibit feminine behavior are often ostracized from their peer groups (Baker-Sperry, 2007). Given the importance of peer groups, learning to differentiate between "appropriate" gendered behaviors is key for later social success. The caveat here is what children deem as "appropriate." If a group of children have an extremely restricted view on what is okay for a girl to wear versus what is okay for a boy to wear, then the instances of peer isolation are bound to increase. The same is true for behavior – in an identical situation a boy may be viewed by his peers as a confident leader, while a girl may be viewed as bossy and shrill. These snap judgments come from years of reinforcing mental representations of how to *do* gender. If children are presented at a younger age with material which combat these stereotypes,

or which grant children the opportunity to question their validity (as when Paterson questioned the children on *why* the stepsisters felt they needed a corset), the later instances of unconscious gender discrimination and judgement may be significantly less.

What must not be forgotten when comparing any of Perrault's fairy tales to their Grimm counterparts, is that Perrault always concluded his stories with a specific moral or set of morals.

Cinderella is concluded by the two following morals:

Moral:

*Beauty in a maid is an extraordinary treasure;
One never tires of admiring it.
But what we mean by graciousness
Is beyond price and still more precious.
It was this which her godmother gave Cinderella,
Teaching her to become a Queen.
(So the moral of this story goes.)
Lasses, this is a better gift than looks so fair
For winning over a heart successfully.
Graciousness is the true gift of the Fairies.
Without it, one can do nothing;
With it, one can do all!*

Another moral:

*It is a great advantage
To have spirit and courage
Good breeding and common sense
And other qualities of this sort
Which are the gifts of Heaven!
You will do well to own these;
But for success, they may well be in vain
If, as a final gift, one has not
The blessing of godfather or godmother.
(Perrault, 1697/1961, p. 64-65)*

These are the elements of *Cinderella* which Perrault deemed most valuable and influential. It is a tale meant to highlight the importance of graciousness and class over beauty and wealth, yet it is

clear from the language Perrault uses that he is largely addressing people of means and “good breeding” (it could be questioned how far class alone would truly carry an individual without beauty and standing). These morals might have been relevant to the French Court in the 17th century, but are they the most relevant messages to send to children in today’s climate? The elements of Perrault’s *Cinderella* which are significant to 21st century children convey a message more focused upon romance and beauty than graciousness. This is due in part to the distillation of the tale by Disney, making the message more about “rags to riches” and finding true romance than about exuding grace and class in the face of adversity.

How children perceive fairy tales cannot be predetermined and the existence of a pre-established moral means nothing to the active mind of a child. A dangerous misconception in prior research surrounding the relationship between fairy tales and children is that children are passive participants in their learning. The significance of fairy tales in the development of children changes drastically when children are recognized as active participants in their own learning and development. Children are able to participate in the telling of the tale and decipher the messages and meanings which speak to them on a personal level. They can also question and disagree with elements of the tale and engage in further discussion – something which goes far beyond passive listening. When a child is able to interact with a text in such a way, it gives the writing new meaning and creates opportunities for the child to interact with the world in completely new ways.

Grimms’ *Aschenputtel*.

Though the version of *Cinderella* most children are familiar with is derived from Perrault, a close examination of the alternate Grimms’ version provides a contrasting illustration of Cinderella’s character, and of the traditionalized role of female leads. On the surface,

Perrault's characterization of Cinderella is defined through descriptions of her innate demure graciousness and goodness, while the Grimms' characterization is illustrated through cleverness, action and ingenuity. Out of these two Cinderellas – one might be more *familiar* to children, but the other is certainly more understandable and relatable.

The Grimms' *Cinderella* may not be as widely popularized as Perrault's, nevertheless it still has the potential to be equally, if not more, influential in the development of gender and social roles. The gendered emphasis is not centered on beauty or expectations of social demureness, but on the more universal inner elements of piousness, patience, and ingenuity. These are elements which are not strictly linked to females, and therefore (despite the main character being a heroine) provide a social template for boys as well. Not everyone can achieve outward beauty or wish themselves to a ball, but neither the ball nor the prince are the driving motivation for the Grimms' Cinderella.

The deep connection between *Cinderella* and her mother lays the foundation for an emotionally-driven character who strives to better herself. As mentioned earlier, Perrault's Cinderella has no relationship or connection to her mother. In fact, there is no mention at all of Cinderella's mother in Perrault's tale, whereas in the Grimms' version, Cinderella's mother plays a central role – even through death. Already, the inclusion of parents adds a depth to the story which is lacking in the original French version. From the first few sentences of the Grimms' *Cinderella*, the reader is made clear of Cinderella's devotion to her mother, and the profound impact that her death had:

“The wife of a rich man fell ill, and as she felt that her end approaching, she called her only daughter to her bedside and said, ‘Dear child, be good and pious. Then the dear Lord shall always assist you, and I shall look down from heaven and take care of you.’ She then closed her eyes and departed.

After her mother's death the maiden went every day to visit her grave and weep, and she remained good and pious."

(Grimm & Grimm, 1857/2003, Location no. 2273)

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„Einem reichen Manne, dem wurde seine Frau krank, und als sie fühlte, daß ihr Ende herankam, rief sie ihr einziges Töchterlein zu sich ans Bett und sprach: „Liebes Kind, bleibe fromm und gut, so wird dir der liebe Gott immer beistehen, und ich will vom Himmel auf dich herabblicken, und will um dich sein." Darauf tat sie die Augen zu und verschied. Das Mädchen ging jeden Tag hinaus zu dem Grabe der Mutter und weinte, und blieb fromm und gut.“

(Grimm & Grimm, 1857/1957, p. 93)

The source of Cinderella's grace and kindness not only develops her more as a character, but also brings her back down to a more 'human' level – away from the untouchable, perfect princess society wishes to emulate. Typical of the Grimms' tales, there is also an emphasis on obeying one's parents, and being true to one's word. As well as further illustrating Cinderella's character, the Grimms elaborate further on the wicked traits of the two beautiful stepsisters. Not only were they vain and jealous, but they were eminently cruel and abusive, whereas Perrault's stepsisters were primarily self-centered and shallow. The Grimms' stepsisters are meant to be vehemently disliked by the readers, and while Perrault's stepsisters are far from pleasant, they remain relatable in a way that the Grimms' do not.

During their preschool years, children are just beginning to gain the ability to understand concepts in the abstract, making the *actions* of characters more cognitively assessable than verbal descriptions of their qualities. Children are able to mentally visualize what is happening in the character's storybook world, but they are still very limited in their conception of the mind. Preschool age children are beginning to understand that other individuals have their *own* thoughts and feelings which are different from the child's own, so it is helpful to have stories which do well in linking the thoughts and feelings of a character to the outside world. *Why* was

Perrault's Cinderella so gracious – *why* was she not bitter, and angry with her stepsisters or with her father? These are questions which are never explicitly answered or alluded to in Perrault's tale, and it leaves the character of Cinderella as a bit of a mystery. The Grimms' Cinderella, however, is placed in a world which provides *context* for her behavior, and she is also more sharply contrasted with her stepmother and stepsisters, as she is depicted not only as acting kind and gracious, but as someone whose *intentions* and *essence* are notably more pure. An example of this contrast between Cinderella and her stepsisters is illustrated well early on in the story:

“One day it happened that her father was going to the fair and asked his two stepdaughters what he could bring them.

‘Beautiful dresses,’ said one.

‘Pearls and jewels,’ said the other.

‘And you, Cinderella?’ he asked, ‘What do you want?’

‘Father,’ she said, ‘just break off the first twig that brushes against your hat on your way home and bring it to me.’

So he bought beautiful dresses, pearls, and jewels for the two stepsisters, and as he was riding through some green bushes on his return journey, a hazel twig brushed against him and knocked off his hat. So he broke off that twig and took it with him. When he arrived home he gave his stepdaughters what they had requested, and Cinderella received the twig from the hazel bush. She thanked him, went to her mother's grave, planted the twig on it, and wept so hard that the tears fell on the twig and watered it. Soon the twig grew and quickly became a beautiful tree.”

(Grimm & Grimm, 1857/2003, Location no. 2273/2293)

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„Es trug sich zu, daß der Vater einmal in die Messe ziehen wollte, da fragte er die beiden Stieftöchter, was er ihnen mitbringen sollte.

„Schöne Kleider,‘ sagte die eine, ‚Perlen und Edelsteine,‘ die zweite. ‚Aber du, Aschenputtel,‘ sprach er, ‚was willst du haben?‘ – ‚Vater, das erste Reis, das Euch auf Eurem Heimweg an den Hut stößt, das brecht für mich ab!‘

Er kaufte nun für die beiden Stiefschwestern schöne Kleider, Perlen und Edelsteine, und auf dem Rückweg, als er durch einen grünen Busch ritt, streifte ihn ein Haselreis und stieß ihm den Hut ab. Da brach er das Reis ab und nahm es mit. Als er nach Haus kam, gab er den Stieftöchtern, was sie sich gewünscht hatten, und dem Aschenputtel gab er das Reis von dem Haselbusch. Aschenputtel dankte ihm, ging zu seiner Mutter Grab und pflanzte das Reis darauf, und weinte so sehr, daß die Tränen darauf niederfielen und es begossen. Es wuchs aber und ward ein schöner Baum."

(Grimm & Grimm, 1857/1957, p. 94)

Here is a clear illustration of Cinderella's pure intentions – planting a tree at her mother's grave – far from any thoughts of attending a ball or wooing a prince. Of interest is the more prominent role of Cinderella's father and the clear mention of her deceased mother. There are hardly any mentions of Cinderella's father in Perrault's version, and there is no mention at all of Cinderella's mother, who plays a prominent role in the Grimms' *Cinderella*.

As well as being clearer about the source of Cinderella's motivation to be kind and good, the Grimms provided far more elaboration on the wickedness of the stepsister, and their abuse of Cinderella.

"Why should the stupid goose should be allowed to sit in the parlor with us?' they said. 'Whoever who wants to eat bread must earn it. Out with this kitchen maid!'

They took away her beautiful clothes, dressed her in an old gray smock, and gave her wooden shoes.

'Just look at the proud princess, and how decked out she is!' they exclaimed with laughter, and led her into the kitchen.

They expected her to work hard there from morning till night. She had to get up before dawn, carry the water into the house, make the fire, cook, and wash. Besides this, her sisters did everything imaginable to cause her grief and make her look ridiculous. For instance, they poured peas and into the hearth ashes so had to sit there and pick them out. In the evening, when she was exhausted from working, they took away her bed, and she had to lie next to the hearth in the ashes. This is why she always looked so dusty and dirty and why they called her Cinderella."

(Grimm & Grimm, 1857/2003, Location no. 2273)

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„Soll die dumme Gans bei uns in der Stube sitzen!' sprachen sie, ‚wer Brot essen will, muß verdienen: hinaus mit der Küchenmagd!'

Sie nahmen ihm seine schönen Kleider weg, zogen ihm einen grauen, alten Kittel an und gaben ihm hölzerne Schuhe.

„Seht einmal die stolze Prinzessin, wie sie geputzt ist!“ riefen sie, lachten und führten es in die Küche.

Da mußte es von Morgen bis Abend schwere Arbeit tun, früh vor Tag aufstehen, Wasser tragen, Feuer anmachen, kochen und waschen. Obendrein taten ihm die Schwestern alles ersinnliche Herzeleid an, verspotteten es und schütteten ihm die Erbsen und Linsen in die Asche, so daß es sitzen und sie wieder auslesen mußte. Abends, wenn es sich müde gearbeitet hatte, kam es in kein Bett, sondern mußte sich neben den Herd in die Asche legen. Und weil es darum immer staubig und schmutzig aussah, nannten sie es Aschenputtel.“

(Grimm & Grimm, 1857/1957, p. 94)

Cinderella's humiliation is palpable, going far beyond the simple description of house chores in Perrault's original version, where she "endured everything patiently, not daring to complain" (Perrault, 1697/1961, p. 55-56). The stepsisters in Perrault's version may have mocked Cinderella and lived a significantly more luxurious life, but even they had moments of compassion which made them sympathetic characters. The Grimms also go into vivid detail about Cinderella's everyday life, describing all her laborious chores and her subsequent exhaustion. In addition to this narrative, the Grimms also took care to illustrate Cinderella's continuing devotion to her mother, despite her living conditions.

“Three times every day Cinderella would go and sit beneath it [her mother's grave] and weep and pray, and each time, a little white bird would also come to the tree. Whenever Cinderella expressed a wish, the bird would throw her whatever she had requested.

(Grimm & Grimm, 1857/2003, Location no. 2293)

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„Aschenputtel ging alle Tage dreimal darunter, weinte und betete, und allemal kam ein weißes Vöglein auf den Baum, und wenn es einen Wunsch aussprach, so warf ihm das Vöglein herab, was es sich gewünscht hatte.“

(Grimm & Grimm, 1857/1957, p. 94)

The intertwining of Cinderella's suffering and her continuing love for her mother make her depth of character much more palpable. It is also important to take note of her connection to the natural world around her: her planting of the Hazel tree, which grew because of her tears, and her connection to the little white bird at her mother's grave. These natural elements are in place of the fairy godmother in Perrault's Cinderella. The magic is still there, however instead of passively receiving her wish from a fairy godmother, the Grimms' Cinderella has agency and is the center of her magic. Her own graciousness, love, devotion, and most importantly, *voice*, are what make her wishes possible. In addition to granting more consequence to Cinderella's innate good nature, the elimination of the fairy godmother makes Cinderella her own independent savior in a way. She possesses the drive and ingenuity to get herself to the ball rather than giving up.

In Perrault's *Cinderella*, she never bothered to ask to go to the ball, simply stating to her stepsisters, "Ah, but you find young ladies are laughing at me. It would be no place for me" (Perrault 1697/1961, p. 56), and then weeping until her fairy godmother came. Even then Perrault's Cinderella could not find the strength to voice her own wish to go to the ball, only being able to utter: "I should like – I should like –" (Perrault, 1697/1961, p. 57). The Grimms' Cinderella asked, and asked, and asked to go to the ball. Her stepmother made impossible demands, believing that this would deter Cinderella, but her determination was so great that she was able to call upon the birds she had made friends with to help her.

*"Cinderella obeyed but wept, because she too would have liked to go to the ball with them, and so she asked her stepmother for permission to go...
When Cinderella kept pleading, her stepmother finally said, 'I've emptied a bowlful of lentils into the ashes. If you can pick out all the lentils in two hours, you may have my permission to go.'
The maiden went through the back door into the garden, and cried out, 'Oh, you tame pigeons, you turtledoves, and all you birds under heaven, come and help me pick*

*the good ones for the little pot
the bad ones for your little crop.'”*

(Grimm & Grimm, 1857/2003, Location no. 2293)

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„Aschenputtel gehorchte, weinte aber, weil es auch gern zum Tanz mitgegangen wäre, und bat die Stiefmutter, sie möchte es ihm erlauben...

Als es aber mit Bitten anhielt, sprach sie endlich: ‚Da habe ich dir eine Schüssel Linsen in die Asche geschüttet, wenn du die Linsen in zwei Stunden wieder ausgelesen hast, so sollst du mitgehen.‘

Das Mädchen ging durch die Hintertür nach dem Garten und rief: ‚Ihr zahmen Täubchen, ihr Turteltäubchen, all ihr Vöglein unter dem Himmel, kommt und helft mir lesen,

Die guten ins Töpfchen,

Die schlechten ins Kröpfchen.‘“

(Grimm & Grimm, 1857/1957, p. 95)

She did this again when her stepmother then demanded that she pick *two* bowls of lentils out of the ashes in *one* hour. When she was denied again, and her stepmother and stepsisters left without her, she went back to the Hazel tree at her mother's grave and said: “shake and wobble, little tree! Let gold and silver fall all over me” (Grimm & Grimm, 1857/2003, Location no. 2312) ~ „Bäumchen, rüttel dich und schüttel dich, wirf Gold und Silber über mich“ (Grimm & Grimm, 1857/1957, p. 96). This level of independence and cunning is something which sets the Grimms' character of Cinderella apart from Perrault's. She does not wait for her fairy godmother to come and save her, rather she takes it upon herself to get what she needs. This difference is especially important for young children, as in the 'real world,' wishes aren't granted without a bit of work beforehand. If all this Cinderella had done was throw herself down and weep, she would have never made it to the ball.

The emphasis on Cinderella's independence and strength of character is continued as she has to thrice evade the Prince's advances in order to get home before her stepmother and stepsisters.

“She danced well into the night, and when she wanted to go home, the prince said, ‘I’ll go along and escort you,’ for he wanted to see whose daughter the beautiful maiden was. But she managed to slip away from him and got into her father’s dovecote. Now the prince waited until her father came, and he told him that the unknown maiden had escaped into his dovecote. The old man thought, Could that be Cinderella? And he had an ax and pick brought to him so he could chop it down. However, no one was inside, and when they went into the house, Cinderella was lying in the ashes in her dirty clothes, and a dim little oil lamp was burning on the mantel of the chimney. Cinderella had swiftly jumped out of the back of the dovecote and run to the hazel tree. There she had taken off the beautiful clothes and laid them on the grave. After the bird had taken them away, she had made her way into the kitchen, where she had seated herself in the gray ashes wearing her gray smock.”

(Grimm & Grimm, 1857/2003, Location no. 2312/2329)

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„Es tanzte bis es Abend war, da wollte es nach Hause gehen. Der Königssohn aber sprach: ‚Ich gehe mit und begleite dich,‘ denn er wollte sehen, wem das schöne Mädchen angehörte. Sie entwischte ihm aber und sprang in das Taubenhaus. Nun wartete der Königssohn, bis der Vater kam, und sagte ihm, das fremde Mädchen wär in das Taubenhaus gesprungen. Der Alte dachte: ‚Sollte es Aschenputtel sein?‘ und sie mussten ihm Axt und Hacken bringen, damit er das Taubenhaus entzweischlagen konnte; aber es war niemand darin. Und als sie ins Haus kamen, lag Aschenputtel in seinen schmutzigen Kleidern in der Asche, und ein trübes Öllämpchen brannte im Schornstein; denn Aschenputtel war geschwind aus dem Taubenhaus hinten herabgesprungen, und war zu dem Haselbäumchen gelaufen: da hatte es die schönen Kleider abgezogen und aufs Grab gelegt, und der Vogel hatte sie wieder weggenommen, und dann hatte es sich in seinem grauen Kittelchen in die Küche zur Asche gesetzt.“

(Grimm & Grimm, 1857/1957, p. 97)

On the second evening, Cinderella evaded the Prince again by running into the gardens.

“When evening came and she wished to leave, the prince followed her, wanting to see which house she went into, but she ran away from him and disappeared into the garden behind the house. There she went to a beautiful tall tree covered with the most wonderful pears, and she climbed up into the branches as nimbly as a squirrel. The prince did not know where she had gone, so he waited until her father came and said, ‘The unknown maiden has slipped away from me, and I think she climbed the pear tree.’ The father thought, Can that be Cinderella? And he had an ax brought to him and chopped the tree down, but there was no one in it. When they went into the kitchen, Cinderella was lying in the ashes as usual, for she had jumped down on the other side of the tree, brought the

beautiful clothes back to the bird, and put on her gray smock.”

(Grimm & Grimm, 1857/2003, Location no. 2329)

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„Als es nun Abend war, wollte es fort, und der Königssohn ging ihm nach und wollte sehen, in welches Haus es ging: aber es sprang ihm fort und in den Garten hinter dem Haus. Darin stand ein schöner großer Baum, an dem die herrlichsten Birnen hingen, es kletterte so behend wie ein Eichhörnchen zwischen die Äste, und der Königssohn wusste nicht, wo es hingekommen war. Er wartete aber, bis der Vater kam, und sprach zu ihm: ‚Das fremde Mädchen ist mir entwischt, und ich glaube, es ist auf den Birnbaum gesprungen.‘ Der Vater dachte: ‚Sollte es Aschenputtel sein?‘ ließ sich die Axt holen und hieb den Baum um, aber es war niemand darauf. Und als sie in die Küche kamen, lag Aschenputtel da in der Asche, wie sonst auch, denn es war auf der andern Seite vom Baum herabgesprungen, hatte dem Vogel auf dem Haselbäumchen die schönen Kleider wiedergebracht und sein graues Kittelchen angezogen.“

(Grimm & Grimm, 1857/1957, p. 97-98)

The third evening, Cinderella was too quick for the Prince yet again, but expecting her flight, he had covered the stairs in pitch causing her to lose a shoe on her way home.

At this point in the Grimms' tale, Cinderella has seen notably more action than in Perrault's tale. Here, the reader is able to see that she is *more* than a beautiful, kind young woman. She is tenacious, clever, and has a will and voice of her own – one that even the handsome Prince cannot sway. This depiction of an independent and cunning heroine is vastly different from the Cinderella most children are familiar with. The messages embedded in Perrault's *Cinderella* are centered on submissiveness, dependence, and physical beauty. The Grimms created a Cinderella who took her destiny into her own hands, used her speech in powerful ways, and had the ingenuity and strength of character to overcome the abuse of her stepsisters. She leans back against the unjustness in the world rather than giving in to it, and she gives readers the opportunity to experience a full range of emotions in relation to her character. Bottigheimer (1987) artfully stated: “At its most powerful, conjuring power resides within the conjurer, who generates her own incantation rather than having it prescribed for her” (p. 42). The

inclusion of the Grimms' version of *Cinderella* into the typical curricular reading material would provide at least one example of a classic heroine who was not dependent on her beauty, and who was able to achieve her goals through her own ingenuity and resourcefulness.

A Fairy Tale Ending

The characterization of Cinderella is not the only significant difference between Perrault's tale and the Grimms' tale. What many individuals typically associate with Grimms' fairy tales are their propensity for including more graphic and violent scenes than their altered counterparts. The typical fairy tale ending of *happily ever after*, though not unheard of in the Grimms' tales, is certainly not a criterion of the genera. Arguably, the endings between these two versions of *Cinderella* could not be more polarized: Perrault illustrates the familiar *happily ever after* ending, while the Grimms present a harsh depiction of karmic justice.

Perrault, in keeping with his moral emphasis on *graciousness*, portrays Cinderella as a forgiving and loving sister. Upon realizing that Cinderella is the mysterious princess who had been attending the ball, her stepsisters instantly plead her forgiveness, which she grants the instant they ask.

"The two sisters recognized her for the beautiful person whom they had seen at the ball, and threw themselves at her feet, begging her pardon for all the ill-treatment she had suffered at their hands.

Cinderella raised them, and declaring as she embraced them that she pardoned them with all her heart, bade them well in the future ... She set aside apartments in the palace for her two sisters, and married them the very same day to two gentlemen of high rank about the Court."

(Perrault, 1697/1961, p. 64)

What could potentially be a concerning element here is the illusion that the stepsisters are repenting only because they are suddenly aware of that Cinderella is the beautiful woman they had admired, and not because they recognized the true error of their ways. Would they have ever

stopped mistreating Cinderella or pleaded forgiveness had the Prince not fallen for her? The ending here is almost too simple, and the graciousness and instantaneous forgiveness which Cinderella displays, while certainly admirable and fitting with Perrault's moral, is not realistic. In fact, the lack of punishment for the stepsisters, especially given the fact that they are actually rewarded by Cinderella in the end, sends conflicting messages, and illustrates that there are no consequences for wicked actions.

The Grimms' tales are unique within the fairy tale genre in that they are typically more revealing about the harsh truths of reality. Uncomfortable elements are not overly sugarcoated or eliminated, and characters' actions *always* have consequences – whether they be good or bad. Perrault's Cinderella was kind and gracious, and she was well rewarded, however her stepsisters' cruelty and frivolity went unpunished – and in the end they got exactly what they wanted as well. Cinderella's behavior provides a good reward model, however, for children reading Perrault's story, there is not real incentive *not* to be like the stepsisters (other than that they were simply unsavory characters). An individual would already have to possess a level of personal accountability and compassion to connect to Cinderella's character and inherently *dislike* the stepsisters.

The Grimm brothers make no such assumption about their readers. In addition to the more blatant cruelty of the stepsisters, the Grimms clearly illustrated the tremendous lengths that the stepsisters were willing to go to in order to lie and cheat to get what they wanted. The fact that Cinderella's lost shoe did not fit did nothing to deter either sister or their mother, and their envy and spite was so great that they were willing to mutilate themselves to win the Prince's favor and the inevitable wealth and status which came with it.

“The oldest took the shoes into a room to try it on, and her mother stood by her side. However, the shoe was too small for her, and she could not get her big toe into it. So her

mother handed her a knife and said, 'Cut your tow off. Once you become queen, you won't have to walk anymore.'

The maiden cut her toe off, forced her foot into the shoe, swallowed the pain, and went out to the prince...

"Then the second sister went into a room and was fortunate enough to get all her toes in, but her heel was too large. So her mother handed her a knife and said, 'Cut off a piece of your heel. Once you become queen, you won't have to walk anymore.'

The maiden cut off a piece of her heel, forced her foot into the shoe, swallowed the pain, and went out to the prince. "

(Grimm & Grimm, 1857/2003, Location no. 2347)

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„Die älteste ging mit dem Schuh in die Kammer und wollte ihn anprobieren, und die Mutter stand dabei. Aber sie konnte mit der großen Zehe nicht hineinkommen, und der Schuh war ihr zu klein, da reichte ihr die Mutter ein Messer und sprach: ‚Hau die Zehe ab: wenn du Königin bist, so brauchst du nicht mehr zu Fuß zu gehen.‘

Das Mädchen hieb die Zehe ab, zwängte den Fuß in den Schuh, verbiss den Schmerz und ging hinaus zum Königssohn...

Da ging diese in die Kammer und kam mit den Zehen glücklich in den Schuh, aber die Ferse war zu groß. Da reichte ihr die Mutter ein Messer und sprach: ‚Hau ein Stück von der Ferse ab: wann du Königin bist, brauchst du nicht mehr zu Fuß gehen.‘

Das Mädchen hieb ein Stück von der Ferse ab, zwängte den Fuß in den Schuh, verbiss den Schmerz und ging heraus zum Königssohn.“

(Grimm & Grimm, 1857/1957, p. 97-98)

These scenes, as initially shocking as they may seem, are simply further illustrations of the vast differences between Cinderella and her stepsisters. They also serve to paint the stepsisters as thoroughly cruel and wicked with no capacity for remorse. The reader up unto this point has been able to experience Cinderella's own creative ingenuity, her devotion, and her piety, however, *here* the contrast becomes even starker. The true darkness within the stepsisters becomes apparent, making the light and good qualities in Cinderella all the more profound. Certain elements become much clearer and more assessable when they are paired with their counterparts: good and evil, darkness and light, joy and sorrow, etc.

The striking differences between the fates of Perrault's stepsisters and the Grimms' stepsisters do not end here. As mentioned earlier, in Perrault's text the stepsisters are happily set up in royal apartments and married to wealthy gentlemen in the Court. In the Grimms' text, the stepsisters are still trying to win favor with Cinderella, but their actions are still ultimately selfish.

“When the bridal couple set out for the church, the oldest sister was on the right, the younger on the left. Suddenly the pigeons pecked out one eye from each of them. And as they came back from the church later on the oldest was on the left and the youngest on the right, and the pigeons pecked out the other eye from each sister. Thus they were punished with blindness for the rest of their lives due to their wickedness and malice.”
(Grimm & Grimm, 1857/2003, Location no. 2366)

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„Als die Hochzeit mit dem Königssohn sollte gehalten werden, kamen die falschen Schwestern, wollten sich einschmeicheln und teil an seinem Glück nehmen. Als die Brautleute nun zur Kirche gingen, war die älteste zur rechten, die jüngste zur linken Seite: da pickten die Tauben einer jeden das eine Auge aus. Hernach, als sie herausgingen, war die älteste zur linken und die jüngste zur rechten: da pickten die Tauben einer jeden das andere Auge aus. Und waren sie also für ihre Bosheit und Falschheit mit Blindheit auf ihr Lebtag bestraft“
(Grimm & Grimm, 1857/1957, p. 99)

It is passages such as these which tend to deter many parents and educators away from the traditional Grimm versions of tales. As gruesome as they may be, these types of passages are designed as a deterrent for selfish and malicious behavior, and they are really not any more ‘violent’ or ‘graphic’ than other stories or forms of children’s media. The simultaneous presentation of good and evil in a balanced way allows children to achieve more independent judgments. Knowing that reality is, by nature, pluralistic, the ability to critically evaluate one’s environment and make independent judgments is crucial. The variety of consequences and events in the Grimms’ tales are an excellent way to expose children to *controlled* violence and fears. Part of the lure and enchantment of fairy tales is the subtle hardness which comes from

fear and violence being woven into the storylines. Without these elements, fairy tales lose much of what sets them apart as a unique genera in the world of literature. (Boudinot, 2007)

Challenging the Beauty Ideal

As illustrated throughout this chapter, one of the most challenging hurdles to overcome when searching for feminine models in fairy tales is that of the beauty ideal. Normative expectations of feminine beauty are maintained through various cultural products – such as fairy tales (Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz, 2003). Today's media is saturated with messages celebrating the virtues of physical attractiveness. The pervasiveness of the beauty industry is astounding – just think of the popularity of cult TV shows such as *Toddlers in Tiaras*! Most parents will try to instill in children that they shouldn't get caught up in appearances – that beauty is only skin deep, and that we should never judge a book by its cover; but these lessons are overshadowed by the bombardment of counter-messages coming from society, elevating the pursuit of beauty to a high art (Cashdan, 1999).

When media and culture is so full of messages equating beauty to virtue and success, how then do fairy tales combat this? Stories such as *Cinderella* are a challenge, even with the independence of character which the Grimms' *Cinderella* displays; but there are a myriad of stories in the Grimms' collection which provide clearer delineations between *beauty* and *vanity* - take *Snow White* for instance. Stories like the Grimms' *Snow White* teach that overinvestment in one's appearance ultimately leads to self-destruction. The temptation of vanity is illustrated both in the wicked stepmother *and* in *Snow White* herself. Both of these characters are challenged, and while one succumbs and suffers greatly for it, the other is able to prevail. When heroes and heroines are tempted and challenged in stories, they instantly become more relatable. No one is truly as loving and kind as Perrault's *Cinderella* – so including allusions to the darker

sides of our beloved fairy tale characters provides children with the encouragement and motivation to confront and combat sides of themselves which are difficult to counter with other means (Cashdan, 1999).

The most overt place to start in *Snow White* when exploring the dangers of vanity is with the wicked stepmother. Both in the Grimms' version, and in the popular Disney adaptation, the stepmother is depicted as shallow, vain, and consumed by jealousy.

“When a year had passed, the king married another woman, who was beautiful but proud and haughty, and she could not tolerate anyone else who might rival her beauty. She had a magic mirror and often she stood in front of it, looked at herself, and said:

*‘Mirror, mirror, on the wall,
who in this realm is the fairest of all?’*

Then the mirror would answer;

‘You, my queen, are the fairest of all.’

(Grimm & Grimm, 1857/2003, Location no. 4215)

~

„Über ein Jahr nahm sich der König eine andere Gemahlin. Es war eine schöne Frau, aber sie war stolz und übermütig und konnte nicht leiden, daß sie an Schönheit von jemand sollte übertroffen werden. Sie hatte einen wunderbaren Spiegel wenn sie vor den trat und sich darin beschaute, sprach sie:

*„Spieglein, Spieglein an der Wand,
Wer ist die Schönste im ganzen Land?’*

so antwortete der Spiegel:

„Frau Königin, Ihr seid die Schönste im Land.“

(Grimm & Grimm, 1857/1957, p. 189)

This fits well with the popularized image of the wicked stepmother, and it echoes back to the motif of mirrors as symbols of vanity as seen in Perrault's *Cinderella*: “They broke more than a dozen laces through drawing their stays tight in order to make their waists more slender, and they were perpetually in front of a mirror” (Perrault, 1697/1961, p. 56). Whereas these stepsisters were inexorably shallow, vain, and self-absorbed, they were not consumed and corrupted in the same way as the wicked stepmother.

*“One day when the queen asked her mirror:
‘Mirror, mirror, on the wall,
who in this realm is the fairest of all?’*

The mirror answered:

*‘You my queen, may have a beauty quite rare,
but Snow White is a thousand times more fair.’*

The queen shuddered and became yellow and green with envy. From that hour on, her hate for the girl was so great that her heart throbbed and turned in her breast each time she saw Snow White. Like weeds, the envy and arrogance grew so dense in her heart that she no longer had any peace, day or night. Finally, she summoned a huntsman and said, ‘Take the child out into the forest. I never want to lay eyes on her again. You are to kill her and to bring me back her lungs and liver as proof of your deed.’”

(Grimm & Grimm, 1857/2003 ,Location no. 4225)

~

„Als diese einmal ihren Spiegel fragte:

*„Spieglein, Spieglein an der Wand,
Wer ist die Schönste im ganzen Land?’*

so antwortete er:

*„Frau Königin, Ihr seid die Schönste hier,
Aber Schneewittchen ist tausendmal schöner als Ihr.“*

Da erschrak die Königin und ward gelb und grün vor Neid. Von Stund an, wenn sie Schneewittchen erblickte, kehrte sich ihr das Herz im Leibe herum - so haßte sie das Mädchen. Und der Neid und Hochmut wuchsen wie ein Unkraut in ihrem Herzen immer höher, daß sie Tag und Nacht keine Ruhe mehr hatte. Da rief sie einen Jäger und sprach: "Bring das Kind hinaus in den Wald, ich will's nicht mehr vor meinen Augen sehen. Du sollst es töten und mir Lunge und Leber zum Wahrzeichen mitbringen.“

(Grimm & Grimm, 1857/1957, p. 189-190)

What is important here in the Grimms' version which was not apparent in Perrault's *Cinderella*, is that vanity and envy have the power to corrupt and lead to evil. The stepsisters were never punished for their cruelty and consuming vanity, and while certainly not intention, this strengthens the message that striving for beauty will ultimately lead to reward.

Another important commonality between Perrault's stepsisters and vanity in *Snow White* are the laces and corsets, and emphasis on shaping oneself to become more alluring. This is also where the Grimms' tale diverges from the well-loved Disney movie with which most individuals are familiar. In Disney's movie, the wicked stepmother only ventures to see Snow-white in the forest once, and is successful in tempting her with the poisonous apple. In the Grimms' tale, however, there are *three* attempts on Snow White's life after she is sent into the forest; the first being with staylaces.

“As long as Snow White was the fairest in the realm, the queen's envy would leave her no peace. Finally, she thought up a plan. She painted her face and dressed up as an old peddler woman so that nobody could recognize her. Then she crossed the seven mountains in this disguise and arrived at the cottage of the seven dwarfs, where she knocked at the door and cried out, ‘Pretty ware for sale! Pretty wares!’

Snow White looked out the window and called out, ‘Good day, dear woman, what do you have for sale?’

‘Nice and pretty things! Staylaces in all kinds of colors!’ she replied and took out a lace woven from silk of many different colors.

I can certainly let this honest woman inside, Snow White thought. She unbolted the door and bought the pretty lace. ‘My goodness, child! What a sight you are!’ said the old woman. ‘Come, I’ll lace you up properly for once.’

Snow White did not suspect anything, so she stood in front of the old woman and let herself be laced with the new staylace. However, the old woman laced her so quickly and so tightly that Snow White lost her breath and fell down as if dead.”

(Grimm & Grimm, 1857/2003, Location no. 4270)

~

„Und da sann und sann sie aufs neue, wie sie es umbringen wollte; denn so lange sie nicht die Schönste war im ganzen Land, ließ ihr der Neid keine Ruhe. Und als sie sich endlich etwas ausgedacht hatte, färbte sie sich das Gesicht und kleidete sich wie eine alte Krämerin und war ganz unkenntlich. In dieser Gestalt ging sie über die sieben Berge zu den sieben Zwergen, klopfte an die Türe und rief: ‚Schöne Ware feil! feil!‘

Schneewittchen guckte zum Fenster hinaus und rief: ‚Guten Tag, liebe Frau! Was habt Ihr zu verkaufen?‘

- ‚Gute Ware,‘ antwortete sie, ‚Schnürriemen von allen Farben,‘ und holte einen hervor, der aus bunter Seide geflochten war.

Die ehrliche Frau kann ich hereinlassen, dachte Schneewittchen, riegelte die Türe auf und kaufte sich den hübschen Schnürriemen. „Kind,“ sprach die Alte, „wie du aussiehst! Komm, ich will dich einmal ordentlich schnüren.“

Schneewittchen hatte kein Arg, stellte sich vor sie und ließ sich mit dem neuen Schnürriemen schnüren. Aber die Alte schnürte geschwind und schnürte so fest, daß dem Schneewittchen der Atem verging und es für tot hinfiel. „Nun bist du die Schönste gewesen,“ sprach sie und eilte hinaus.“

(Grimm & Grimm, 1857/1957, p. 192)

Here, Snow-white is tempted by the same vanity that consumes her stepmother, and it is nearly her undoing. Little innocent Snow-white did not open the door for the old woman out of mere curiosity, but because she knows that these laces would make her more attracting. Her trials do not end here though, and she is tempted yet again when the wicked stepmother returns.

“This time I’m going to think of something that will destroy her,” she said, and by using all the witchcraft at her command, she made a poison comb. Then she again disguised herself as an old woman and crossed the seven mountains to the cottage of the seven dwarfs, where she knocked at the door and cried out, ‘Pretty wares for sale! Pretty wares!’

Snow White looked out the window and said, “Go away! I’m not allowed to let anyone in.”

‘But surely you’re allowed to look,’ said the old woman, and she took out the poison comb and held it up in the air. The comb pleased the girl so much that she let herself be carried away and opened the door. After they agreed on the price, the old woman said, ‘Now I’ll give you a proper combing for once.’

Poor Snow White did not give this a second thought and let the old woman do as she wished. But no sooner did the comb touch her hair than the poison began to take effect, and the maiden fell to the ground and lay there unconscious.

‘You paragon of beauty!’ said the wicked woman. ‘Now you’re finished!’ And she went away.”

(Grimm & Grimm, 1857/2003, Location no. 4288)

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“Nun aber,“ sprach sie, „will ich etwas aussinnen, das dich zugrunde richten soll,“ und mit Hexenkünsten, die sie verstand, machte sie einen giftigen Kamm. Dann verkleidete sie sich und nahm die Gestalt eines anderen alten Weibes an. So ging sie hin über die sieben Berge zu den sieben Zwergen, klopfte an die Türe und rief: „Gute Ware feil! feil!“

Schneewittchen schaute heraus und sprach: „Geht nur weiter, ich darf niemand hereinlassen!“

- ,Das Ansehen wird dir doch erlaubt sein, ' sprach die Alte, zog den giftigen Kamm heraus und hielt ihn in die Höhe. Da gefiel er dem Kinde so gut, daß es sich betören ließ und die Türe öffnete. Als sie des Kaufs einig waren, sprach die Alte: ,Nun will ich dich einmal ordentlich kämmen. '

Das arme Schneewittchen dachte an nichts, ließ die Alte gewähren, aber kaum hatte sie den Kamm in die Haare gesteckt, als das Gift darin wirkte und das Mädchen ohne Besinnung niederfiel.

,Du Ausbund von Schönheit, ' sprach das boshafte Weib, ,jetzt ist's um dich geschehen, ' und ging fort. "

(Grimm & Grimm, 1857/1957, p. 193)

Even after the incident with the laces, and being thoroughly warned by the dwarfs not to let *anyone* in the cottage, Snow White cannot resist the allure of the comb – another apparatus of vanity. Again, she almost loses her life because of the consuming impulse to look her best, providing a clear message that beauty is *not* the ultimate goal, and can, in fact, be a dangerous endeavor.

Of course we are all familiar with the third trial Snow White faces when she is offered a bite of the poisonous apple. When this time the dwarfs cannot bring her back to life, they choose to place her in a glass coffin – one last echo of the vanity motif as Snow White will continue – even in death – to be valued and cherished for her beauty. This is a point in the tale which reverts back to viewing women as passive objects – the prince, enamored by Snow White's beauty, merely wants to possess her and keep her as a beautiful object to display. There is no deep love or devotion leading to the life-saving kiss which concludes the Disney movie, instead it is only an accident which befalls one of the prince's servants which brings Snow White back to life. As they are carrying away the glass coffin, one of the servants trips, causing the piece of poison apple to dislodge allowing Snow White to awaken. This is decidedly less romantic than the Disney version, and paints the prince in a much less flattering light. He basically *purchases* Snow White as he would a piece of art. Not necessarily a message we aim to

impart on today's young girls. This of course points to the need for discourse along with the reading of these tales!

While *Snow White* might be failing insofar as displaying an independent and skillfully imaginative female protagonist (like the Grimms' portrayal of Cinderella), it does well in providing tools to combat the all-too-common feminine beauty ideal. *Snow White* challenges the 'pursuit of beauty' which occupies a central role in many women's lives. As beauty and appearance remain one of the primary vehicles through which adolescent girls and young women gain social status and self-esteem, it is important to define other modes of building identity and self-esteem early in childhood. Girls often equate *feeling good* with *looking good* – a juxtaposition which is constantly reinforced by society. This can be seen even in which fairy tales become popularized, as the number of times women's beauty is mentioned in a romantic tale has a strong positive correlation to the number of times that tale has been reproduced. This is not surprising considering the general makeup of the content of fairy tales. Baker-Sperry and Grauerholz (2003) found through coding and analyzing, that the number of references to men's physical appearance ranges from 0-35 per story, while the range for references to women's physical appearance is much larger: 0-114 (p. 771).

Concluding Discussion

The importance of fairy tales lies both within their original content and within their ability to remain relevant focal points of social discourse. Fairy tales are *historical documents* which evolve in meaning according to shifting societal values (Parsons, 2004), and as such, the approach to their use in children's education should be constantly reexamined. The idea that literary fairy tales have somehow become obsolete with the cultural suffusion of Disney is naïve. More so than ever, children are surrounded by the vestiges of fairy tale culture and the romantic

ideal. This is one of the many reasons that introducing social discourse in young children's classrooms is vital for maintaining healthy perspectives on gender roles.

Cinderella is a fascinating example to analyze given the various disparate adaptations. The stark comparison between Perrault's *Cinderella* and the Grimms' *Cinderella* make the elements concerning gender and self-autonomy all the more apparent. The common themes of romance, virtue, and beauty can be found in the majority of the canon tales – both in Perrault's and the Grimms' collections. More often than not, beauty is equated with purity and virtue, however, the offense of vanity comes with its own fair share of cautioning as seen in *Snow White*. When these two elements are present in the same tale, it provides a much more balanced message about the connection between superficial image and intrinsic virtue. In too many tales, the message is that reward – for instance the happily ever after with a prince – is the result of the heroine's submission and quiet suffering, along with her beauty, rather than her inner strength and agency. *This* is the why differences between these versions of *Cinderella*, and the highlighting of the negative consequences of vanity in *Snow White*, are so important when it comes to gender development.

Perrault's *Cinderella* is embedded with messages lauding the merits of demureness and silence – encouraging young girls to strive to attain beauty rather than independence. Fairy tales are important guides to helping children adopt certain goals and desires, which is why enabling discourse, and allowing children to question the messages in fairy tales is so essential. Allowing access to alternative discourses which challenge the dominant patriarchal ideology is a method which serves to both broaden children's conception of appropriate gender behavior (Parsons, 2004), as well as infusing these centuries-old tales with new life and purpose. One might question the continued use of tales which perpetuate outdated gender stereotypes (such as the

prince's desire to possess Snow White for her beauty), however, simply reformulating traditional fairy tales to better reflect modern ideals cannot change the deeply embedded gender binary and power hierarchy which exists in today's society. As Parsons (2004) explains, a simple role reversal, shifting the feminine to the masculine and vice versa, presents as comedic rather than empowering and realistic. They lack the subtlety needed to most effectively challenge ingrained stereotypes. This subtlety can be achieved through providing traditionally submissive heroine figures with a strong voice and agency. This allows for a level of self-discovery that is often lacking in typical romantic tales – encouraging children to strive for personal development rather than material gain.

The canonical heterosexual romantic storyline which underlies most fairy tales is so much a part of our popular culture that it is nearly impossible to read and write outside of it (Parsons, 2004). This is why texts must be challenged based on the discourses available. These discourses allow for organization, understanding, and explanation of everyday experiences – such as the construction of gender norms. Children need access to different types of discourse in order to challenge problematic storylines and to broaden their mental conception of what is masculine versus feminine (and if those distinctions even really matter). Studies have confirmed that once children have the discursive background necessary to do so, they are able to resist the pull of the dominant (in this case, patriarchal) discourse, and question the traditional storylines when needed (Parsons, 2004). This is not an ability that would be expected of preschool-age children, however, in order to build and establish the aforementioned discursive background, young children must be introduced and repeatedly exposed to different types of discourse and thinking – hence the introduction of Grimms' tales into the preschool classroom.

If parents and educators are attentive and diligent in how they choose to present fairy tales to children, the *dominant discourse* that is established early on need not be one deeply rooted in patriarchal stereotypes. This would make challenging the dominant themes and stereotypes presented by the media and society a much more achievable endeavor. Allowing children to experience the independence of the Grimms' Cinderella, who doesn't need a fairy godmother to save her, and to see that the quest for beauty can have disastrous consequences, has the potential to drastically alter the course of gender development by broadening the constraining definitions of what is masculine and what is feminine.

Fairy Tales and the Development of Prosocial Thinking

The Foundations of Prosocial Thinking

Within the study of child development, concepts of morality and prosocial inclinations are particularly important. Prosocial activity is a key foundation of successful social interactions and interpersonal relationships, and on a larger scale it is necessary for healthy and peaceful societies. The emergence of prosocial behavior and of an identifiable “moral code” begins at an early age, making early childhood a pivotal time of moral development. Preschool-age children are beginning to learn the nuances of peer relationships, making the experiences and interactions within their classroom settings a fundamental part of advancing the development of prosocial behavior.

It is important to remember that *morality* as a developmental concept is complex and multifaceted. Neither moral thinking and reasoning, nor an individual's *stage* of moral development, is the same thing as an individual's moral *actions*. In fact, there is evidence that development of moral thinking and moral behavior are not parallel, and that the ability to think and reason in moral terms is slower to develop than the instinctive action response (Rosen, 1980). This may seem contradictory, however, most moral behavior can be seen as *intuitive* in a sense, whereas moral reasoning is a conscious process. The reasoning process requires the ability to analyze a situation through a variety of different perspectives, and to have a sense of potential consequences and their severity. Given the age-range of interest in this current examination, the focus will remain mostly on observable moral behavior and instances of expressions of sympathy, empathy, and deceit, rather than attempting to navigate the complexities of internal moral reasoning as it relates to any particular stage of moral development (though consequences of social exposures to moral situations will be discussed later in this chapter).

This is not to say that moral stages are obsolete in the study of behavior. To better understand concepts which will be discussed later in this chapter it is imperative to grasp the general assumptions of the psychology community surrounding moral development. A key name in this area of study is Lawrence Kohlberg who proposed 3 levels of morality comprised of 6 stages (Kohlberg, 1971).

Kohlberg's Stages of Moral Development.

Level 1: *Pre-Conventional Morality*

Stage 1: Punishment and Obedience

Stage 2: Instrumental Relativist
(Reciprocity Principle)

Level 2: *Conventional Morality*

Stage 3: Interpersonal Concordance

Stage 4: "Law and Order"

Level 3: *Post-Conventional Morality*

Stage 1: Social Contract /
Individual Rights

Stage 2: Universal Ethical
Principles

Of particular interest within the study of moral development in preschool-age children are the stages within the first level. In short, stage 1 can be summarized as "might makes right," where children defer to the authority (or most powerful) figure as the moral figure. Insofar as their own behavior is concerned, children do the "right" thing not *because* it is right, but so they avoid punishment. Stage 2 is where children break away from the view of there being only *one* authority, and they come to recognize that there are many different sides to any one issue. Their behavior reflects this so that they pursue their own interests while occasionally satisfying the needs of others through reciprocity - "you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours." (Kohlberg,

1971). This signals the beginnings of more complex social interaction which preschool-age children are in the midst of learning. For the majority of children, true sustained contact with peers and individuals outside of the immediate family, begins when they are placed in childcare – making the preschool classroom one of the first places young children develop true social bonds (Ladd, 2005). The development of moral and prosocial thinking, and progress through the stages as outlined by Kohlberg, is as much a group experience as it is an individual experience.

This basic notion of “stage and sequence” largely dominates the study of morality. Nevertheless, as Arnold (2000) notes - morality is a topic surrounded by controversy because by its very nature it is a topic which elicits unique challenges and deep personal convictions (Arnold, 2000). While Kohlberg’s stages certainly reflect the trajectory of preschoolers’ behavior, and in doing so also reflects moral evolution, they fail to take into account a number of factors which also influence the development of prosocial thinking. Kohlberg emphasizes the role of *reason* in moral thinking, however, he has been criticized for disregarding the other factors which influence moral functioning, and also disregarding *how* reason interacts with these other variables (Arnold, 2000). These ‘other variables’ include emotional and social context, as well as predisposed individual character traits and dispositions. These may very well be some of the variables which contribute to the previously mentioned discrepancy in the development of moral thinking versus moral behavior. More recent research on morality better reflects the variations and fluctuations (including the influences of social and situational context) of one’s moral understanding in everyday life, as well as better integrating other areas of psychology, such as the importance of cognitive foundations and nuances in social relations.

A more extensive view of moral functioning is presented by Blasi (1983) who views *the self* as the missing link in Kohlberg’s theory. This view of the *self* as a motivational factor for

moral behavior contends that an individual's need for self-consistency is what drives them to act in accordance with their moral beliefs (Arnold, 2000). Reason alone, without the influence of emotion or conviction, is not enough to evoke action or any sense of *personal* moral responsibility. This is where the *self* becomes an important determinative factor. Blasi argues that moral behavior is largely dependent on the integration of moral beliefs and values in one's personality, and the extent to which these beliefs and values inform their conception of their identity (Arnold, 2000).

This concept of *self* and its importance with moral development is what makes exposures to different moral situations and perspectives so vital. Instilling early on the knowledge that morality is not always black and white would have numerous beneficial impacts, including increased flexibility in future moral thinking. Providing a broader and more nuanced definition of moral vs. immoral and right vs. wrong to children address the inevitable conflicts which they will encounter later in their adolescence, namely, that it is not always clear what is right and what is wrong, and what is *moral* for one person is not necessary *moral* for another. This is an area where the Grimms' fairy tales would prove to be particularly effective as they do not provide clear cut morals, and in some cases even present as immoral or amoral, allowing children to see their heroes and heroines face the same challenges and temptations as the antagonists. These 'contradictions' in a genre typically associated with providing clear models of moral behavior, inform children's concept of morality and, as mentioned earlier, allows for more flexibility in their cognition and reasoning.

The Role of Fairy Tales in Teaching Morality

The Importance of Ambiguity.

An important element within both the home and the classroom is that of children's stories – specifically classic *fairy tales*. Fairy tales are unique in that they are an integral, and for the most part *unchanged*, aspect of childhood – meaning that over the years classic fairy tales have undergone very little literary change. As illustrated through the in-depth examination of *Cinderella* in conjunction with gender development, it is clear that classical fairy tales have the ability to influence the trajectory of specific areas of development – including the development of moral and prosocial behavior. The social templates which these stories provide allow children to make more informed behavioral decisions, as well as providing examples of social situations and dilemmas which touch upon some of the more 'grey' areas of morality. In this chapter we will examine the role that Grimms' fairy tales play in informing and shaping the moral development of preschool children – specifically, in informing appropriate emotional reactions to situations, and providing models for prosocial behavior.

An inquisitive reader may very well ask why *fairy tales* in particular would have a noticeable impact on behavior and cognition as opposed to other types of children's literature. This examination of the impact of fairy tales certainly does not negate the impact of other types of literature, it only serves to highlight the unique, and often overlooked qualities of classic fairy tales. Out of these qualities, of specific importance is the accessibility of fairy tales to children – not only in their content, but also in their style and form. Fairy tales – in particular the Grimms' fairy tales – are comprised of deliberate language, repetition, rhythm, and imagery, which make them simultaneously more appealing and understandable to a young audience. In addition, Grimms' fairy tales are, by nature, more ambiguous when it comes to delineating *right* and

wrong. Unlike Perrault's writings, the Grimms' tales are strikingly lacking when it comes to prescribed morals – some of them ending in ways which even might suggest a *lack* of moral message (think back to the strikingly contrasting endings of the two versions of *Cinderella*). So why then are the Grimms' tales so relevant when it comes to moral learning as opposed to the works of Perrault for instance? The answer to this may very well lie in the ambiguity and questionable morals of the tales – the exact elements which are often used in arguments *against* introducing these particular stories to children.

The ambiguity of the Grimms' tales is more reflective of the reality individuals face as they progress through life. The world is not a moral place, and to present it as such is creating a barrier which may impede the progress of developing a mature moral understanding. This conclusion is drawn from the general thinking behind stage theories, which are structured around the idea that an individual progresses from one stage to the next when a challenge or inconsistency threatens their way of thinking. The successful overcoming of this challenge and/or integration of the inconsistency into one's mindset signals the transition to a higher stage of cognitive reasoning. It follows to reason that the sooner an inevitable challenge or inconsistency is presented, the sooner cognitive development would occur. This means that the ambiguous, and at times immoral qualities, of the Grimms' tales are, in fact, beneficial for the promotion of moral development and smoother transition from one stage of reasoning to the next. These tales are vehicles for introducing challenges and barriers to reasoning in a 'safe' and controlled manner.

Again, it is important to reiterate that the beneficial qualities of the ambiguity portrayed in some of the Grimms' fairy tales does not negate the equally beneficial qualities of modeling good and moral behavior. A healthy mix of classic moral stories and fables, along with stories

that challenge “black and white” moral thinking, provides children with the variety they need in order to better understand the more complex nuances of social interaction. A prime example of one of these more complex nuances is the necessity for “little white lies.” Children are initially taught that lying is wrong, and that one should always be honest, but this is a hard lesson to accommodate in a social reality which often dictates the preservation of another individual’s feelings over what might be a harsh truth. Adults intuitively recognize that treating the *truth* as sacrosanct is not always in one’s best interest (Cashdan, 1999). This is not an easy lesson for children, and it is one which must be treated with care, as the intention is not to promote lying and deceitful behavior, but rather to promote thoughtful and *tactful* behavior.

As with many areas of developmental psychology, a healthy balance between any two alternatives is best. Mixing exposures of prime behavior models with examples of the moral contradictions that are faced in everyday life, serves to both promote prosocial behavior patterns, as well as prepare children mentally for those situations where the moral choice is not always clear, or where there *is* no identifiable moral alternative. In typical social situations, people must decide quickly and instinctively whether or not an action is morally right or wrong, and react in socially appropriate ways. As discussed earlier, telling the truth is not always the prudent action, and so providing children *only* with stories that reward honesty and punish deceit makes the cognitive barrier much harder to overcome. This is where one can truly see that fairy tales are much more reflective of the reality in which we live, as there is a large overlap of tales in which deceit is harshly punished and tales in which cunning and appropriate deceit is not only treated with ambivalence, but rewarded (Cashdan, 1999). Take for instance, the tale *The Three Spinners* (*Die drei Spinnerinnen*), in which a lazy and idle girl who refused to spin flax for her mother is given over to the Queen. Now the mother was too ashamed to admit to her daughter’s laziness

and lack of industry, so she told the Queen: "I can't get her to stop spinning. She does nothing but spin and spin, and I'm so poor that I can't provide the flax" (Grimm & Grimm 1857/2003, Location no. 1678) ~ „Ich kann sie nicht vom Spinnen abbringen, sie will immer und ewig spinnen, und ich bin arm und kann den Flachs nicht herbeischaffen“ (Grimm & Grimm, 1857/1957, p. 65).

This is only the *first* blatant lie in the tale, and though it sets off the story, it is not even the lie of most consequence. The lazy girl who went with the Queen at her mother's behest was told that if she spun all of the flax which filled three entire rooms of the palace, she would be allowed to marry the Queen's eldest son. Perhaps in any other tale this would be the turning point for the lazy girl, and she would learn to work for her reward – but this is *not* any other tale, so of course, there is a twist. The girl knew that she would never be able to spin all of the flax, and spent three days weeping rather than working. On the third day the girl must explain to the Queen why she has not spun, and instead of admitting her situation, she simply says that she is homesick and will begin the next day. Of course, she is still stuck in the same hopeless situation, except for the sudden appearance of three woman who offer their assistance:

“In her distress she went over to the window and saw three women coming in her direction: the first had a broad flat foot, the second had such a large lower lip that it hung down over her chin, and the third had an immense thumb. They stopped in front of her window, looked up, and asked the maiden what the matter was. She told them about her predicament, and they offered to help her.

‘We’ll spin your flax for you in no time at all,’ they said. ‘But only if you invite us to your wedding and are not ashamed of us. Moreover, you must call us your cousins, and let us eat at your table.’

‘With all my heart,’ she responded. ‘Just come in and get to work right away.’

(Grimm & Grimm 1857/2003, Location no. 1694)

~

„Als das Mädchen wieder allein war, wußte es sich nicht mehr zu raten und zu helfen und trat in seiner Betrübniß vor das Fenster. Da sah es drei Weiber herkommen, davon hatte die erste einen breiten Plattfuß, die zweite hatte eine so große Unterlippe, daß sie über

das Kinn herunterhing, und die dritte hatte einen breiten Daumen. Die blieben vor dem Fenster stehen, schauten hinauf und fragten das Mädchen, was ihm fehlte. Es klagte ihnen seine Not, da trugen sie ihm ihre Hilfe an und sprachen:

,Willst du uns zur Hochzeit einladen, dich unser nicht schämen und uns deine Basen heißen, auch an deinen Tisch setzen, so wollen wir dir den Flachs wegspinnen, und das in kurzer Zeit.'

'Von Herzen gern,' antwortete es, ,kommt nur herein und fangt gleich die Arbeit an.'“
(Grimm & Grimm, 1857/1957, p. 65-66)

When the Queen saw all of the spun flax she gave immediate orders for the wedding. This girl who, up unto this point, has done none of what was asked of her and has deceived the Queen, is now being rewarded with a royal wedding. The key is to realize that this is not truly a tale about honesty. One could very well argue that without an understanding of the historical context¹ the message would be lost upon young readers, but the fact still remains that this tale breaks the traditional mold of honesty being rewarded and deceit being punished.

It is in the conclusion of the tale where the true message is instilled. When the girl introduces the three strange women as her aunts at her wedding, the prince expresses dismay over their appearance:

“'Ahh!' said the bridegroom. 'How did you ever come by such ghastly-looking friends?' Then he went to the one with a broad flat foot and asked, 'How did you get such a flat foot?'

'From treading,' she answered. 'From treading.'

Next the bridegroom went to the second and asked, 'How did you get such a drooping lip?'

'From licking,' she answered, 'From licking.'

Then he asked the third one, 'How did you get such an immense thumb?'

'From twisting thread,' she answered. 'From twisting thread.'

¹ This tale is meant to be illustrative of the reality faced by women forced to spin for a living (such as the physical ramifications of spending one's life at the spinning wheel) – the theme of spinning is a recurring theme throughout the Grimms' collection, though it is interspersed with the value of hard work and industry as well – often describing those who refuse to work in negative terms. It was Wilhelm Grimm, through re-working of the materials in-between publications, who equated spinning as a symbol of hardship. (Bottigheimer, 1982)

Upon hearing this the prince was alarmed and said, 'Never ever shall my beautiful wife touch a spinning wheel again.'

Thus she was able to rid herself of the terrible task of spinning flax."

(Grimm & Grimm 1857/2003, Location no. 1714)

~

„ ,Ach, ' sagte der Bräutigam, ,wie kommst du zu der garstigen Freundschaft?' Darauf ging er zu der einen mit dem breiten Plattfuß und fragte: ,Wovon habt Ihr einen solchen breiten Fuß?'

,Vom Treten, ' antwortete sie, ,vom Treten. '

Da ging der Bräutigam zur zweiten und sprach: ,Wovon habt Ihr nur die herunterhängende Lippe?'

,Vom Lecken, ' antwortete sie, ,vom Lecken. '

Da fragte er die dritte: ,Wovon habt Ihr den breiten Daumen?'

,Vom Fadendrehen, ' antwortete sie, ,vom Fadendrehen. '

Da erschrak der Königssohn und sprach: ,So soll mir nun und nimmermehr meine schöne Braut ein Spinnrad anrühren. ' Damit war sie das böse Flachsspinnen los. "

(Grimm & Grimm, 1857/1957, p. 66)

Though this tale may not have the *intention* of being a paradigm of 'good' behavior, it is nevertheless an excellent example of the moral 'grey area' which is so important in the fairy tale genera.

Sympathy and Schadenfreude.

An area of study which supports the claim that children benefit from exposure to a mixture of 'good' behavior models and morally contradictory behavior models, and which also supports the need for examples of *immoral* behavior, is the examination of expressions of sympathy versus Schadenfreude in children. Sympathy is most simply defined as the ability to *imagine* someone else's emotional state without the prerequisite of having experienced that emotion firsthand. Schadenfreude is the unique experience of feeling joy or pleasure in the witnessing of another's misfortune. This may seem counterproductive in the study of moral thinking and behavior, however, it is an emotional experience which serves to better inform which behaviors should be modeled, and which result in social turmoil. The relationship between

these two emotional experiences has been studied in depth by Schindler et al. in their 2015 paper, where they examined the emotions of sympathy and Schadenfreude as two sides of the same coin – both being emotional reactions to another's misfortune, and both being elements of social-emotional regulation and approach and avoid behaviors.

What Schindler et al. (2015) ultimately found was that a child's reaction of either sympathy or Schadenfreude was dependent upon (1) the *intent* behind the observed action, (2) whether or not the initial goal was achieved, (3) whether or not the individual was directly responsible for their own misfortune, and (4) whether or not the individual was relatable to the child. In their studies, children were interviewed while being presented with picture stories about particular protagonists experiencing a misfortune. The children's reactions to the protagonist's situation were noted, and further questions were posed to them, such as whether or not they would sit next to the protagonist, or whether or not they would do the protagonist a favor. These served to highlight the approach and avoid tendencies attached to the emotions of sympathy and Schadenfreude.

Sympathy is more likely to arise when an individual is likable, when they are pursuing 'morally positive' goals, and when they themselves are not personally responsible for any misfortune which befalls them. Schadenfreude, on the other hand, is more likely to arise when an individual is disliked, when they are pursuing an 'immoral' goal, and when they themselves are directly responsible for their own misfortune. Most of the prior research concerning the experience of Schadenfreude has been focused on adult populations, so little is known about the developmental trajectory of Schadenfreude throughout childhood and adolescence (Schindler et al., 2015). This speaks to the need for more research on the area, and perhaps a broadening of the research focused on emotion regulation, seeing as Schadenfreude itself acts as a regulator. For

instance, when a child experiences Schadenfreude, it acts as a “stop” signal – signaling either a behavior or pattern of misconduct or inattention which should not be replicated. When a child experiences sympathy, it acts as a “go” signal – indicating when an individual is not responsible for their misfortune and therefore deserving of comfort. In other words, children are able to learn through the negative experiences of their peers, and are able to differentiate when sympathy is deserved and when it is not.

If one were to distill a single factor behind the alternate experiences of sympathy and schadenfreude, it would be *deservingness*. This is an important element within fairy tales, as a character's deservingness, for either a reward or for a punishment, helps to shape the behavioral model which is presented. Perhaps the clearest illustration of the relationship between manufactured Schadenfreude and sympathy in the Grimms' fairy tales can be seen in the contrasting fates of the heroes and villains in some of the most beloved stories. Take for instance, the memorable examples from the previous chapter of the fate of Cinderella's stepsisters and the demise of the wicked stepmother in *Snow White*:

“When the bridal couple set out for the church, the oldest sister was on the right, the younger on the left. Suddenly the pigeons pecked out one eye from each of them. And as they came back from the church later on the oldest was on the left and the youngest on the right, and the pigeons pecked out the other eye from each sister. Thus they were punished with blindness for the rest of their lives due to their wickedness and malice.”
(Grimm & Grimm, 1857/2003, Location no. 2366)

~

„Als die Hochzeit mit dem Königssohn sollte gehalten werden, kamen die falschen Schwestern, wollten sich einschmeicheln und teil an seinem Glück nehmen. Als die Brautleute nun zur Kirche gingen, war die älteste zur rechten, die jüngste zur linken Seite: da pickten die Tauben einer jeden das eine Auge aus. Hernach, als sie herausgingen, war die älteste zur linken und die jüngste zur rechten: da pickten die Tauben einer jeden das andere Auge aus. Und waren sie also für ihre Bosheit und Falschheit mit Blindheit auf ihr Lebtag bestraft“
(Grimm & Grimm, 1857/1957, p. 99)

“Now, Snow White’s stepmother had also been invited to the wedding celebration, and after she had dressed herself in beautiful clothes, she went to the mirror and said:

*‘Mirror, mirror, on the wall,
who in this realm is the fairest of all?’*

The mirror answered:

*‘You my queen, may have a beauty quite rare,
but Snow White is a thousand times more fair.’*

The evil woman uttered a loud curse and became so terribly afraid that she did not know what to do. At first she did not want to go to the wedding celebration. But, she could not calm herself until she saw the young queen. When she entered the hall, she recognized Snow White. The evil queen was so petrified with fright that she could not budge. Iron slippers had already been heated over a fire, and they were brought over to her with tongs. Finally, she had to put on the red-hot slippers and dance until she fell down dead.”

(Grimm & Grimm, 1857/2003, Location no. 4342)

~

„Zu dem Feste wurde aber auch Schneewittchens gottlose Stiefmutter eingeladen. Wie sie sich nun mit schönen Kleidern angetan hatte, trat sie vor den Spiegel und sprach:

„Als diese einmal ihren Spiegel fragte:

*„Spieglein, Spieglein an der Wand,
Wer ist die Schönste im ganzen Land?’*

so antwortete er:

*„Frau Königin, Ihr seid die Schönste hier,
Aber Schneewittchen ist tausendmal schöner als Ihr.’*

Da stieß das böse Weib einen Fluch aus, und ward ihr so angst, so angst, daß sie sich nicht zu lassen wußte. Sie wollte zuerst gar nicht auf die Hochzeit kommen, doch ließ es ihr keine Ruhe, sie mußte fort und die junge Königin sehen. Und wie sie hineintrat, erkannte sie Schneewittchen, und vor Angst und Schrecken stand sie da und konnte sich nicht regen. Aber es waren schon eiserne Pantoffel über Kohlenfeuer gestellt und wurden mit Zangen hereingetragen und vor sie hingestellt. Da mußte sie in die rotglühenden Schuhe treten und so lange tanzen, bis sie tot zur Erde fiel.“

(Grimm & Grimm, 1857/1957, p. 195-196)

The reader feels no sympathy for either the stepsisters or the wicked stepmother, primarily because they have been portrayed as wholly *deserving* of their punishment – feeling no remorse or guilt over their atrocious actions. In his 1999 book, *The Witch Must Die*, Sheldon Cashdan contends that if the witch is to perish, or the stepsisters to suffer for the rest of their lives, the reader must be utterly convinced that the punishment fits the crime – in other words, those receiving a punishment in a fairy tale are painted as either despicable creatures who deserve the worse (as is the case in the two examples above), or as so foolish and arrogant that they deserve of their fate. These are the characters who elicit feelings of Schadenfreude. There is a certain satisfaction knowing that Cinderella's stepsisters didn't get away with their sadistic treatment of their sister – the reader doesn't feel sorry for them in the least. They do, however, feel a connection to, and a level of sympathy for, Cinderella's own prior suffering at the hands of her sisters, namely because she did nothing to warrant their abuse and actively tried to better her own situation. She fits all of the criteria outlined by Schindler et al. (2015) for a protagonist who rightfully earns the reader's sympathy. When presented simultaneously, the dueling forces of Schadenfreude and sympathy work together to heighten the psychological impact of the tale. One, without the other to counterbalance it, leaves a lesser impression than if the two are contrasted side by side.

Yet another reason why fairy tales are such excellent tools for modeling 'good' and 'bad' behavior, is their literary capacity for detailing characters and scenarios which lend themselves particularly well to *affective perspective taking*. The Grimms' tales are purposefully vague in the areas which would create a barrier between the characters and the audience. Places and times are rarely, if ever, specified, and rather than having true names (with the exceptions of Snow White, Rapunzel, Briar-Rose, and Hänsel and Gretel, and a handful of others) characters are typically

labeled by their gender, profession, or a strong personality trait, such as in the tale, *The Brave Little Tailor*. All of these elements work together to allow children to project their own thoughts and experiences onto these characters. In this way, children are able to connect more deeply with the characters and their respective situations, opening up the possibility for a deeper sympathetic connection. This is supported by research conducted by Vaish, Carpenter, & Tomasello in 2009, where they examined toddlers' ability to sympathize with adult strangers. In the study of the development of prosocial thinking, evaluating expressions of sympathy is paramount. Preschool-age children are able to emotionally connect to strangers through *affective perspective taking* – meaning that they are able to imagine themselves, and what their feelings would be, if they were in another's situation – a skill which is honed and strengthened through exposure to fairy tales.

Honesty and Deceit.

In addition to navigating the social implications of sympathy and Schadenfreude, children are also tasked with grasping the moral implications of honesty and lying. Preschoolers are at a developmental age where they are able to begin exploring the concept of lying. As children enter the stage in ToM development which allows them to grasp the concept of deception, it becomes imperative that they come to fully understand the variations of lying and the social consequences of harmful deception. Lying, much like the dichotomy between sympathy and Schadenfreude, is multifaceted and has both a positive and negative side. As many socially literate people know, there are lies which are necessary to maintaining healthy social relationships. For this reason, it is important to take note of the types of fairy tales (as in *The Three Spinners*) where the conventional moral mold is broken, and the act of deception is actually *rewarded*.

Children are told from day one that there is nothing worse than a liar and that telling the truth is always the right choice. These lessons are supported again and again through popular

fables such as *George Washington and the Cherry Tree* and *The Boy Who Cried Wolf* – where honesty is *always* the best policy. Yet, lying serves important developmental functions in several aspects of a child's life. When a young child first successfully tells their mother or father a lie, and the parent *believes* it, the child is able to further separate their consciousness and mental experiences away from their parents and peers – they are able to liberate themselves mentally and realize that their thoughts and actions are unique (Cashdan, 1999). This is one of the most important milestones in ToM development, where the child breaks away from the belief that everyone has the same thoughts as them, and come to realize that they have a *personal identity*. In addition to this cognitive benefit of lying, children are also often taught to lie in order to smooth over tense social situations; for instance, a parent will admonish a child who bluntly tells a relative that they absolutely *hate* the birthday present they received. This in itself is a contradiction – even if a small one – of the deeply engrained lesson to *never* lie. One could go as far as to say that the social fabric of our modern society is held together with 'little white lies' (Cashdan, 1999). The key here is that children must learn to differentiate between so-called altruistic lies, which are meant to spare feelings, and lies that intend to do others harm. Obviously, fairy tales cannot provide all the answers in this regard, however, they can be effectively used to teach readers that there are important issues one must consider when the truth is at stake.

The way in which the Grimms' fairy tales deal with the concept of lying and deceit is not black and white. Unlike many of the more popular fables, the pattern of reward and punishment is not fixed, and there are many instances where a clever or necessary lie is rewarded. What fairy tales achieve in doing this is highlighting the importance of context and intention when one evaluates the 'morality' of a lie. Insofar as teaching morality goes, young children are often

underestimated in their ability to be discerning – and thus are presented with the maxim that lying is always wrong. Preschool-age children are, in fact, capable of two types of moral reasoning; subjectivist and realist (Wimmer et al., 1985). These two types of moral reasoning depend on how children are prompted to think about a given situation: did they consider a protagonist's intent first, or did they define the protagonist as a liar first. In other words: did they judge the situation or the action? Wimmer et al. (1985) found that when children examined a given scenario in a “moral-before-lexical” sequence, they based their judgments on *intent* – displaying subjectivist moral reasoning (whether or not the lie was necessary or unintentional). Conversely, when children examined a similar scenario in a “lexical-before-moral” sequence, the negative implications of the label “liar” led to a realist moral judgment (the protagonist lied so they should be punished regardless of intent).

Lying, in its various forms, is a common theme in fairy tales. The wicked stepmother in *Snow White* lies about the staylaces, comb, and apple; Cinderella's stepmother cruelly taunts her with promises to take her to the ball if she completes her tasks; and the heroine in *The Three Spinners* deceives the queen into thinking she spun all of the flax herself. Depending on how the story is presented to the children and what questions they are asked, their answers would be very different. If asked first if the character lied, the children would agree and conclude that she did not deserve a reward; however, if children are first asked if the character deserves a reward, children would be inclined to say yes. This is because young children's moral intuition about lying is more advanced than their definitional understanding of ‘*to lie*,’ and there are strong negative connotations attached to a realist definition of lying (Wimmer et al., 1985). These connotations override the subjectivist intuition –explaining why children come to different conclusions about moral situations.

In a tale such as *Rumpelstiltskin*, where practically every character lies, it becomes more difficult to unravel the moral implications. The first, and perhaps worst lie within the tale is told by the heroine's father, who falsely boasts to the king that his daughter can spin gold from straw.

“Once upon a time there was a miller who was poor, but he had a beautiful daughter. Now it happened that he was talking to the king one time, and in order to make himself seem important, he said to the king, ‘I have a daughter who can spin straw into gold.’ ‘That is an art that pleases me!’ the king replied. ‘If your daughter is as talented as you say, then bring her to my castle tomorrow, and I’ll put her to a test.’”
(Grimm & Grimm, 1857/2003, Location no. 4454)

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*„Es war einmal ein Müller, der war arm, aber er hatte eine schöne Tochter. Nun traf es sich, daß er mit dem König zu sprechen kam, und um sich ein Ansehen zu geben, sagte er zu ihm: ‚Ich habe eine Tochter, die kann Stroh zu Gold spinnen.‘
Der König sprach zum Müller: ‚Das ist eine Kunst, die mir wohl gefällt, wenn deine Tochter so geschickt ist, wie du sagst, so bring sie morgen in mein Schloß, da will ich sie auf die Probe stellen.‘“*
(Grimm & Grimm, 1857/1957, p. 200-201)

The father's lie is completely selfish, rooted in his desire to elevate his own social standing, and is worsened by the fact that he seems little concerned about the fact that his boast places his daughter's life on the line – for if she fails the king's test she will be put to death. She, of course cannot spin straw into gold, and so is resigned to her fate when finally a little man appears. He offers to spin the straw for her as long as she gives him something of value in return, and she gives him her necklace. The second day, when the king demanded she spin him more gold, the girl gives the little man her ring in exchange for his services. Of course, as is the way of fairy tales, challenges come in threes, however the poor girl has nothing left to give the little man, so he offers her a deal in exchange for first born child. She has to agree (even though she has no

intention of ever making true on her promise) in order to keep her life, and thus, after her third trial, she is married to the king.

*“I have nothing left to give,’ answered the maiden.’
‘Then promise me your first child when you become queen.’*

Who knows whether it will ever come to that? thought the miller’s daughter. And since she knew of no other way out of her predicament, she promised the little man what he had demanded. In return the little man spun the straw into gold once again. When the king came in the morning found everything as he had wished, he married her, and the beautiful miller’s daughter became a queen.”

(Grimm & Grimm, 1857/2003, Location no. 4470)

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*„Ich habe nichts mehr, das ich geben könnte,’ antwortete das Mädchen.
‘So versprich mir, wenn du Königin wirst, dein erstes Kind.’*

– ‚Wer weiß, wie das noch geht,’ dachte die Müllerstochter und wußte sich auch in der Not nicht anders zu helfen; sie versprach also dem Männchen, was es verlangte, und das Männchen spann dafür noch einmal das Stroh zu Gold. Und als am Morgen der König kam und alles fand, wie er gewünscht hatte, so hielt er Hochzeit mit ihr, und die schöne Müllerstochter ward eine Königin.“

(Grimm & Grimm, 1857/1957, p. 202)

Though the heroine’s deception of the little man was out of self-preservation – as she wanted to live, but knew that she would never give up her child – it is still an example of the acts of deceit which are common in the Grimms’ tales.

When the little man finally comes a year later to collect her debt, the queen was so horrified and desperate that the little man offered her three days to guess his name so that she could keep her child. When one looks deeper, however, his offer is a cruel taunt, much like the way in which Cinderella’s stepmother promises she can go to the ball if she pick out the lentils from the ashes. Dwarfs and gnomes do not have names in fairy tales (Cashdan, 1999), and the term “Rumpelstiltskin” in itself not truly a name. When broken down into its Middle German roots, the word results in a description of a little man who is “a wrinkled dwarf that acquires

things illicitly.” (Cashdan, 1999, p. 136). It is clear that Rumpelstiltskin knows that the poor queen has no hope of guessing his ‘name’ on her own.

It turns out that he is correct, and the queen would have lost her child to him were it not for a messenger who returned and reported to her that he spotted the little man singing and dancing in the forest.

“On the third day the messenger returned and reported, ‘I couldn’t find a single new name, but as I was climbing a high mountain at the edge of the forest where the fox and the hare say good night to each other, I saw a small cottage, and in front of the cottage was a fire, and around the fire danced a ridiculous little man who was hopping on one leg and screeching:

*‘Today I’ll brew, tomorrow I’ll bake.
Soon I’ll have the queen’s namesake.
Oh, how hard it is to play my game,
for Rumpelstiltskin is my name!’”*

(Grimm & Grimm, 1857/2003, Location no. 4480)

~

„Den dritten Tag kam der Bote wieder zurück und erzählte: ‚Neue Namen habe ich keinen einzigen finden können, aber wie ich an einen hohen Berg um die Waldecke kam, wo Fuchs und Has sich gute Nacht sagen, so sah ich da ein kleines Haus, und vor dem Haus brannte ein Feuer, und um das Feuer sprang ein gar zu lächerliches Männchen, hüpfte auf einem Bein und schrie:

*‚Heute back ich,
Morgen brau ich,
Übermorgen hol ich der Königin ihr Kind;
Ach, wie gut ist, daß niemand weiß,
daß ich Rumpelstilzchen heiß!’“*

(Grimm & Grimm, 1857/1957, p. 202)

This tale provides several different contexts of lying; lying for personal gain, for intentional harm, and for self-preservation. This allows children to experiment with the concept that lying comes in more than one form – and perhaps some of those forms are worse than others. Being able to move past the notion that honesty and deceit are black and white concepts that fall into a

category of 'good' or 'bad' challenges children cognitively, which, in turn, spurs development, and allows them to grasp certain social nuances faster.

The study of morality and prosocial thinking in early childhood is extremely complex and multifaceted, containing concepts which even adults continue to struggle with. What is key in the examination of the role that fairy tales play in encouraging prosocial thinking, is that they provide understandable social templates which illustrate the importance of variables, such as intention and context.

Concluding Thoughts

In reading this paper, it is important to note that it is merely an *introduction* to the study of fairy tales in the realm of child development. Fairy tales have the capacity to effect change in many areas of the child's life beyond gender ideology and prosocial behavior, and it would require an exposition much longer than this one to cover them all in depth. What can be determined here is that fairy tales are reflective of many of the cognitive challenges which children face as they progress into adolescence, and, as a genre, they are particularly well-suited to imparting social patterns and expectations in a manner which young children can understand. Children books, as a general rule, introduce all of the plots used in adult works, and are the forgotten (or at least dimly remembered) origin of many adult responses to social situations (Hallett & Karasek, 2002). Fairy tales provide the framework for the majority of children's early imaginative experiences, allowing them to interact with, and role play well-crafted situations which prepare them for more complex social interaction.

If one were to break down the composition and subject matter within fairy tales, and identify a singular unifying element, it would be that fairy tales illustrate the transition from childhood into adulthood. Most fairy tale plots are centered on young heroes and heroines who are confronted with tragic and dangerous challenges: the death of a mother; a stepmother's persecution; the threat of death if one cannot achieve the impossible – turning flax into gold. These are all situations which illustrate the need for creativity, adaption, and survival – and foreshadow the inevitability of unexpected situations – all tools which prepare children to become independent agents (Zipes, 2006). When examining the role of fairy tales in childhood, their historical context must also be taken into consideration. The concept of *childhood* as a distinct period of life is relatively new (only having emerged over the last 3 to 4 centuries), and many of the elements which are often criticized when fairy tales are placed in juxtaposition with

childhood – such as the violent and terrifying scenes – are, in fact, placing major emphasis on the transition to adulthood (Hallett & Karasek, 2002). More simply stated, the tales, as they were written, were blatantly reflective of the harsh realities of the world, while still remaining ensconced in the relatively 'safe' world of fantasy.

Though the aim of this paper is to broaden the association between fairy tales and psychological study to encompass areas other than traditional psychoanalysis, the bond which Marie-Louise von Franz establishes between fairy tale figures and archetypal images of the collective unconscious illustrates well the profound behavioral impact that these stories can have. She describes the heroes and heroines of fairy tales as *abstractions* which express the difficulties and dangers posed by nature (von Franz, 1996). This relates to the earlier discussion in this paper in that it is an exceptional illustration of the universality of the fairy tale style and structure. The almost seamless relation of the contents in fairy tales to archetypal symbols is indicative of the same qualities which make fairy tales such an effective vehicle for imparting behavioral patterns. Children are able to connect on a much deeper mental level to the ambiguous and abstract characters in fairy tales, than more 'established' characters in other types of children's literature.

This propensity for wide-reaching mental congruence has ensured that fairy tales have survived the changing times relatively intact. The contents of what are considered the canon tales in Western culture are virtually unchanged from their original publication, and they have become so culturally engrained that people tend to respond to these classical tales as though they are innate knowledge despite knowing that they are products of popular culture (Bacchilega, 1997). This is an especially consequential phenomenon in realms of identity development, for instance *gender* development – as classical tales tend to be overtly patriarchal and politically conservative, reflecting and reinforcing the dominant cultural forces and discourses (Bacchilega,

1997). Rather than attempt to combat the overwhelming influence of these canonical tales in perpetuating outdated, negative gender stereotypes, the focus should be on *using* the tales as they are to create a new discourse.

The messages inherent in many of the popularized fairy tales (namely, the ones which have been commercialized through Disney) idealize a feminine stereotype which hinders the progress achieved over the decades in establishing an equal status for women in society. A common image of a desirable woman in Disney's fairy tale canon is of a young, beautiful girl who displays varying degrees of passivity. She must be rescued, and ultimately fulfilled by marriage when she finds her prince. This social inequality is romanticized, and has become an all too common central theme in many children's stories. Stories which don't follow this formulaic layout tend to have strong male leads, transferring the female status from passive to invisible. As mentioned in the Gender Development chapter, simply introducing storylines which reverse typical gender roles do little insofar as combating the dominant social discourse. This is the reason why reexamining the original texts is paramount. Children have a greater capacity for social dialogue than usually given credit for, and even when their ability to understand or articulate a concept fully is limited, just the exposure to an alternate mode of discourse (such as challenging the beauty ideals in Perrault's *Cinderella*) goes a long way in broadening their conceptions of gender and appropriate gendered behavior. The idea in this respect, is to avoid the narrowing of gender schemas earlier in development so as to allow for more flexibility and adaptability as children grow older.

As in cases where there are more than one version of a particularly popular tale, such as *Cinderella*, providing children with the contrasting stories and allowing them to compare the portrayals of the characters opens many avenues for further discussion and exploration of

discourse. This is especially pertinent within the *Cinderella* example, as a comparison between the two versions of the famous heroine reveals striking differences. Where Perrault's *Cinderella* (the story adapted into the 1950 Disney classic) embodies the traditional passive role, the *Cinderella* in the Grimms' tale is an active agent in her destiny – displaying a refreshingly different portraiture of the expected role and capacity of women. This intriguing contrast between the conventional role expected and the actual behavior displayed by a heroine is not unique to *Cinderella*, which is just one of the many reasons why the Grimms' collection is so fascinating.

As discussed, also important in the development of gender is *image* – more specifically, the beauty ideal women are expected to pursue. There is a reason people tend to say '*as beautiful as a princess*,' however, to the mind of a young child, the pressure of achieving an unobtainable standard of appearance can have great consequences. The focus on image which today's mass media perpetuates leads to unreasonable expectations insofar as appearance – especially weight – is concerned. The number of young girls suffering from eating disorders has increased exponentially, and it is no help that they are exposed to stories equating image and beauty with goodness and success. The lesson is engrained early on that one must become a certain level of attractive to have a place in society. Even the ugly duckling becomes beautiful at the end of his story. Though this message is unfortunately inescapable, there are ways to instill in children that the pursuit of image has consequences – as illustrated in *Snow White* where vanity proves to be deadly.

What is important in these two examples which were discussed in-depth in this paper, is the opportunity for children to identify and evaluate messages within the texts which may become clear only after guided interaction and discussion. Here is where the role of the parent or educator becomes vital. In order for new discourses and patterns of thought to emerge, there needs to be a facilitator who is able to *challenge* the dominant discourse and guide interaction

and discussion in such a way that children are able to question elements of the tales and formulate their own independent assessments. Though younger children may still initially adhere to more generalized notions of 'appropriate' gender behavior, the implication that there is more to the social dialogue concerning gender rituals, initiations, and expectations, will make the eventual cognitive transition much easier.

Zipes (2006) contends that fairy tales are about to create order through creating disorder. As paradoxical as this may seem at, it makes some sort of sense to highlight an ideal through illustrating disaster. Behavioral psychologists would cite this as simple operant conditioning. *Reinforce* a behavior through granting a reward or taking away an unpleasant variable, or *decrease* a behavior through inflicting a punishment or taking away a positive variable. The illustrative, and at times violent and macabre, scenes in fairy tales tell children what types of actions are socially acceptable, and what types of actions are not. No one wants to succumb to the fate of the stepsisters or the wicked witch! This, of course, is a pattern which is evident throughout the scope of children's literature; however, *fairy tales* are unique in that they breach the gray areas of morality, whereas other types of moral stories and fables paint the world as starkly black and white.

The very scenes in certain fairy tales which may deter parents and educators from reading them to children, could very well be conveying important social nuances – which otherwise would have to be learned through trial and error. The moral codes which are woven into fairy tales speak not only to the cultured expectations of society, but also to the more banal and animalistic traits often not spoken of.

Fairy tales provide a safe and controlled medium through which children can explore human dilemmas and the role that basic instincts play. For instance, the instinct for survival in

Rumpelstiltskin, when the girl lies to the king so he thinks she spun the gold, and lies to the little man when she promises him her child. These are not 'moral' actions in the strict sense of the word, however, they are *necessary* actions. This is more reflective of the reality which children will inevitably face as they enter the world – there are not always clear “right” answers, and sometimes one has to choose the lesser of two evils.

The topics of gender development and prosocial thinking are broad enough and intricate enough to fill several books. They are two of the more socially influential areas of child development in which the early years are especially important. There are, however, several other areas of importance in which fairy tales would have a profound developmental impact. One of these areas is that of imaginative play – a fascinating developmental phenomenon which peaks in early childhood. Play is in and of itself a type of language for children – a way for them to interact with their world, communicate and build relationships with their peers, and unravel new and/or emotional situations. The impact of fairy tales – especially the sub-genre of *magic fairy tales* (*Zaubermärchen*) – on imaginative play and world building would be a fascinating area to explore further; especially as it has a great impact on the trajectory of later cognitive development. Another area of interest, which the Grimms' tales are particularly well-suited for, is the examination of children's understanding of death and grief – concepts which even adults struggle with. These are just two examples of the directions of research open to those fascinated with the role that fairy tales play in child development. Childhood is a time of growth and exploration, and the ability of adults to control what types of media children are exposed to is limited, however, insightful and attentive critics have the ability to shape the way children perceive the world around them. By further exploring the various developmental consequences of fairy tales, parents and educators would have the opportunity to broaden their children's conceptions about the world and about their agency as individuals.

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