

Fairy tales are the favourite bedtime stories english literature essay

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1. 0 Introduction

Fairy tales are the favourite bedtime stories for young children; one of the reasons is because " they can teach morals" (Christians, 2009). Fairy tales have been around for centuries; even before they emerged as a literary genre of their own. Children the world over have been exposed to different fairy tales and folklore. Fairy tales have also been known to be essential in a child's development, because of its suitability to teach young children moral values while helping children distinguish between deeds that are good and deeds that are evil, such as vengeance. Fairy tales " accomplish this by casting protagonists as ordinary children with whom young audiences can easily identify" (Cashdan, 2000); in other words, children are able to relate with the protagonists of fairy tales and as they are " just like any other children, except for their titles" (Cashdan, 2000). Fairy tales have also been described by Bettelheim (1962) as key means by which culture is assimilated by children. Bettelheim (1976) suggests that our unconscious desires are expressed through fairy tales and fairy tales symbolize deep hidden meanings within our beings. For children, he asserts that fairy tales are a wonderful experience because " the child feels understood and appreciated deep down in his feelings, hopes, and anxieties, without theses all having to be dragged up and investigated in the harsh light of a rationality that is still beyond him" (Bettelheim, 1976). Christians (2009) summarizes this as fairy tales are more naturally suited for children because children can fill a deep psychological need with stories. Fairy tales have also received increasing research as a literary genre because of its influence on children who have been exposed to fairy tales from a young age. Fairy tales, particularly

Western European fairy tales have secured a unique place in literature written in English because " they have entered our cultural shorthand via the popularity of English translations of the works of Perrault and the Brothers Grimm as well as Disney movies" (Schanoes, 2007); making fairy tales a fairly an integral part of childhood. It is also because of the popularity of Western European fairy tales that Christians (2009) derives that fairy tales can now be " defined on their own while receiving considerable scholarly attention" due to its widespread influence. On the other hand, feminist writers have cited fairy tales as an effective means of submitting women to the values of a patriarchal society, particularly through depicting the fairy tale heroines as beautiful and passive. Fairy tales as a literary genre have also been used in Western cultures to " safeguard the values and conventions of its patriarchal societies" (Comtois, 1995). These values and conventions embedded in fairy tales, Comtois noted, were consistent with the values that were enforced during the times the tales were written. Fox (1997) notes how the feminine beauty can be seen as a " normative means of social control whereby social control is accomplished through the internalization of values and norms that serve to restrict women's lives". Doll (2000) also states that " good girls become idealized, perfected objects, pedestaled for the males gaze", further enforcing that women are shaped into characters that are appealing to males. Many feminist writers such as Freedman (1986), Fox (1977), Dellinger and Williams (1997), Baker-Sperry and Grauerholz (2003), and Stone (1985) have noted how fairy tales, particularly princess-themed fairy tales, often employ the portrayal of feminine beauty as a means of control over women by men and the

patriarchal societies in which we live in. Beauty is a key element in the lives of many women who spend time, resources and effort in the pursuit of the ideal beauty, most often depicted in numerous media. Women relentlessly strive to pursue the feminine beauty ideal, which is "viewed largely as an oppressive, patriarchal practice that objectifies, devalues, and subordinates women" (Baker-Sperry and Grauerholz, 2003). Despite this, many women continue to strive for beauty, believing that it plays a major social role in their lives. Backman and Adams (1991) and Sutor and Reavis (1995) assert that beauty is one of the main ways self-esteem and social status are gained by young women and adolescent girls. Women not only want to be beautiful for self-gratification, but also for social purposes, particularly the approval and appraisal by men, whereby according to Freedman (1989), "women are aware that beauty comes heavily with men and they therefore work hard to achieve it". The frequent portrayal of women merely as 'pretty things to look at' often create stereotypes that women are exactly that—beautiful dolls who are meant to be seen, and never heard; and all those who do not adhere to such femininity are incompetent and lacking. Dellinger and Williams (1997) found in their study 'Makeup at work: Negotiating appearance rules in the workplace' that women who wear makeup in the workplace are seen as healthier and more competent while those who do not are seen in a negative light. Women who achieve a high degree of attractiveness are psychologically and socially rewarded (Dellinger and Williams, 1997; Hatfield and Sprecher, 1986). This patriarchal society where women are meant to pursue the ideal feminine beauty is mirrored very heavily in fairy tales, especially princess-themed fairy tales, where "beauty is often the only

power granted to the heroine" (Christians, 2009). Jorgensen (2012) declares that beauty is not only linked with success of the heroines in fairy tales but also with character. Fairy tale princesses like Snow White, Cinderella and Sleeping Beauty all rely on using their beauty to entice a prince to liberate them from their burdens; depicting the man as the only key to women to free themselves from problems and to upgrade their social status. The way most classic fairy tales depict women is capable of exposing young children to women's role stereotyping. According to Comtois (1995), feminist writers such as Lieberman (1972), Bottigheimer (1987), Stone (1985), and Tartar (1987) have contended that folklore has at least resulted in the perpetuation of stereotypes in society. These feminist writers also assert that " traditional fairy tales have not only served as a mirror of society but have been intentionally used to promote societal values which often depict gender roles in narrow, predetermined ways" (Comtois, 1995). Feminist scholars often consider females in fairy tales to be " too passive, pretty, and domestic (if protagonists), or alternately too wicked, ugly, and vicious (if antagonists)" (Jorgensen, 2012); and these passive, pretty fairy tale heroines receive rewards when they adhere to said roles (Gauntlett, 2002).

1. 1 Statement of the Problem

While research on fairy tales is not new (with studies of fairy tales dating back as far as the 19th century and early 20th century), its research is not widespread, though gaining momentum because of the popularity of Western European fairy tales. Research on feminism and gender stereotyping in fairy tales have dated back as early as the 1960s with

Bettelheim's 'Use of Enchantments' (1962) and Heuscher's (1963) 'A Psychiatric Study of Fairy Tales: Their Origin, Meaning, and Usefulness' for example. Much of feminist fairy tale researches focus primarily on the sexual stereotyping of women in fairy tales, as carried out by feminist writers such as Bottigheimer (1987), Stone (1985), Comtois (1995), and Baker-Sperry and Grauerholz (2005). Some research also focuses on the negative impact of fairy tales as found in Stone's 1985 study 'The misuse of enchantment: Controversies on the significance of fairy tales'. According to Stone (1985) stereotypes are engraved in the perceptions of young women from early childhood and it is possible that as these young girls progress into young adults, the gender stereotypes created in their childhood will still persist and perhaps result in negative effects regarding their perceptions of gender roles and even confidence and self-image. This study aims to discover the impacts of fairy tales on young adult males who have been exposed to fairy tales, particularly princess-themed fairy tales, to determine what kind of gender stereotypes have been conceptualized and their perceptions towards gender roles depicted in fairy tales. This study also aims to determine whether feminism has had an impact on altering the stereotypes created by fairy tales. Moreover, much of the feminist researches focus more on women's responses and opinions towards fairy tales and these researches are mostly theoretical in nature. Previously, there have been two researches conducted on the impact of fairy tales on people: Kay F. Stone's 1985 study which involved a sample consisting of women, children, and men; and Rita Comtois' 1995 study which featured a sample of women only. According to Comtois (1995), despite a number of feminist writers who have studied the

potential impact of sexual stereotyping in fairy tales (Bottigheimer, 1987; Stone, 1985; Tatar, 1987), the majority of their opinions are "speculative", based on "conclusions drawn from and implications of a fairy tale's exposure on its audience". This study will be similar to Rita J. Comtois' 1995 qualitative study of the perceived impact of fairy tales on a group of women. This study will also be similar to K. F. Stone's 1985 study on the impact of fairy tales, which she conducted in a series of interviews, with a sample of forty-four people, whereby 6 of her respondents were boys. While Comtois' research explored the "psychological impact fairy tales have had on a female audience which has reached adulthood", this study will instead use a male audience as the sample. With the use of males as the respondents, this study, which adopts a feminist approach, it will be possible to collect data on the opinions of males on the topic without resorting to speculative theories. The results of this study whereby a bigger male sample is used, as opposed to the 1985 study carried out by Stone (with only a small sample of 6 males), it will also be possible to gain more insight into what males think without resorting to conjectures.

Purpose of this study

This study aims: To determine the effects of exposure of fairy tales from an early age on young male adults regarding the way they perceive stereotypical gender roles. To establish whether the gender stereotypes in young male adults have slowly changed over time or are carried well into adulthood due to these effects of exposure to princess-themed fairy tales. To determine how feminist views have altered and changed the way young

adult males view the stereotypical female characters depicted in fairy tales and women in real life.

Research questions

At the end of this study, the researcher hopes to answer the following research questions: What are the effects of exposure of fairy tales on young adult males regarding their perspectives of stereotypical gender roles? How have the effects of exposure to princess-themed fairy tales on young adult males from their youths persisted over time? How have feminist views changed the perception of gender stereotypes formed in young male adults regarding female characters depicted in fairy tales as well as woman in real life?

1. 4 Significance of the Study

The results from this study will help to increase the knowledge and awareness on the impact of fairy tales on the development of stereotypes of women in young adult males who have been exposed to fairy tales at a young age. From the study, it will also expand the knowledge base on what kind of gender stereotypes are formed and whether they are identical to the stereotypical characteristics of women (particularly princesses) that have been depicted in fairy tales. It will also help to shed some light on whether these stereotypes have degraded over time in the mindset of young adults, whether they have applied these stereotypes onto women in real life, and whether the onset of feminism has in turned further altered these stereotypes. If the gender stereotypes formed through the exposure of fairy tales from an early age still persist throughout the lives of the respondents

well into their young adult years, then it will show that fairy tales do have a lasting impact on young adult males. The results of study will provide more insight into how much fairy tales have affected young adult males and what kind of stereotypes have formed as a result of fairy tale exposure. Apart from that, based on the results from this study, it will shed some light on whether young adult male still hold stereotypes towards feminine beauty and women (whereby women who make an effort to enhance their appearance are more valued than those who do not) as suggested by Dellinger and Williams (1997) as well Hatfield and Sprecher (1984). Instead of drawing conclusions from theoretical analysis and assumptions of what kind of impact fairy tales have on men, the data collected from this study will provide will help to clarify what sort of stereotypes that males really have towards women as a result of exposure to fairy tales.

1. 5 Scope of Study and Methodology

The independent variable of this study is the princess-themed fairy tales. The dependent variable would be the responses provided from the respondents towards the princess-themed fairy tales text. The hypothesis of this study is that fairy tales do have some impact on the formation of gender stereotypes in men. In this study, the respondents will be male Faculty of Arts and Social Science students studying in UTAR. A total of 50 respondents will be chosen through two sampling methods to participate in this study where respondents will be required to answer an online questionnaire based on their cognitive knowledge of fairy tales. The first will be the purposive sampling method which is a form of non-probability sampling technique by

which the researcher chooses the sample based on who they think would be appropriate for the study. The second method used will be snowball sampling, a non-probability sampling technique where the participants that have already been selected will be asked to recommend new respondents from their friends and acquaintances. In this study, purposive sampling will be used because the selection of respondents will not be random as only male respondents will be chosen; and the snowball sampling method is used to gain access to a larger sample of young adult males.

1. 6 Limitations of the study

This study will be conducted among Faculty of Arts and Social Science students in UTAR, which would mean that the scope of respondents is limited as the findings cannot be generalized to all students. In this study, there will be no equal distribution of race, so it would not be possible to examine the different responses among races and cultures. Moreover, this study will only focus on princess-themed fairy tales, namely Snow White, Sleeping Beauty, and Cinderella. Therefore, the finding cannot be generalized with other non-princess-themed fairy tales. Furthermore, the use of an online questionnaire, despite its advantages, will not guarantee absolute control over the respondents. Additionally the use of snowball sampling might result in wrong anchoring, whereby there is a lack of definite knowledge on whether the respondents are from the intended target group. Time constraint is also a limitation in this study. With a set time limit allocated, it was not possible to gather more thorough data for more conclusive findings.

1. 7 Operational Terms

1. 7. 1 Fairy Tale

A 'fairy tale', according to Anderson (2000) can be defined as "short, imaginative, traditional tales with a high moral and magical content".

Heuscher (1963) defines the fairy tale as a narration which is not based on historic persons or events, as opposed to an epic or saga.

1. 7. 2 Gender Stereotypes

Gender stereotypes are simple generalizations about the gender attributes, differences, and roles of individuals and groups. Gender stereotypes are widely held beliefs about the characteristics and behaviour of not only women and men but also transgendered people (Manstead and Hewstone; 1995) which suggest how men and women should and should not behave. These stereotypes can be positive or negative, but are rarely accurate.

1. 7. 3 Feminism

Feminism is the championing of equal rights for men and women. It is defined as "the belief in the social, political, and economical equality of the sexes" (Rowe-Finkbeiner, 2004) such as the right to vote; pursue a career and to have equal social status.

1. 7. 4 Feminine beauty ideal

Femininity is a set of womanly qualities, behaviours, and roles generally associated with girls and women. Baker-Sperry and Grauerholz (2003) define the feminine beauty ideal as the "socially constructed notion that physical

attractiveness is one woman's most important assets, and something all women should strive to achieve and maintain."

1. 8 Organization of the Thesis

This study consists of a total of five chapters, which are Introduction, Literature Review, Methodology, Findings & Analysis, and Discussion & Conclusion. The Introduction, which is the first chapter, addresses the background of study, statement of problem, purpose of study, research questions, significance of study, scope and limitations of study, the definition of key terms and the organization of the thesis. The second chapter, Literature Review, will outline the definitions of fairy tales, feminine beauty ideal, gender stereotypes, as well as men and their negative reaction towards feminism. Additionally this chapter will also explore some of the previous feminist critiques on fairy tales, the feminine beauty ideal, and gender stereotypes; investigating the relationship between fairy tales and feminism through past research, and briefly address the present study. The third chapter, Methodology will explain the research design, sampling, instruments used for data gathering, the pilot study, procedures, and the data analysis. The fourth and fifth chapter will present the findings and discuss its significance in relation to the study as well as provide recommendations for further research and conclusions respectively.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

2. 0 Introduction

This chapter will highlight more on the definitions of fairy tales, feminine beauty ideal, gender stereotypes, as well as men and their negative reaction

towards feminism. Additionally this chapter will also explore some of the previous feminist critiques on fairy tales, the feminine beauty ideal, and gender stereotypes; investigating the relationship between fairy tales and feminism through past research.

2. 1 Fairy tales

In order to find out about the impact of fairy tales on young adult males, it is first crucial to understand the meaning of fairy tales as well as their purpose in society, and the relationship between feminist criticism, fairy tales, and society—which first begins with the question: " What is a fairy tale?"

2. 1. 1 What is a fairy tale?

A fairy tale is a very powerful literary piece that undoubtedly resonates throughout the entire world as everyone has been exposed to fairy tales at one point in their lives, most notably during their childhood. Rohrich (1986) describes fairy tales as " one of the deepest and most enduring childhood impressions". If one were to be asked to define a ' fairy tale', no doubt it would be described as a story with magical elements where a hero does a good deed while rescuing a princess in between, thus saving the day.

According to Anderson (2000), ' fairy tales' can be defined as " short, imaginative, traditional tales with a high moral and magical content".

Heuscher (1963) defines the fairy tale as a narration which is not based on historic persons or events, in contrast to an epic or saga. Jack Zipes (2012) has described the fairy tale as " both an elaborate and simple narrative".

Various fairy tale scholars consider fairy tales to be " highly structured fictional stories wherein youth protagonists attain riches, marriage, and

social justice by means of cleverness, beauty, endurance, and magic" (Christians, 2009). However, even with all the definitions provided on fairy tales, it has been noted that fairy tales cannot easily be defined. Rachael Burkholder (2011) explains that " even within the genre itself, there are minor discrepancies in definitions, causing overlap within the definitions" and " such variations within the genre make clear definitions difficult." Author J. R. R. Tolkien has also confessed to being a fairy tale lover though he uses the term ' fairy-stories' instead. Tolkien himself has found difficulty in defining fairy tales or fairy-stories in his study " On Faerie Stories": " You will turn to the Oxford English Dictionary in vain. It contains no reference to the combination fairy-story, and is unhelpful on the subject of fairies generally. In the Supplement, fairy-tale is recorded since the year 1750, and its leading sense is said to be (a) a tale about fairies, or generally a fairy legend; with developed senses, (b) an unreal or incredible story, and (c) a falsehood." (Tolkien, *The Tolkien Reader*, 1966).

2. 1. 2 The purpose of a fairy tale

It is also important to understand the purpose of the fairy tale. The goal of the fairy tale is " to describe the marvellous and mysterious; that is, happenings which transcend everyday reality and as such are impossible to study by any scientific method" (Comtois, 1995). Cashdan (2000) states that fairy tales " are more than suspense-filled adventures that excite the imagination, more than mere entertainment"; Cashdan stresses that while the initial attraction of fairy tales may be for entertainment and enjoyment purposes, " its lasting value lies in its power to help children deal with the

internal conflicts they face in the course of growing up" The fairy tale genre has roots " deeply embedded in the traditions of oral tales, myths and legends" (Christians, 2009) and many scholars classify fairy tales with folklore narratives—which are the various genres such as legends, fairy tales, myths, epics, ballads, folktales and so on (Christians, 2009). The emergence of the fairy tale as a literary genre has been fairly recent; the fairy tale " has evolved through many cultural changes, making it one of the more diversified genres" (Christians, 2009). While many people of today often classify fairy tales as children's literature, these stories were in fact intended for adults instead. However, the tales have been adapted and revised for children because they are a suitable medium for teaching morals (Christians, 2009) because children find it easy to identify with the protagonists in fairy tales, whom they regard as ordinary and therefore similar to themselves (Cashdan, 2000). It is because of this that fairy tales, particularly fairy tales by the Grimm brothers in the nineteenth century were originally used as " primers for relatively affluent European children and served to impart moral lessons to them" (Zipes, 1988a as cited in Baker-Sperry and Grauerholz, 2003). Bettelheim (1976) has also noted how fairy tales manage to connect with children on a deep psychological level, as opposed to adults, where he argues that for adults, the fairy tale motifs are something " one is better off understanding rationally so one can rid oneself of them". As Zipes (2002) states, " Most fairy tales are an imaginative depiction of healthy human development and help children understand the motives behind their rebellion against parents and the fear of growing up". Today, fairy tales especially those that have survived the test of time are one

of the most widely read genres in the world. They are actively read by children across the globe and its readership transcends the borders of social class and racial groups (Zipes, 1997) while " continuing to contain symbolic imagery that legitimates existing race, class, and gender systems" (Baker-Sperry and Grauerholz, 2003).

2. 1. 3Fairy tale as a mirror of society

It is generally recognized by fairy tale scholars such as Jack Zipes (1988), Kay Stone (1985) and Maria Tatar (1987) that fairy tales have been known to reflect the culture and values of the society of their time. As fairy tales are one of the most influential forms of literature, one of the more important purposes of fairy tales was to teach children good moral values as well as the norms of society. Bettelheim (1976) suggests that fairy tales symbolize deep hidden meanings and desires within our unconscious mind, therefore it is much easier for children to identify with fairy tales as children can fill a deep psychological need with stories (Christians, 2009). Folklorists thus utilize fairy tales to transmit the cultures and traditions acceptable in society to young children. According to Glassie (1999), " folklorists learn to emphasize transmission and to think of traditions as things, items, as song texts and quilt patterns passed from generation to generation." Considering the impact of fairy tales on young children, it is not surprising that fairy tales have been made into a medium used to imprint desired gender roles before being transmitted to the young. Therefore it should also not be unforeseen that " children's literature contains messages, both implicit and explicit, about dominant power structures in society, particularly about gender roles

(Clark, Lennon, and Morris, 1993; Crabb and Bielawski, 1994; Kortenhause and Demarest, 1993; Weitzman et al., 1972; as cited in Baker-Sperry and Grauerholz, 2003). With the rise of technology in the 18th century due to the development of the printing press, the publishing power and distribution were " in the hands of the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie" (Comtois, 1995) who had originally considered fairy tales to be lacking in morals for their failure to promote " hallowed virtues such as order, discipline, and modesty which were needed to cultivate and thereby ensure newly rising capitalist interests and which were consistent with the Christian ethic" (Comtois, 1995). In order to keep with the socio-political era in 19th century Germany, many tales were sanitized and adapted by the Grimm brothers. Zipes (1988a, 1988b) had noted that apart from teaching young children appropriate values and attitudes of the time, fairy tales were also intended to teach young girls and women how to become responsible, domesticated and attractive to a marriage partner during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Bottigheimer (1986) also found that tales reinforced women's silence, a cultural preference at the time—a trait noticeable in fairy tale heroines who often stay silent and only speak in response to a question posed by a male character.

2. 1. 4 Feminism, Fairy tales and Patriarchal Society

One of the main concerns of feminist scholars is the way traditional fairy tales are used by patriarchal societies to promote narrow, predetermined views on gender roles whereby women are portrayed in a shallow light.

Feminist writers like Lieberman (1972), Bottigheimer (1986), Stone (1985),

and Tatar (1987) maintain that fairy tales have resulted in the formation of gender stereotypes. Women are expected to behave like fairy tale heroines and thus be 'seen and not heard'—they are expected to be pretty, passive, domesticated and silent. It is a common opinion among feminist writers that fairy tales are indeed a tool used by men in patriarchal societies to impart what they think is considered as proper behaviour for women, setting the blueprint for what they see as proper gender roles in society. Therefore, fairy tales are used to shape and mould women to conform to the patriarchal values and norms; or simply as a form of control on women's behaviour. Taking a closer look at the use of fairy tales to promote norms and values that are viewed as acceptable in a patriarchal society, Tatar (1987) uncovered some interesting details about fairy tales, prior to and after the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In her 1987 work 'The hard facts of the Grimms' Fairy tales', Tatar notes that prior to the 18th century, male and female Cinderellas were found in equal frequencies in European folklores. The male counterparts of the present-day female fairy tale heroines were not limited to Cinderella alone—documentations of male Snow Whites were also found in Turkish folklores as well as a Russian male Sleeping Beauty (Tatar, 1987). From this knowledge, it is rather interesting to ponder on the reason for the sudden drastic change in the role of the rescuer and the rescued. When early European folktales have clearly placed women in the roles that, in today's patriarchal society, would conventionally be bestowed on males, Tatar (1987) prompts us to "think twice about male hero patterns when we come across a collection of tales depicting heroines who carry out tasks

normally put to male heroes alone or who denounce fathers too weak to protect them from evil stepmothers".

2. 1. 5 Female heroines and patriarchal society

Consistent with the values of the era, the Grimms's tales made it clear that domestic talents were a heroine's ideal (Comtois, 1995). However, Tatar (1987) questions the motives of the Grimm brothers, who were responsible for collecting, rewriting and adapting the folklores for the German audience to ensure that the folklores to fit in with the morals, values and norms in 19th century Germany. Women, who were once revered as brave and worthy, were suddenly reduced to the role of damsels in distress; morphing into what Kohlbenschlag (1988) refers to as the ' formula female'. The formula female, according to Kohlbenschlag, has two personas—the desirable object, and the woman who is geared to live for another person (Comtois, 1995); she is a woman who will sacrifice her own needs in order to achieve these two personas. Atkins (2004) states that fairy tale heroines like Snow White, Cinderella and Sleeping Beauty are " schooled through their gender constructions, must participate in patriarchal society" because their " happiness depends on conformity to [its] rule" (Zipes, 1983). Atkins further asserts that these fairy tale heroines are left with no choice as they have " no right to challenge their roles as idealized women". There are fairy tale females who do not fit into the passive, obedient category and as these female characters fail to conform (Zipes, 1983), they are typecast as wicked women. These are the wicked female antagonists that we see in fairy tales—mothers, step-mothers, stepsiblings, and evil witches. These women are

punished at the end of the tales for their contravention (Mueller, 1986) against the "good-girl heroines" (Atkins, 2004), usually during, immediately after or before the wedding of the heroine princess. This, according to Atkins (2004) makes it clear to readers of fairy tales that the choice is simple—conform to the norms of patriarchal society or suffer the consequences. Atkins (2004) further states that "conformity is the key to the kingdom" where women must submit themselves to the patriarchal rule, because they are compelled to do so (Rowe, 1979; Atkins 2004). According to Rowe (1979), fairy tales "perpetuate the patriarchal status quo by making female subordination seem a romantically desirable, indeed and inescapable fate".

2. 2 Gender Stereotypes

Gender stereotypes are also an important key term in this study as the main objective of this research is to explore the effect of fairy tales on the formation of gender stereotypes of women on young adult males. Therefore, it is imperative to first understand the meaning of gender, stereotypes, as well as previous feminist critiques on gender stereotyping in fairy tale literature.

2. 2. 1 Gender, Sex, and Stereotypes

The words 'gender' and 'sex' are often confused to mean the same thing. As Ifegbesan (2010) states: "Gender is distinct from 'sex' and refers to socially constructed and not biologically defined characteristics of human being"; and goes on to refer to gender as "the social construction of what is considered male and female based on socio-cultural norms and power" (Ifegbesan, 2010). In essence, sex is physical and biological while gender is

socially constructed and not engraved in nature, but in society and " biological sexuality is transformed into socially significant gender" (Glen, 2000). Gender roles are defined as " socially and culturally defined prescriptions and beliefs about the behavior and emotions of men and women" (Anselmi and Law, 1998). Stereotypes are defined differently by different scholars. Hall et al. (1988) defines stereotypes as the representations that are widely accepted and shared among members of a particular society and these personifications are passed down from generation to generation. Lipmann (1957) defines stereotypes as " preconceptions" that are " not a complete picture of the world, but they are a picture of a possible world to which we are adapted". Stereotypes are surprisingly easy to develop and " rigidify surreptitiously, and operate reflexively, provide convenient bases for making personal sense of the world" (Cortes, 2001). In terms of gender stereotypes, Martins and Halverson (1981) describe them as one type of " subjective perception of what a man or woman should be or how people should behave".

2. 2. 2 The existence of gender stereotypes

The reason as to why stereotypes exist and persist still remains a mystery. At one point, stereotyping is useful as characterizing people into groups and generalizing allows us to draw conclusions about the personalities and behaviours of others (Farley et al., 1998; Kim, 2005) as they are considered as " serving a knowledge of function by enabling people to construct simplified images of reality" (Feinman & Gill, 1978). It can be argued that by stereotyping, it makes it easier for us to understand different groups of

people as they probably act and think the same way. Although stereotypes may " help us to understand others, values or beliefs by generalizing them in a simple way" (Kim, 2005), it can lead us to process information inaccurately with bias (Farley et al., 1998). Stereotyping can lead to negative effects on men and women, due to the existence of the stereotype threat, a term first used by Steel and Aronson (1995), which refers to " being at risk of confirming, as a self-characteristic, a negative stereotype about one's social group". On the surface level, gender stereotyping serves to segregate men and women into two separate poles, highlighting men as capable, useful leaders; and women as housewives. Ifegbesan (2010) notes that " most of these stereotypes often described men as intellectually, competent, strong and brave, while women areas homely, warm and expressiveness, incompetent and passive." In gender stereotyping, males are portrayed as the stronger, more dominant sex who are fit to be leaders; while females are portrayed as being subordinate to males and confined to the home (Fiske, 1993; Ifegbesan; 2010).

2. 2. 3 Gender stereotypes and media distortion

When it comes to the cause of gender stereotyping, the blame often falls on the mass media; with their constant advertising of sexily-clad women or women as happy mothers at home—creating the image of women as sex objects or women as housewives. However, according to Kim (2005), gender stereotypes might not have originated from the mass media, and " rather is seems that the media uses stereotypes to generalize a group of people, values or belief in a simple way". While the image of women portrayed in the

media is not necessarily accurate, the mass media constantly, carelessly and mindlessly reinforces distorted and biased stereotypes and images of people (Cortes, 2001), especially women, in the minds of their audiences.

Advertisers use " the distorted values or beliefs of gender roles by reinforcing the same stereotypical images of gender roles" (Kim, 2005) as if these distorted images were indeed the ideal images of society (Pollay, 1996; Williamson, 1978). Distorted stereotypes are often used by advertisers because the " advertisers seek to communicate to a target audience using existing societal beliefs" (Kim, 2005) as stereotypes make it much easier for advertisers to effectively reach out to target audiences to sell their products than realistic values and beliefs (Voight, 2003).

2. 2. 4 Feminism, fairy tales and gender stereotypes of women

With the use of gender stereotypes in media by advertisers to sell their products, it can be said that the same concept can be extended to the way society uses fairy tales to instill traditional gender roles in young children, particularly about femininity. According to Atkins (2004), numerous scholars have " written widely on the ways in which fairy tales reinforce traditional notions of femininity". The heroine princesses in fairy tales almost always exhibit traits of passivity and extreme patience; and for good reason. When heroines in fairy tales adhere to their passivity, and roles as pretty faces, they are rewarded (Gauntlet, 2002; Stone 1985), usually by their marriage to a prince. The sacrifice, solemnity, and dependence (Rowe, 1979; Zipes, 1983) of these fairy tale princesses " signify their virtue and make them attractive upon the appearance of Prince Charming" (Atkins, 2004) and the

moral message embedded in fairy tales for young females is clear: be a good girl, and thou shall live happily ever after. Notable fairy tale heroines like Cinderella, Snow White, and Sleeping Beauty are well aware of this life lesson as they had also patiently waited for their handsome prince to come along to set their lives in motion after marriage (Tatar, 1986; Atkins, 2004; Bottigheimer, 1986).

2. 2. 5 Passivity and domesticity in fairy tale heroines

One lesson fairy tale femininity teaches us about gender roles, is that women " exist for others" (Kohlenschlag, 1988). The fairy tale heroine waits in " self-redemptive silence" (Bottigheimer, 1986) for the arrival of the one " who will make her life meaningful and fulfilled" (Kohlenschlage, 1988). It is through this course that an " idealized perfect woman" forms (Stone, 1985) with " classic qualities—beauty, patience, submissiveness, charm, repose, productivity and reproductive potential" (Atkins, 2004). Passivity is prized among female fairy tale heroines. As second-wave feminist Simone de Beauvoir once commented, " everything still encourages the young to expect fortune and happiness from some Prince Charming rather than to attempt by herself their difficult and uncertain conquest" (as quoted in Stone, 1986). Stone (1986) also notes the underlying message in fairy tales are interpreted by some modern readers is that " success for the female comes from being beautiful and sitting around and waiting". In essence, the success of the heroine in finding happiness is not only tied to beauty but " also to inactivity" (Jorgensen, 2012). In Jennifer Waelti-Walters' 1982 book ' Fairy tales and the Female Imagination', female characters are claimed to be " the epitome of

passivity" (Jorgensen, 2012). Waelti-Walters (1982) asserts that fairy tales portray girls as objects and that " girls have been taught for centuries that they should commit a smiling, lifelong suicide, deny their own nature, have no identity whatsoever". Another trait frequently portrayed in fairy tales is that women are stereotypical domestic, especially in the Grimm fairy tales. As Maria Tatar (2003) asserts " social promotion depends primarily on proof of domestic skills". Fairy tale heroines like Snow White and Sleeping Beauty possess good domestic skills that of a housewife as each of them are shown to cook and clean in their respective tales, portraying the stereotype of the " dutiful daughter who takes care of everyone's wants (the father's in particular)" (Tatar, 1992). In conclusion, a stereotypical fairy tale heroine is a woman with good domestic skills, passivity, and a pretty face are considered and it therefore the duty of every woman in the real world to strive to achieve such virtuous traits as portrayed by the female role models of fairy tale land in order to snag a mate as their fairy tale counterparts have done. As Kay Stone (1985) in ' The Misuse of Enchantment' says:" Thus the message of the Cinderella story that seems most relevant for modern girls and women concerns the rewards one is supposed to receive for being pretty, polite, and passive; the primary reward, of course, is marriage, and marriage not just to anyone but to a ' prince'."

2. 3 Feminism

" Feminism is the radical notion that women are human beings."—Cheris Kramarae
The relationship between males and feminism must be explored further in order to effectively answer the third research question in this

study, which is to determine if males who possess feminist views still adhere to the gender stereotypes embedded in fairy tale literature, or if they have altered perceptions of fairy tale heroines and men in general. Furthermore, the negative reaction of males towards feminism is also investigated to shed some light on why some men still avoid the label of 'feminist' and continue to hold onto traditional gender roles.

2. 3. 1 Men and Feminism

Feminism is a word that is very common today, though it holds different meanings semantically. It originated from the French word 'feminisme' and "began to be used widely in the 1890s and then principally as a synonym for women's emancipation" (Offen, 1988). Ngwainmbi (2004) breaks feminism into two definitions: in a narrow sense and in the broader sense. In a narrow sense, she defines feminism as "a complex set of political ideologies used by the women's movement to advance the cause of women's equality and put an end to sexist theory and the practice of social oppression" (Ngwainmbi, 2004). In a broader sense, feminism is defined as: "a variety of interrelated frameworks used to observe, analyze, and interpret the complex ways in which the social reality of gender inequality is constructed, enforced, and manifested from the largest institutional settings to the details of people's daily lives which includes feminist scholarship (Ali et. al, 2000; Barsky 1992; Bryson 2002; Johnson 1995; Ritzer 2000; Segal 1999; Zalewski 2000; as quoted in Ngwainmbi, 2004). Karen Offen (1988) defines feminism using "the dictionary definition (in composite)" as "a theory and/or movement concerned with advancing the position of women through such

means as achievement of political, legal, or economic rights equal to those granted men (my emphasis)". According to Crowe (2011), feminism focuses specifically "on women's interest, experiences and concerns" and asserts that feminism is gynocentric, which is a "response to the androcentrism of mainstream culture, including prevailing views of justice and fairness". In essence, the feminist movement seeks to shed some light on "gendered issues that are overlooked or underemphasized within mainstream debates" (Crowe, 2011). According to Pleasants (2011), women have "cautiously called for men's participation in feminist movements" increasingly in the past few decades. However, for many men, the feminist movement and feminism still carry a negative connotation and remains a subject of which they hope to avoid being associated with. Jonathan Crowe (2011) states in his article 'Men and Feminism: Some challenges and a partial response' that "relatively few men exhibit active support for feminism, while many men express negative attitudes towards the feminist movement". As women continuously urge the male population to show their support in the feminist movement, many men, particularly men who still hold onto traditional gender roles and masculinity, hold feminists in a very negative light.

2. 3. 2 The negative reaction of males towards feminism

There are two main reasons presented by Crowe (2011) on why males continue to reject feminism. The first reason given by Crowe is that feminism is not about males and therefore males and this presents a problem to them. Williams and Wittig (1997) suggest that males reject the label of feminism due to the "gendered nature of the word 'feminist'" (Sutter and Toller,

2006), which they think cannot refer to males. Haddock and Zanna (1994) conducted a study on men and women's attitudes towards "feminists" and "housewives" and from their findings had found that men evaluated feminists more negatively than housewives. The men with the most negative attitude towards feminists were labeled 'highly authoritarian' by Haddock and Zanna (1994), and these men such perceptions perhaps because "the value system of feminists contradict the value systems of highly authoritarian men" (Suter and Toller, 2006). Crowe explains that this negative attitude towards feminism is because of males who practice what Raewyn Connell (2005) has called 'hegemonic masculinity'. Hegemonic masculinity is the tendency for males to define their social position by seeking dominance over other males and their subordinate females (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005; Connell, 2005). As feminism is gynocentric, it deviates heavily from the hegemonic masculinity social norm (Crowe, 2011). As feminism is for others, males are wary of the ambiguous position that feminists have placed them in. It is unclear to males exactly how far or how much they can contribute to feminism and how much their views actually count within feminist discourse (Crowe, 2011). Crowe also notes that feminists are more interested in hearing from women, than men as they regard the opinions of women of more importance than the opinions of men. A second reason provided by Crowe regarding males' avoidance with feminism is that males are the ones to blame in feminism. As Crowe (2011) puts it, "many men feel defensive in response to feminism. They feel they are being blamed—or perhaps they feel they are to blame." With the notion that they are indeed the villains and the propagators of the feminist movement, which they assume is because of

them and against them at the same time, it is no wonder that many males choose to shy away from being identified as feminists—the very label that makes them look evil in the first place.

2. 4 Feminine Beauty Ideal

" Each of us the child may bless with a single gift. No more, no less. Little princess, my gift shall be the gift of beauty."— Flora (Sleeping Beauty, 1959)The very first gift bestowed upon Sleeping Beauty in the titular tale, is the gift of beauty, above all else. The role of beauty is implicitly crucial in this study; as it is one of the most noticeable of the stereotypes found in fairy tales. It is therefore important to further explore the feminine beauty ideal in fairy tales, to determine if men also place as much significance on it as women do.

2. 4. 1 The portrayal of feminine beauty as a means of control in a patriarchal society

As the famous saying by William Shakespeare goes, ' Beauty is in the eye of the beholder'—it is subjective and heavily left to the interpretation and judgment of each individual to decide for themselves on whether something is beautiful or not. Many women have pursued the idea of beauty relentlessly throughout their lives; devoting time, resources and energy to achieve the ideal, perfect beauty as Bordo (1963) disputes that beauty regimes that women engage in (such as makeup, dieting and dressing up) are " central organizing principles of time and space in the day of many women". Baker-Sperry and Grauerholz (2003), Backman and Adams (1991), and Suitor and Reavis (1995) have noted how beauty regimes, diet and makeup remain as

one of the major means by which adolescent girls and women gain social status and self-esteem. The definition of ideal beauty is very subjective and differs with different cultures. In Western societies, women experience strong social pressures to be extremely thin and perfect, a culture ideal of beauty that is often portrayed by the media (Jefferson and Stake, 2009; Engeln-Maddox, 2006; Owen and Laurel-Seller, 2000; Spitzer, Henderson, & Zivian, 1999). In Eastern cultures, though varied, many still consider fair skin as a sign of feminine beauty. East Asians have idolized fair skin as a sign of ideal feminine beauty for the longest time (Nakano Glen, 2008). According to Jung and Lee (2009), "traditional feminine beauty in Korea has consisted of being moderately plump with fair skin, cultivated mannerisms and modesty, with a cultural emphasis on inner-beauty" though Jung and Lee also note that this perspective is changing due to the influx of Western culture. In India, there is a huge cultural emphasis placed on being fair or light skinned as it is an "essential ingredient in Indian women's beauty" (Parameswaran and Cardoza, 2009). With the vulnerability of women towards the notion of the ideal beauty, many feminists view the use of the feminine beauty ideal as a means of control or restriction that is forced upon women by men or the patriarchal society in which we live. As mentioned in chapter 1, Freedman (1986) asserts that women are fully aware of the interconnection between beauty and men and therefore take pains to meet the standards of beauty set by men. Fox's 1977 work "Nice girl": Social control of women through a value construct' describes the feminine beauty ideal as a 'normative means of social control', asserting that social control is achieved by the 'internalization of values and norms' that function as a control on the lives of

women; through the use of the ' nice girl' or ' good-girl' labelling. Such labelling by our patriarchal society acts as normative restrictions by laying the " groundwork for a circumscription of women's power and control in the world" (Fox, 1977). It is through this way, Baker-Sperry and Grauerholz (2003) notes that " women internalize norms and adopt behaviours that reflect and reinforce their relative powerlessness, making external forces less necessary".

2. 4. 2 The Role of Beauty in Fairy tales

As women in real life are wrapped around the idea that beauty is something that is ideal and is worth pursuing, the same can be said for many characters in fairy tales; especially princess-themed fairy tales where princesses are always depicted as beautiful and " some writers portray their beauty as almost supernatural" (Christians, 2009). In many fairy tales, there is a frequent portrayal of the notion that beauty is the secret and key to success (Christians, 2009, Gauntlet, 2002; and Jorgensen, 2012). Comtois (1995) notes that the way beauty is portrayed in fairy tales " represents a dramatic example of the use of visual imagery". Comtois (1995) also describes beauty in fairy tales as an abstract concept which carries an " ethereal quality"— therefore " the imagination is called upon; precise definitions are intentionally left ambiguous"; concluding that a certain amount of " subjectivity and individual interpretation is uncontrollably present." As fairy tales are the earliest forms of literature that many of us are exposed to, it is not surprising should young children develop stereotypes of women and their place and function in society from the characters depicted in fairy tales;

particularly the female heroines, who are commonly portrayed as princesses who often have no other useful trait other than beauty. Many princess-themed fairy tales, most notably Snow White and Sleeping Beauty, are blessed with extraordinary beauty, which is regularly their only quality. One such instance can be seen in the story of Snow White where the titular character is blessed with exquisite beauty, due to her mother's wish that Snow White be "white as snow, as red as blood and as black as the ebony window frame" (Cashdan, 2000). In Rita J. Comtois' 'A qualitative study on the perceived impact of fairy tales on a group of women' in 1995, Comtois lists several techniques that are used to portray the intensity of beauty in fairy tales. The first technique Comtois mentions is "to describe its shock on others". Beauty in fairy tale is often used as a "shock effect", whereby the prince, upon encountering the beauty princess is "rendered mute or paralyzed by her loveliness", which according to Luthi (1984) spellbinds and captivates sans eroticism and sensuality. Beauty in fairy tales, as Comtois notes, is "almost never made specific" and is left to the imagination. However, when characteristics are indeed specified, it is to "enhance the audience's appreciation for the beauty being described, to make it more absolute" (Comtois, 1995). On the other hand, many of the descriptions of beauty in fairy tales are defined by the extreme cultural standards of European audiences. The element of ugliness, although occasionally present in fairy tales, is mostly used a device to enhance the beauty of the heroine princess, through the effect of contrast. Luthi (1984) explains how beauty and ugliness are juxtaposed to one another and when contrasted, the beauty of heroines is more easily identifiable and visible. The element of beauty in

fairy tales also serves as a catalyst for the progression of the story. Beauty is often " the driving force in fairy tale plots" (Comtois, 1995), as it is often the astounding beauty of the heroines that set the plot in motion. For example, it was the radiant beauty of Cinderella that advances the story as she captures the attention of the prince who eventually marries her and upgrades her social status. It is almost unheard of to find a princess or heroine who is not of amazing physical beauty, who attracts the love and attention of her saviour prince, which leads Luthi (1984) to conclude that the object of magnificence is the heroine princess and it is her beauty and radiance that is usually the catalyst for the prince to pursue her. The heroine's extraordinary beauty has also been noted to be the main cause of conflict (Christians, 2009), often caused by the older female character who deems the young, radiant heroine as a threat. Conversely, Comtois also notes that it is a rule that both the hero and heroine are not only beautiful but virtuous at the same time. Fairy tale princesses and heroines are portrayed as beautiful yet gentle and as ladies of virtue—who are never cruel or wicked. As fairy tales have been described to " mirror the proper world" (Comtois, 1995), there are no cross-patterns in fairy tales, according to Lieberman (1972) of plain but virtuous heroines or ugly but gallant princes. It is because of these circumstances that Lieberman (1972) also points out that expectations will be ingrained in the minds of readers, which may result in feelings of negative feelings of inadequacy within those who are not able to identify with the characters portrayed (Stone, 1985). As Christians (2009) observes, " beauty is often the only guaranteed power to the heroine", while Jorgensen (2012) notes that " beauty is not only linked with success in fairy tales, but also with character".

As Lawrence Talairach-Vielmas states in his *Moulding the Female Body in Victorian Fairy Tales and Sensation Novels* (2007), " princesses are beautiful and may even try to improve their beauty"; therefore, for princesses their " beauty is their wealth—quite literally since beauty enables them to win a prince and a fortune". The notion of fairy tale heroines further trying to improve their already beautiful looks is also noted by Jorgensen (2012) who states that " fairies grant baby girls (usually princesses) the gift of beauty, and older girls have a chance to impress donor figures with their politeness and charm, which frequently results in beautification."

2. 4. 3Feminist Critique on Beauty in Fairy tales

Feminist writers have often considered and criticized the characterization of females in fairy tales—where females are either too pretty and passive or conversely too ugly and cruel. The female protagonists are depicted as gentle, passive, beautiful and domestic. The female antagonists on the other hand, are the polar opposites; ugly, wicked, cruel and aggressive. This obvious contrast can be seen in the story *Cinderella*, where the beautiful titular protagonist is tormented and enslaved by her wicked step-mother and ugly step-sisters. One of the prominent critiques of feminist writers like Marcia Lieberman and Kay Stone is that fairy tales have created such an exaggeratedly high mark for the beauty of women solely to win a husband and elevate their social status. In the majority of fairy tales, especially princess-themed fairy tales the female protagonist does not rely on any particular talent or skill, other than her beauty to catch the attention of the wealthy prince. In a patriarchal society, fairy tales have been observed by

feminist writers to control women by placing an importance on the body, creating a notion that there is nothing more to being female than looking beautiful which is the "key to success" (Jorgensen, 2012; Christians, 2009). Bullough and Bullough's 1973 'The Subordinate Sex' marks one of the earliest critiques of the standard of beauty of women in fairy tales as they critique the image of "the beautiful girl with the right measurements who catches the attention of a rich sponsor and simply by being female in a male-dominated society can advance her social origins".

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the definitions of fairy tales, feminine beauty ideal, gender stereotypes, as well as men and their negative reaction towards feminism. Fairy tales and their connection to patriarchal society were explained. Additionally, feminist critiques on fairy tales, gender stereotypes, and the feminine beauty ideal were explored. Finally, past research was briefly addressed. The next chapter will describe in detail the methodology employed in the research.