

Gender roles in cinderella essay sample



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Throughout history, fairy tales have captivated the hearts and minds of fans and critics alike. While fans applaud the underlying morals of fairy tales, critics point out the negative effects these tales have in the socialization of children. Modern adaptations of fairy tales, as well as original versions, all place negative gender expectations on women. Providing cultural and socio-historical information, fairy tales have helped to perpetuate stereotypical thoughts on the “ideal virtues” of women. Natural beauty, obedience to the husband, and dedication to the maintenance of the home are all standards for women modeled throughout different versions and adaptations of fairy tales.

Cinderella, one of the most popular fairy tales with countless versions, reflects gender expectations on women in vastly different societies and settings. It's storyline revolves around the idea that women are beautiful, vulnerable, passive, and obedient. Furthermore, Cinderella provides another example in fairy tales where the heroine of the story must be “rescued” by a man of princely ways and helped by the forces of nature. Using examples from Cinderella, it is evident that women's portrayals in fairy tales have placed gender expectations on the ideals and characteristics of heroines throughout history.

In numerous versions, Cinderella essentially keeps the same form, differing only in small details like the harshness of the stepsisters and their punishments. In all versions, the tale begins by relating the initial situation. The first introduction is that of the heroine, Cinderella. She is beautiful, kind, obedient, and passive. The death of her mother is revealed, and the ugly and evil stepmother and stepsisters are brought in. Now the mistreatment of the

heroine is shown as Cinderella is forced to live in poor conditions while the others have a luxurious life. The dilemma of the story comes next, as the heroine cannot attend the royal ball since she is so poor and dirty. Her character is reaffirmed as she nevertheless helps her evil stepsisters prepare for the ball. After her sisters leave for the royal palace, Cinderella is shown helplessly crying alone. Then, with the help of a magical force, she acquires beautiful clothing and jewelry and transportation to the ball. Here, the prince is mesmerized by her beauty and falls in love.

After a splendid evening, Cinderella must leave the ball because the magical force will be gone after midnight. The next night, Cinderella again attends the royal ball and has a wonderful time. However, she forgets her restrictions of time and as the clock rings midnight, she runs out. In her haste home, she loses one of her glass slippers which is found by the prince. The prince vows to marry the woman whose foot fits the slippers, and all the women anxiously await their chance to try it on. The prince arrives at the house, and after the stepsisters fail to fit the slipper, Cinderella's foot slides easily in. When Cinderella removes the matching slipper out of her pocket, everyone was certain she was the beautiful princess at the ball. The sisters then begged for forgiveness and Cinderella marries the prince.

The three major versions of Cinderella come from Giambattista Basile around 1634, Charles Perrault in 1697, and Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm in 1812. While the story lines of this fairy tale differ slightly, they all reflect the society in which they are told. Each version also puts the heroine in a passive position, as each Cinderella relies on natural forces and the prince for a happy ending.

Cinderella is portrayed as helpless, vulnerable, passive, and unable to attend the royal ball without assistance.

At the end of the nineteenth century in Russia, fairy tales were institutionalized as themes for grandiose and ballet pieces. Charles Perrault's version in the seventeenth century used fairy tales as models to set standards for civilization directed to upper class children. It was geared towards a patriarchal, capitalist, middle-class mentality. A feminist Kay Stone notes that in Grimm and Disney stories these characteristics are preconditions for a woman to be a heroine.

Subtle and obvious differences in the story of Cinderella, have not changed the overall intent of the various versions. Perrault chose fairy tales that showed the "ideal virtues" of women, namely natural beauty, sweetness, obedience, loyalty, and dedication to the home. His version of Cinderella falls right along the same lines. Cinderella, beautiful, kind, and indifferent to the severe cruelty received from her sisters, passively awaits redemption from an unfair lifestyle. Specifically, she is treated as a maid, while her sisters live in luxurious, carefree lifestyles. After her sisters leave to attend the ball, Cinderella, again highlighting feminine archetypes, remains home and begins to cry. This sullen cry for help brings in the help of an outside, magical force; here represented as a fairy godmother. Indeed, Perrault uses this literary framework to imprint in the story rules of the baroque period, as well as lessons on virtue.

In traditional French baroque, he praises aristocratic good manners, unconditional forgiveness, and cleanliness. Cinderella exemplifies these

manners in that she returns home before midnight; at the ball, she shares fruits with her evil stepsisters; at the end she forgives her sisters without consideration of the severeness of their cruelty; and the glass slippers are used as a perfect symbol of aristocratic refinement. More than any other fairy tale writer, Perrault transforms a hard working girl struggling to regain her social rights after her mother's death, into a pretty, passive, and unconditionally good lady of high class. In baroque grandeur, Cinderella does not use her new status and power to seek revenge on her evil sisters, rather she kindly and graciously has her sisters married to noblemen in the royal court.

Much more dramatic and vivid in description, the version written by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm focuses on more real life punishments. The evil stepsisters, in this version, have their eyes pecked out by doves, without any protest by Cinderella. There is even a detailed description of this process-changing what is usually thought of doves as a symbol of peace. Also, this version relates how the sisters go as far as to cut off their toes in hopes of fitting the glass slipper. The brothers Grimm stay consistent with this theme in that the mutilation of the sisters in the end is an answer to the their own self-mutilation. They cut off their toes and heels, and thus their eyes are poked out by forces from above.

In Giambattista Basile's *La Gatta Cenerentola*, his version of Cinderella, violence is present throughout. It is evident that Basile had his influence over future fairy tale writers.

In all the different versions of Cinderella, the heroine is put in the secondary position. Although the main character embodies many aspects of human nature associated with both sexes, Cinderella focuses on the archetypes of women. Cinderella is expected to be receptive to the demands of others; she passively cries out for help, instead of taking actions into her own hands, and her methods to help herself all rely on outside forces. She must have the help of magical forces, some from nature or through a parental spirit. These actions, or lack there of, all reflect feminine characteristics. They often appear as princesses or queens, or a poor girl who is under the supervision of a cruel parent, while the loving figure is out of the picture. Many fairy tales also depict a fragile girl rescued by a sumptuous prince.

While the man in fairy tales carries out heroic deeds, the woman generally plays a menial role. The oppression of women is highly notable in fairy tales. For instance, Cinderella has to conceal herself while she is wearing her raggedy clothing. She only becomes a heroine after she is dressed, cleaned, and covered with jewels. The second night at the ball, Cinderella loses track of time and hurriedly runs out of the castle when the clock strikes midnight. The prince asks if anyone has seen a princess, and a man of the court replies, " I only saw a girl in rags, who looked more like a peasant than a princess."

The effects that fairy tales have on society is reflected in gender expectations and differences in the present. Although all humans possess both masculine and feminine archetypes, women in fairy tales have long since represented only the feminine sides of human characteristics. In society today, the overabundance of masculine energy has dominated heroic

<https://assignbuster.com/gender-roles-in-cinderella-essay-sample/>

characteristics. Violence, abuse of power, and competition are prevalent in today's society. Children, traditionally to whom fairy tales are told, unfortunately are socialized in these archetypes and gender expectations. Specifically in Cinderella, young females are taught that the way to accomplish things is not to do things actively, but to wait, with patience and virtue, for a princely man to rescue her from her position. They are socialized to oversee the qualities of men that can be said to have "too much testosterone."

Most traditional fairy tales use a low to middle class woman being rescued or brought out of poor lifestyles by a healthy, handsome, and wealthy older man. The resulting influence forces individuals to identify themselves with either archetype, while shunning the other. The heroines of these tales are obligated to behave in a certain manner to preserve herself, as traditionally the feminine has less power than the masculine. Thus, the heroines behave a certain way because of her relationship to the masculine. It is clear that the stories we remember best are the ones instilled in our minds at the early, most-influential stage in our lives. To help in the battle against inequality, we must first address these tales passed down from generation to generation and note the effects on gender roles and expectations.