Many studies have shown the stereotypical characteristics of female protagonists in the original fairy tales. Many characters are passive, and rarely show any masculine characteristics. For today’s young adults, retellings of fairy tales are popular topics for teens to read and they want to be able to relate to the characters and stories found within. Using a modified version of the Bem Sex Role instrument, this quantitative content analysis compares the female protagonists in five selected fairy tales to their counterparts in five young adult fairy tale retellings from recent authors. Have the female protagonists stayed more feminine or do they portray more masculine qualities? Are roles still gender biased, or have they become neutral? This study explored the changes that retellings of fairy tales have taken towards addressing gender stereotypes.

Headings:

Fairy tales -- evaluation

Literary criticism -- content analysis

Feminism
FEMININE AND MASCULINE CHARACTERISTICS IN YOUNG ADULT FAIRY TALE RETELLINGS: THE DIFFERENCES IN FEMALE PROTAGONISTS FROM THE ORIGINAL FAIRY TALES AND THE YOUNG ADULT RETELLINGS

by
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A Master’s paper submitted to the faculty of the School of Information and Library Science of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Library Science.

Chapel Hill, North Carolina

2016

Approved by

_______________________________________
Sandra Hughes-Hassell
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Acknowledgments

First, to my parents, whom I owe everything to- if I didn’t have you lunatics in my life there would be a lot less laughing and more grammatically correct sentences. I thank God for you every day. To Sandra for being an amazing adviser and wonderful mentor- I have learned so much from your guidance over these last few years and I look forward to working with you in the future. To Brian Sturm- thank you for all your assistance with my endless questions and for helping me think outside the box. To my wonderful partner who has had to deal with me these last few months- thank you for sticking by my side even though I’ve driven you crazy and you had to hear me talk about fairy tales for hours on end. You’re my rock. To my puppies- thank you for letting me cuddle whenever I got stressed out (believe me, there was a lot of cuddling). To all my librarian friends- you were the best resource I could have had! This was an amazing journey and I’m so happy to have had you all there with me. Lara Bailey, you are wonderful, thank you for helping me with Word-which can be evil. Finally, thank you to the mystery librarian who was working the chat service late one night while I was doing my resource list- without you, I never would have succeeded.
I. Introduction

Everyone around the world has heard of fairy tales. Whether they remember them as bedtime stories from their childhood or recognize them from the Disney movies, everyone knows the power of the three little words “once upon a time”. The fairy tale is sometimes the first poetic form youth come into contact with and for many it has left on them the deepest and most enduring childhood impressions. As thumbprints of history, fairy tales teach about the cultures of people while entertaining and explaining the world to the next generation. While the tales are valued as a kind of historical archive and a great source of entertainment, researchers have found that fairy tales have an impact in shaping the ways children view the world (Kuon & Weimar, 2009). Often, for example, little girls look at the princesses and women of their favorite fairy tales and say that they want to grow up to be like them. Many times, it’s the Disney movies rather than the original fairy tales that shape the opinions of who is the “best” princess or which female character a child may want to be most like.

The realization that fairy tales may influence how children believe the world works has led to substantial study of specific portrayals of characteristics, themes, and morals learned from fairy tales from all over the world. One area of focus has been on gender portrayals, specifically in regard to portrayals of women in fairy tales (Kuon & Weimar, 2009). The first fairy tale princesses were primarily prized for their beauty, ability to
clean, and were passive in their own stories, typically allowing events to happen to them, and not taking charge. Furthermore, feminist critics find the endings to many of these fairy tales unsettling since many fairy tales end with a wedding, concluding that happiness is not only possible, but attainable through the bonds of traditional marriage. Feminist critics believe that this seems to perpetuate the stereotype that a woman is incomplete without a husband, and also unable to independently care for herself (Price, 2014, p. 2). In modern adaptations and retellings, by writers such as Robin McKinley, Jane Yolen, Sarah Jessica George, and Jo Napoli, female characters are given more obvious agency compared to their original fairy tale counterparts.

Many modern young adult authors have taken the original fairy tales and retold them for modern teen audiences. In recent years, parents have turned to contemporary stories in place of the traditional fairy tales for bedtime reading with their children. According to Leah Schnelbach, writer of *Fairy Tales for the Modern Age*, a study conducted in a UK parenting website concluded that parents favor more modern and tales of morality when the content of certain fairy tales contain extremely violent imagery and scary characters such as in “Hansel and Gretel” or “Cinderella”. Even the word “dwarf” in “Snow White” has turned some parents off. These fairy tales are used to explain the harshness of the world to children and to explore the darkest places of the human psyche while doing it in a fantasy world (Schnelbach, 2013). A variety of cultures have adapted these stories to their own needs, and it is because of this resonance that so many authors today go back to explore the changes in our society. Modern tales use the lens of fairy tales to examine issues of gender, class, and race and the problems that we are dealing with in our culture.
in the 21st century. This also means that with the changing times, the original fairy tale women continue to be rewritten and changed as well.

This paper aims to explore the personalities and actions of the female main characters in a subset of original fairy tales and compare them to the female characters in modern retellings (sometimes known as fractured tales), as seen in young adult literature (literature written for those aged 12 to early 20’s). By examining the retellings of five of the most popular fairy tales that feature women, I investigate the changes modern authors have made to the heroines and explore questions, such as. What do the original fairy tales teach us about women? How have today’s authors chosen to portray them in their retellings? Are women still as passive as they were in the original stories or do they exhibit greater agency? Is marriage presented as the only option for women or are their other endings that portray women exploring careers or other adventures? Additionally, I assess the femininity of the female characters to see if the heroines should still be considered “female” in their retellings, or if they have had to disregard their female selves and be more masculine to be less passive and assertive.

II. Literature Review

Young Adult literature as a genre

The field of young adult literature has thrived in recent years, resulting in a plethora of wonderful books for young adolescents, and even adults. We now have a robust collection of books that traverse all genres, including realistic fiction, science fiction, fantasy, and historical fiction (Henkin, R., Harmon, J., Pate, E., & Moorman, H., 2010).
James Blasingame (2007), associate English professor at Arizona State University who specializes in young adult literature, uses the following characteristics to define young adult literature:

1. Has characters and issues young readers can identify with; those issues and characters are treated in a way that does not invalidate, minimize, or devalue them.
2. Is framed in language that young readers can understand.
3. Emphasizes plot above everything else.
4. Is written for an audience of young adults (p. 11).

Blasingame also writes that works of young adult literature might best be understood and appreciated for the purpose they serve in helping young readers through this crucial, formative time in their lives (2007, p. 19). Overall trends in subject matter for young adult literature have included a shift away from coming-of-age stories to a focus on books with the of fitting in, finding oneself, and dealing with major life changes (Koss & Teale, 2009, p. 569). Since fairy tales were meant to set an example, warn about danger, or explain what seemed inexplicable, this is one reason young adult retellings are so important and the basis of this paper (Zipes, 2012, p. 2). Young adults are learning about themselves and the world and fairy tales are one way to teach. Young adult literature is also “an important source of cultural information for young readers in that it portrays adolescents negotiating the social and sexual standards of the dominant culture” (Younger, 2009, p. xi). There is a definite rise in popularity of young adult novels and young women need strong, positive role models in their literature. Studies have been conducted regarding the roles of women in fantasy fiction (fairy tale retellings fall under the category of fantasy many times) as a whole as well as young adult literature. Due to
the rise of popularity in young adult (fantasy) fiction, this creates a need for the study of current young adult fairy tale retellings.

Fairy tales as a genre

Though it is impossible to trace the historical origins and evolution of fairy tales to a particular time and place, we do know that humans began telling tales as soon as they developed the capacity of speech. Folk tales originated in oral traditions throughout the world and still exist whereas fairy tales emanated from the oral traditions through manuscripts and print (Zipes, p.2, 2012). Fairy tales act as a learning tool for children since they are passed down from generation to generation. Not only do children find out what happens to the various princes and princesses, woodcutters, witches, and children of their favorite tales, but they also learn behavioral and associational patterns, value systems, and how to predict the consequences of specific acts or circumstances (Lieberman, 1972, p.384).

Some popular and important folktale authors and collections include the following: French author, Charles Perrault and his “Tale of Mother Goose” (1697) the first written version of folktales; Joseph Jacob’s “English Fairy Tales” (1894), collected and published in England; Andrew Lang’s “Fairy Books” (1889), which contained folktales from around the world; Danish writer, Hans Christian Andersen, who wrote tales such as “Thumbelina” and “The Little Mermaid” (1835).

The Grimm brothers- Joseph and Wilhelm- are perhaps two of the most famous fairytale and folktale authors, and thus four of their fairy tales will be analyzed in this paper: Snow White, Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty, and Rapunzel. Although they are not
the original authors of some of these fairy tales their versions are the ones that are most well-known. In Germany, December of 1812, Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm published the first volume of their Children’s and Household Tales. Called brilliant philologists and scholars by many scholars, they did most of their work at their desks and depended on many different informants from diverse social classes to provide them with oral and literary tales (Zipes, 2014, p. xxi).

Psychoanalysts have revealed some of the ways in which the Grimm’s tales represent our secret fears in life. Our American culture, has appropriated these stories for children- no matter how gruesome or intense they sometimes are. Their collections of stories have even been ranked “next to the bible in importance” according to W.H. Auden, English poet during WWII (Tatar, 2004, p. xxx,) and have become part of the international canon of children’s literature. Along with Charles Perrault’s Tales of Mother Goose (1697), Children’s and Household Tales and The Grimms’ Tales have quickly established themselves as the authoritative source of tales now spread across various cultures (Tatar, 2004, p.xxxi).

The author Gabrielle-Suzanne Barbot de Villeneuve is another famous fairytale author. In the mid-eighteenth century, Madame de Villeneuve, a progressive French writer and educator in England, wanted to provide reading material to a juvenile audience that was suitable to their level of comprehension and their immediate interests, invoking the scarcity of books suitable to children, especially girls. To do this, she resorted to fairy-tale narratives, which she believed would provide the perfect camouflage to trying to teach kids anything from her stories. She wished to write in a way that would entertain children so that they had no idea they were actually learning a lesson which is
exactly the point of fairy tales in general (Korneeva, 2014, p. 233.). Heavily influenced by Madame d’Aulnoy and Charles Perrault, Madame de Villeneuve wrote one of the most renowned fairy tales ever—Beauty and the Beast (Lawrence, 2014). Although the novel was reasonably successful when it was first published, it was radically transformed just sixteen years later by Jeanne-Marie de Beaumont, producing a shorter, didactic children’s story that has been handed down to us today (Swain, 2005). While there were many other women from fairy tales that could have been chosen for this paper, there are more well-known retellings for Beauty and the Beast than any of the others (The Little Mermaid for example).

**Women’s portrayal in the original fairy tales**

Fairytales have been criticized by feminists for their narrow portrayal of women as passive objects, as romanticized innocents, as victims of mental and physical abuse (Stone, 1994). Beauty is a constant device in fairy tales where the prettiest girl is invariably singled out and designated for a reward (a prince most likely) and this beauty is the girls most valuable asset. Good temper and meekness are regularly associated with beauty in fairy tales, while ill-temper and assertiveness is most often connected to ugliness. The heroine does not even have to do anything most of the time except be beautiful. They wait, they are chosen, they are rewarded (Lieberman, 1972, p. 390). Rarely do women in fairy tales need resourcefulness, cunning, wit, or assertiveness to have a happy ending. Their prince comes to save them, and they are taken to a castle where they are married. In fact, Kay Stone (1996) put fairy tale heroines into four categories in her article “And She Lived Happily Ever After”. Her categories include: heroines who were not only passive but were murdered or mutilated (the wives in
“Bluebeard”); passive heroines (like Cinderella or Sleeping Beauty) who took little action in their stories; tamed heroines (i.e. “King Thrushbeard”) who in the beginning were assertive but ended up as submissive wives; and a very few heroic heroines who took charge of their lives and their fates (“Molly Whuppee” and Beauty from “Beauty and the Beast” for example).

Feminist revisions of fairy tales and myths came into their own in the 1970s and 1990s, with a surge of feminist activism and theorizing (Schanoes, 2014, p. 3). Modern feminist fairy tales are understood to be a forum where the originally male dominated discourses are critiqued and alternatives to the gendered subject positions are illustrated in the texts (McAndrew, 2013, p. 1). The original fairy tales and even Disney’s depiction of fairy tales have been discussed and objected to in their depiction of limited gender roles, gender stereotypes, and conservative models of familiar behavioral patterns throughout these texts (Zipes, 1994). Fairy tales were originally intended to provide guidelines for boys and girls on appropriate societal behaviors, values, and attitudes. In feminist fairy tales, these ideas have been questioned and altered. A revised or reconstructed feminist fairy tales is a fairy tale where the author sets out to create a new vision of gender promise. The heroine in these tales is revised and defined as a character who takes a position of power to obtain her own independence (Parsons, 2004). These feminist fairy tales seeks to alter the reader’s view of traditional gender patterns, images, and codes (Crew, 2002, p. 92).

Fractured Fairy Tales or Retellings for Teens

In Germany after the Second World War, fairy tales were considered a “dead genre”. Within the next three decades however, the fairy tale rose to life once again- not only in
their traditional forms, but also as the subject of a rich body of fairy tale retellings and literary criticism (Joosen, 2011, p. 1). In order to survive, fairy tales as a genre had to adapt itself to the changing environments over the centuries. They had to change with the times, not only by the addition of socially relevant content, but also by absorbing certain characteristics of other genres (Zipes, 2009). The content of such tales has been transformed into parodies, updates, role reversals, sequels, and prequels, which help to keep the interest in the old tales (Joosen, 2011, p. 2). Young Adult fiction is particularly rich with fairy tale retellings.

III. Methodology

For this study, I selected five young adult fairy tale retellings to examine (Table 1). I chose the novels using the catalog of a local public library, their list of which fairy tale retellings have been checked out the most in the last two years, recommended book lists, personal experience, and the extensive knowledge of several youth services librarians. For the purposes of this study the “main character” is defined at the protagonist, or the person around whom the story revolves. Only books with female main characters were selected for this study.
Table 1. Study Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title of Retelling</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Title of Original</th>
<th>Author</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Cinder</em> (2012)</td>
<td>Marissa Meyer</td>
<td>Cinderella</td>
<td><em>Cinderella</em> or <em>The Little Glass Slipper</em></td>
<td>First Published by Charles Perrault, later version by Brothers Grimm (1812)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Towering</em> (2013)</td>
<td>Alex Flinn</td>
<td>Rapunzel</td>
<td><em>Rapunzel</em></td>
<td>Brothers Grimm as part of <em>Children's and Household Tales</em> (1812)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Stitching Snow</em> (2014)</td>
<td>R.C Lewis</td>
<td>Snow White</td>
<td><em>Sneewittchen (Snow White)</em></td>
<td>Brothers Grimm in first collection of <em>Grimms' Fairy Tales</em> (1812)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I used latent content analysis to determine how the female protagonists have either remained feminine, or become more masculine with the retellings using the Bem sex-role inventory (described below). Content analysis is defined by Babbie (2007) as “the study of recorded human communication,” and latent content as “the underlying meaning of communications,” rather than the manifest content, or “the concrete terms contained in a
communication” (p. 325). I chose this method because it provides the least bias possibly in an analysis of gender roles within literature.

Assessing Feminine and Masculine Traits

In order to determine if (and how) the women in the fairy tales have changed to become more “traditionally masculine” or remained “traditionally feminine”, I used a modified version of the Bem Sex-Role Indicator’s list of traits. The modified instrument is the Gender Personality Traits as used in the Basal Reading Group Series (Evans & Davies, 2000). The Bem Sex-Role inventory has been used in many studies over the years including Vaughan-Roberson, Tompkins, Hitchcock, and Oldham (1989); Keller, Lavish, and Brown (2007); and Crothers, Field, and Kolbert (2005). The scale has been used in sex-role studies for almost 40 years and is still considered reliable (Holt, 1998).

The original Bem Sex-Role Indicator test was a standardized survey that used a Likert Scale to rate 60 adjectives that are stereotypically masculine or feminine traits: 20 adjectives are feminine, 20 are masculine, and 20 are gender neutral (Malloy, 2010). In designing the test, Bem asked participants “How desirable is it in American society for a man/woman to possess each of these characteristics?” essentially crowdsourcing her definition of appropriate male and female behavior (Holt & Ellis, 1998, p. 932). Although the scale has been critiqued for its traditionalism and even that it may be too stereotyped, in fact, the traits described as feminine and masculine when the test was designed are consistently recognized as feminine and masculine today, hence why it is still used in studies after 40 years (Holt, 1998).
In the modified version, Evans and Davies (2000) chose sixteen of Bem’s roles; eight feminine and eight masculine traits, and gave them working definitions to be used for content analysis. Some examples of feminine traits are affectionate, passive, and understanding. Some examples of masculine traits are adventurous, assertive, and decisive. They took out the neutral gender traits to make the study more concise, which is another reason I chose to use it for this paper. The gender personality traits as used in Basal Reading Group Series (Evans & Davies, 2000) are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2: Evans and Davies’ Gender Personality Traits and Definitions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personality Traits</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Masculine traits</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adventurous</td>
<td>Actively exploring the environment, be it real or imaginary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggressive</td>
<td>Actions and motives with intent to hurt or frighten; imparts hostile feelings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argumentative</td>
<td>Belligerent; verbally disagreeable with another</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assertive</td>
<td>Taking charge of a situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competitive</td>
<td>Challenging to win over another physically or intellectually</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decisive</td>
<td>Quick to consider options/situations and make up mind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk-taker</td>
<td>Willing to take a chance on personal safety or reputation to achieve a goal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-reliant</td>
<td>Can accomplish tasks or handle situations alone with confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Feminine traits</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affectionate</td>
<td>Openly expressing warm feelings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotionally expressive</td>
<td>Allowing feelings to show, including temper tantrums, crying, or laughing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impetuous</td>
<td>Quick to act without thinking of the consequences; impulsive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurturing</td>
<td>Actively caring and aiding another’s development, be it physically or emotionally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panicky</td>
<td>Reacting to a situation with hysteria; crying, shouting, running</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive</td>
<td>Following another’s lead and not being active in a situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tender</td>
<td>Handling someone with gentle sensitivity and consideration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding</td>
<td>Being able to see and comprehend a situation from another person’s perspective; showing empathy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Generally, this instrument has been used for the study of picture books, but it can be applied to novel-length fictional works. The length of a normal novel—which is usually many more pages longer than a typical picture book—allows the author more room for character development and documenting changing behaviors. Novels are also often full of multi-dimensional characters and changing events that can make content analysis difficult and unruly, yet Evan & Davis’ instrument provides a structured framework for examining gender traits and roles.

In this content analysis, the novels are treated holistically. Each book was read and then, upon completion, the characters were analyzed using the modified Bem Sex-Role Indicator test. The sixteen character traits and their definitions were examined for their relationship to the character’s personality and to actions the characters takes throughout each novel. Individual events or character descriptions were recorded to share examples, but every instance of a trait was not recorded. As Evans and Davies (2000) reported, “Traits were recorded based on the holistic portrayal of the main character or characters throughout the story, not just individual incidents in the story” (p. 261).

Procedure

The first step in the procedure was to read the original fairy tales that were chosen for the sample. Since the fairy tales are significantly shorter than the novel retellings, both masculine and feminine characteristics were calculated using an excel spreadsheet while reading. After reading the fairy tales, the novel retellings were then read. After reading each retelling, the books were analyzed and masculine and feminine characteristics were calculated and recorded on the Excel spreadsheet. The endings of the retellings were also
noted- Did the characters live happily ever after? Is there a wedding? Page numbers and sentences were also recorded for the analysis.

IV. Findings

The final sample included five original fairy tales and their corresponding female main protagonists - Cinderella, Snow White, Sleeping Beauty, Rapunzel, and Beauty, as well as the five retellings and their corresponding female characters, Cinderella, Essie, Mirabelle, Rachel, and Nyx. In the original fairy tales, more feminine characteristics were present than masculine characteristics- some of the male characteristics were not present in any of the tales at all. Female characteristics were shown in the personalities of the female protagonists nineteen times, while male characteristics appeared only eight times. The feminine characteristic exhibited by the most characters was “emotionally expressive”, followed by “panicky” and “tender”. The masculine characteristics not found at all were “aggressive”, “argumentative”, and “competitive”. Figures 1 and 2 show the spread between the characteristics in the original fairy tales.

In the retellings, the number of times that female versus male characteristics were used is very close in number. Female characteristics were exhibited in the personalities of the female protagonists twenty-nine times, while male characteristics appeared thirty-one times. The characteristics demonstrated by the most characters were “risk-taker”, “emotionally expressive”, and “impetuous”. The characteristics that appeared the least amount were “competitive”, “understanding”, and “nurturing”. Figures 3 and 4 show the spread between the characteristics in the retellings.
Figure 1: Female Characteristics in Original Fairy Tales

![Bar chart showing female characteristics in fairy tales.](chart1)

Figure 2: Masculine Characteristics in Original Fairy Tales

![Bar chart showing masculine characteristics in fairy tales.](chart2)
Figure 3: Female Characteristics in Retellings

- Affectionate
- Emotionally Expressive
- Impetuous
- Nurturing
- Panicky
- Passive
- Tender
- Understanding

Figure 4: Masculine Characteristics in Retellings

- Adventurous
- Aggressive
- Argumentative
- Assertive
- Competetive
- Decisive
- Risk-Taker
- Self-Reliant
Tables 3, 4, and 5 show the percentage of characters that show each characteristic. While a larger sample would provide a more complex view of how the female protagonists have changed from the original fairy tales to retellings I examined, this smaller sample’s percentage do show a few interesting findings. The “aggressive” and “argumentative” characteristic rose from 0% to 80% from the original fairy tale to the retellings – none of the females in the fairy tales portrayed any “aggressive” or “argumentative” traits while both of those traits are shown by four different characters in the retellings. “Emotionally expressive” has a high percentage in both the original fairy tales and in the retellings, showing that even though the characters exhibit more masculine traits in the retellings, they are still emotionally expressive.

**Table 3: Percentage of Characters Using Each Characteristic**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feminine Characteristics</th>
<th>%- Fairy Tales</th>
<th>%- Retellings</th>
<th>Masculine Characteristics</th>
<th>%- Fairy Tales</th>
<th>%- Retellings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Affectionate</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>Adventurous</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotionally Expressive</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>Aggressive</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impetuous</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>Argumentative</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurturing</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>Assertive</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panicky</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>Competitive</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>Decisive</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tender</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>Risk-Taker</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4: Characteristics found in each fairy tale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Cinderella</th>
<th>Snow White</th>
<th>Sleeping Beauty</th>
<th>Rapunzel</th>
<th>Beauty and the Beast</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>MASCULINE TRAITS</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adventurous</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggressive</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argumentative</td>
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<td>Assertive</td>
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<tr>
<td>Competitive</td>
<td>x</td>
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<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decisive</td>
<td>x</td>
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<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Risk Taker</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
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<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Reliant</td>
<td>x</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>FEMININE TRAITS</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affectionate</td>
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Table 5: Characteristics found in each retelling

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V. Discussion

While the sample of retellings analyzed contain characters that exemplify a variety of the female and male traits, the fairy tale characters have more feminine traits than masculine. Snow White does not show any masculine traits; Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty, and Rapunzel only show one masculine trait—“decisive”, “adventurous” and “risk-taker”.

This suggests that the original fairy tales reinforced the gender norms of the times in which they were written. Women were feminine and feminine meant passive, being tender to humans or animals, easily showed emotions that were both happy and sad, or taking care of their family and the people around them. The endings in the retellings were also not all “happily ever after”.

The number of masculine and feminine traits exhibited by the main characters in the retellings was striking. It is understandable that the characters in the retellings would show more characteristics in general since they are longer stories. The lack of masculine characteristics in the fairy tales may show the values of society when these fairy tales were written: passive women who took care of the home, were soft spoken, and not argumentative. This is not the case in young adult retellings these days. The other part of the gender equation is the importance of seeing characters that display a variety of personality traits that do not conform to gender stereotypes (West, 2010). It appears that fairy tale retellings being published today show that being a woman does not mean being all feminine. Another study could be done on male protagonists and the masculine characteristics that are represented in certain retellings compared to their original tales. It is vital for young adults to see themselves represented in the characters that they read so
that they can learn to empathize, learn different cultures, and realize that there are other people in the world like them.

One interesting finding was the high percentage of “passive” found in the retellings. This however, was due to the characters and their progression and growth through the stories. While many of the characters exhibited this characteristic, they grew out of it or became assertive later on (Rachel in Towering for instance). Even though in these retellings the female protagonists are far more assertive than their counterparts, they still show signs of passivity. This gives the female protagonists more complexity and depth as well.

It is important to note that all of the retelling authors were female. This is another probable reason why many of the female protagonists have more masculine characteristics in retellings now as well—female authors want to promote strong women that young adult girls want to look up to.

**Snow White and Stitching Snow**

Snow White was the only one of the five female protagonists from the fairy tales who did not portray any masculine characteristics. This may be because the Queen in the story shows the masculine characteristics (“competitive”, “assertive”, and “self-reliant”) and Snow White is meant to be her exact opposite. By doing this though, the Queen is seen as the villain, and Snow White is the fair, and beautiful victim. The cause of the stepmother's wickedness, is that she is an independent and assertive woman in a story that values demure and submissive women like Snow White. The Queen is not content to live a life of submission as is expected of her. Whereas Snow White spends her days cooking
and cleaning for men and relying on them to take care of her, the stepmother is more focused on her own needs and how she can achieve them (Grimm, p. 85). Snow White depends on her relationships with men to live happily ever after. This includes not only the dwarves and the prince, but the huntsman as well. He lets her live even though it was his duty to kill her. Snow White’s stepmother, on the other hand, relies on herself to live happily ever after and because of that she is doomed to be a villainess with only misery in her future. An entire study could be done on the Queen of Snow White and her masculine and feminine characteristics. Snow White is also almost irritatingly impetuous. She lets an old woman into the house three times to sell her items, even after the dwarves warn her not to. “‘I can let this good woman in,’ Snow White thought, and she unbolted the door and bought the pretty lace” (Grimm, 2004, p. 249). In the end, Snow White is taken away with her prince and married and they live happily ever after, showing that Snow White continues to need men to take care of her.

Stitching Snow’s female protagonist Essie- the “Snow White” equivalent- shows seven of the eight masculine characteristics, and only six of the eight feminine characteristics. Essie is extremely aggressive, putting herself in fights so that she can make extra money when needed and seeming to enjoy the experience as this quote shows: “The heel of my palm slammed into his nose with a satisfying crunch despite the cushioning of my shock-fiber hand-wraps, drawing a chorus of sympathetic grunts from the crowd” (Lewis, 2014, p. x). This is the complete opposite of the original fairy tale, in which Snow White shows no aggression at all; her main characteristics are being “impetuous” and “passive”. Essie shows no “passive” characteristics to note, asserting herself throughout the novel by constantly telling people what is on her mind, fighting
droids, and not being afraid to get a little dirty since she is a mechanic to droids. When Essie and Dane need to make money so that he can repair his ship, she immediately decides that she will participate in a fight. "'You want your shuttle repaired? We need all the shares we can get, preferably in a single fight so we can get you on your way that much sooner. The men will bet more to see me take some hits, particularly after what I cost them in my last fight. Nothing like watching the legal beat-down of a girl’” (Lewis, 2014, pg. 31).

The ending is very similar to that of the original fairy tale- Essie’s evil stepmother dies in a fire that Essie creates and she marries Dane (the prince) in the end. However, it is Essie who kisses Dane awake. It is a rare moment of tenderness shown by Essie when Dane lay in the hospital asleep and she realizes her love for him. “With the slightest hesitation, my fingers skimmed over those perfect lines of his face—through the brown curls that tickles the edge of his eat, down along his jaw, and over his chin before brushing lightly across his lips” (Lewis, 2014, p. 316). It is Essie who kisses Dane awake, unlike the fairy tale where the prince kisses Snow White awake. This is the beauty of the modern retellings- showing that it can be the princess who awakes the prince. It does not always have to end with the prince saving the princess.

Beauty and the Beast and Cruel Beauty

The Beauty and the Beast fairy tale was the only original fairy tale in which the female protagonist exhibited multiple masculine and feminine qualities- five masculine qualities and six feminine qualities. Beauty showed characteristics of both “passive” and “assertive”- she did whatever her father asked of her, no matter what, yet at the same time
sacrificed herself to the beast for him, even though he did not want her to. She also shows “understanding” when she sympathizes with the beast about how he looks. “Know that I would lay down my life to save his and that this beast who is only one in form has a heart so humane that he should not be persecuted for a deformity which he refrains from rendering more hideous by his actions. I will not repay his kindness with such black ingratitude” (Villeneuve, 1740, p. 55).

Writing Beauty with more feminine and masculine characteristics could be due to the fact that the author, Gabrielle-Suzanne Barbot de Villeneuve, was a progressive female writer for her time. Her version of Beauty and the Beast brought up many issues such as the practice of arranged marriages, beauty as a desirable quality yet not as important as the soul, and the idea of social hierarchy. These are topics that are much more in depth than the subjects of the other fairy tales, making this a fairy tale that does not stay within the bounds of a typical damsel in distress tale. In fact, Beauty saves the Beast in the end of the tale. While we see this happen very rarely in other tales (such as Rapunzel saving her prince or Gretel saving her brother from the witch) Beauty is a rare case where she saves more than one of the men in the tale- the Beast and her father. "I will risk my life," she pursued, in a firm tone, "to release my father from his fatal engagement" (Villeneuve, 1740, p. 22). She not only risks her life to save her father from the clutches of the beast, she also saves the beast in the end from his fateful curse. In the end, she does marry the beast, fulfilling the perfect fairy tale ideal of the time that women are first in the house of their fathers where she is under his care and command, then under the roof of her husband where she is then under his care and command in the end.
The retelling, *Cruel Beauty*, was a much darker tale than the original— the Beast was a demon who gives deals to humans in exchange for things they desire, only to find out later that the deals are not “good”. Nyx (Beauty) must marry the beast due to the bargain her father had made with the demon when Nyx was a child. While she is now forced to marry the demon, Nyx plans his death every step of the way. Though beautiful, Nyx is not the pure, kind woman that Beauty is. She is devious and slightly wicked to those around her because of her resentment at being forced to marry. Nyx thinks of her sister before her wedding, “I should love her and be willing to die for her, since the only other choice was that she die for me. And I did love her; I just couldn’t stop resenting her either” (Hodge, 2014, p. 34).

However, Nyx and the Beast finally fall in love and she releases him from his curse as well. “‘But we’ll pretend we know how to love.’ I smiled at him. ‘And someday we’ll learn’” (Hodge, 2104, 342). Nyx has feminine qualities that are not found in the original tale. For example, she is “impetuous” and “nurturing”. She is impetuous when she tries to stab the Beast without thinking— “Strategy was suddenly nothing to me. I snatched my fork and tried to stab him” (Hodge, 2014, p.65). Nyx is also nurturing towards the beast when she saves him from the darkness and takes care of him after— “Then he whispered- so softly I barely heard it- ‘Please stay.’…I lay down beside him, and immediately he rolled over to nestle against my back. He laid an arm over my waist, then fell asleep with a sigh… His breath tickled against my neck. I took his hand in mine, weaving our fingers together” (Hodge, 2014, p. 164). These characteristics seem to be much more emotionally driven and probably why they are not found in the original tale. Beauty is much more refined and holds her feelings back throughout the tale, while Nyx
is constantly expressing her feelings and reacting quickly to situations through feeling. “I couldn't stop the tears from sliding down my cheeks, but I glared back at his as best I could” (Hodge, 2014, p. 136).

**Cinderella and Cinder**

Cinderella portrayed many feminine characteristics and only one masculine characteristic, “decisiveness”. She is able to make decisions very quickly and act with great care in her actions. “Cinderella had jumped down from the back of the back of the dovecote and had run over to the little hazel tree, where she slipped out of her beautiful dress and then put it on the grave” (Grimm, 2004, p.124). Cinderella is not quite as passive in the Grimm version as in the Perrault tale or the Disney movie. In the Grimm version, Cinderella performs the necessary rituals at her mother’s grave in order to get help from her “spirit mother” or “godmother”. She even has enough resourcefulness to think and act to get herself out of trouble. However, she still remains a passive character, who lets her stepmother, stepsisters, and even her father tell her what to do. Though she is quick to act when leaving the ball, she still does not take action in the rest of her life. “They made fun of her and threw peas and lentils into the ashes so that she would have to bend down over the ashes to pick them out” (Grimm, 2004, p.116).

*Cinder*, however, showed a female protagonist who portrayed more masculine characteristics than feminine. Cinder (Cinderella) is a mechanic who works with just herself and her droid in the market to make money for her commanding stepmother. This is similar to Essie who codes and repairs the drones for the mines she works in. She also happens to be a cyborg- a human who has mechanical elements built into her body. Because of this, she is seen as less than human, and treated as less than human.
Throughout the novel, her stepmother and stepsister remind her that she is not capable of human emotion—such as love—and throughout she continues to show them how determined, emotional, and humanlike she is. She loves her stepsister Peony and even visits her in quarantine when she has been taken by the plague. “Cinder stood and untangled Peony’s hair with her fingers. ‘Try to get some sleep. Reserve your strength’ Peony followed Cinder with her watery gaze. ‘I love you, Cinder. I’m glad you’re not sick.’ Cinder’s heart tightened. Pursing her lips, she bent over and placed a kiss against Peony’s damp forehead. ‘I love you too’” (Meyer, 2012, p. 150). When Cinder’s stepmother tries to have Cinder taken to the castle to be tested on, she does not go willing: “Cinder swung the magbelt, smacking it hard against the android’s cranium. ‘I won’t go. Scientists have done enough to me already!’” (Meyer, 2012, p. 68).

Yet, even though Essie possesses many feminine characteristics such as “affectionate”, “emotionally expressive”, and “impetuous” the way she portrays them usually corresponds with the masculine qualities. She is impetuous by going to the palace even though Dr. Erland told her not to while the Lunar Queen was there. “Cinder could hear Dr. Erland’s warnings in her head, echoing like a damaged audio file, the entire six miles to the palace. And yet if something were to happen between the apartment and the palace to this android who had real information on the missing Lunar princess, Cinder would never forgive herself…Turning the last corner, Cinder’s gaze fell on the crowd up ahead, filling up the courtyard before the palace’s maroon gates and spilling down the street” (Meyer, 2012, p. 202). This shows the complexity of the characters, and suggests that women today too are complex, possessing a mesh of masculine and feminine characteristics.
Cinder has moments of passivity in the novel as well: “Irritation hardened in Cinders gut. She might have pointed out that Pearl and Peony could have been given ready-made rather than custom dresses…But all arrangements would come to nothing. Legally, Cinder belonged to Adri as much as the household android and so too did her money…So she stomped down her anger before Adri could see a spark of rebellion…Cinder cast one more look at her stepsisters’ sumptuous gowns before backing out of the room” (Meyer, 2012, p. 24). The only thing that keeps Cinder passive to her stepmother is because she technically “owns” her. However, she decides to take a stand. In secret, she meets with the Castle’s doctor to make money, and eventually fixes up a car she found at the junk yard so that she can break free of her stepmother’s grip. Cinder shows much more assertiveness in her story than that of Cinderella, but it cannot be denied that they both are decisive in their actions.

**Sleeping Beauty and Kill Me Softly**

Sleeping Beauty is often considered one of the more passive female protagonists in fairy tales- she is taken care of by her parents through the story, until she pricks her finger, and in the end is saved by a prince and whisked off to marry him right after. She never seems to take control of her own life. Her only masculine characteristics is “adventurousness” which she shows while she is exploring the castle: “She wandered around in the castle, poking her head into one room after another, and eventually she came to the foot of an old tower” (Grimm, 2004, p. 235). Besides just being passive, Sleeping Beauty’s other feminine characteristics are “impetuous” and “tender”. Although she knows there is a curse on her, it does not stop her from touching the spindle she finds at the top of the tower. “‘What is that thing bobbing about so oddly’ asked the girl, and
she put her hand on the spindle for she too wanted to spin” (Grimm, 2004, p. 236). She is very similar to Snow White in throwing logic to the wind, and not thinking about the consequences of a situation when they know there is danger around them.

Sleeping Beauty and her counterpart, Mira, from Kill Me Softly, are similar in their characteristics and both portray more feminine rather than masculine traits. However, Mira (Sleeping Beauty) portrays every feminine characteristic on the list, yet also portrays six of the masculine characteristics. She is a well-rounded character who portrays many emotions and qualities, which make her an interesting character to read about. Sleeping Beauty and Mira both possess the “adventurous” characteristic. Sleeping Beauty wanders around her castle, exploring each of the rooms until she eventually comes face to face with a tower that she climbs. This leads her to fulfill her curse and touch the spindle. Mira runs away from her godmother’s and boards a bus to Beau Rivage, the city where she was born and where her parents lay buried. This eventually leads her to finding out about her curse as well, and finally, fulfilling her curse as well. Both female characters show “impetuous” and “tender” characteristics as well.

Impetuous, as stated, was shown in 100% of the characters in the retellings. What makes “impetuous” different from “decisive” is that decisive means to act quickly while thinking of all the consequences of what could happen. Impetuous is when the person thinks without thought or care- its reckless, headstrong, and hasty. These all happen when someone is overly emotional and in the retellings, many of the female characters act impetuously when they are under duress or has intense feelings. The biggest difference between Sleeping Beauty and Mira may be that Mira has more masculine characteristics,
but Mira also reflects more feminine qualities as well showing how well rounded of a character she is.

Rapunzel and Towering

The final female protagonist is Rapunzel. Rapunzel was one of the few who ends up saving her prince and takes control of her own life after being passive for most of it. She allows the enchantress to keep her trapped in the tower for most of her life. It is only when she meets the prince that she decides she needs to escape- of course, to escape with her prince. Rapunzel to her prince- “Every time you come to visit, bring a skein of silk with you, and I will braid a ladder from the silk. When it’s finished, I’ll climb down and you can take me with you on horseback” (Grimm, 2004, p. 59). She risks being caught with her prince in the tower and trying to escape, but she strays from passivity by realizing that she doesn’t want to be trapped anymore. She is also “affectionate” and “emotionally expressive” with her prince: She openly shows her sadness when she sees that her prince is blind by crying, and she also ends up bearing his children at the end of the tale, showing her affection for the prince as well. This would be an interesting tale to do a study on considering they were not married, yet she bore his children and openly betrayed her captor who was the closest thing to a parent she had.

_Towering_ also has a female protagonist that shows more feminine characteristics than masculine characteristics. In _Towerling_, Rachel (Rapunzel) shows five feminine characteristics and three masculine characteristics. She does share the masculine trait with Rapunzel of “risk-taker”- both because they are trying to escape from the tower where they have been held captive. Rapunzel and Rachel also both save their “princes”.

Once Rapunzel gets out of her tower, she finds her prince and cures his blindness. Rachel
climbs from her tower to save Wyatt from drowning and freezing in the lake. “He fell through the ice! Something, some unearthly force propelled me forward, told me what I must do. I ran to the bed and seized the rope, my rope of hair, then twined it around one of the pillars in my tower…then, I grabbed the rope, passed it over my shoulder and under my leg in hopes of slowing my descent a bit, and slid down it to the bottom” (Flinn, 2013, p. 111). Although they are both passive in letting their “mothers” keep them locked in the tower, they do have moments of action and taking control of their lives.

VI. Conclusion

There have been many studies done about the role of women in fairy tales and their passivity, or lack of masculinity. The current popularity of young adult literature and retellings of fairy tales necessitates an understanding of how the current fairy retellings compare with the original fairy tales. The female protagonists in the fairy tales and retellings were analyzed for gender stereotypes using the Evans and Davie’s Gender Personality Traits. This instrument showed that the female characters in the retellings possess far more masculine traits than their fairy tale counterparts, and in some cases, they even portray more female characteristics. This could be due to the length of the novels in the retellings, but more likely due to the need for more developed characters in today’s stories, and the need to show more gender equality in young adult literature today. Young adult women and men need literature that will help them become strong members of today’s society. Author Mem Fox (1993) says of gender stereotypes, “Gender stereotypes in literature prevent the fullness of female human potential from being realized by depriving girls of a range of strong, alternative role models. I believe that male potential is also stunted by such material. Everything we read, from sexist
advertisements and women’s magazines, to romance novels and children’s books, constructs us, makes us who we are, by presenting our image of ourselves as girls and women, as boys and men” (p.152).

This study provides information on the stereotypical traits exhibited by female characters and future studies could look at the stereotypical traits demonstrated by male characters in fairy tales. While we see the growth of characteristics in the retellings for women, another study could even be done of the growth of characteristics of men. Since teenagers often prefer to read books that portray characters like themselves, an opposite sex author may dissuade them from reading the book (Wolford, 2011, p. 25). R.C Lewis and Alex Flinn have more gender neutral names which may persuade young male readers to read their stories. Authors want to write books that everyone can relate to and it is especially important in today’s young adult literature that this is happening. It is vital to see that our young adult literature today is showing young men and women that it is okay to be masculine or feminine, or a combination of both- be yourself and find yourself. That’s all that matters.
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