

## Student's Gender Understanding by Reading Grimm's *Cinderella*

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### Abstract

This study explores students' understanding on gender. It starts from reading a fairy tale text (prose) entitled *Cinderella* by Grimm Brothers. From reading the fairy tale, the study goes to the students' opinion on gender which they found in the text and in society. It also applies feminism ideology to reveal students' opinion on gender. Gender differs man's and woman's values created by patriarchy society. It impacts on woman's position. Woman becomes less value than man. Fairy tale as one of prose is often used by parents and teachers to teach good values and behavior to conduct life in society. *Cinderella* as a famous classic fairy tale is used to teach them. This study took the data from the second semester students of Faculty of Language and Cultural Study Unisbank, academic year 2014/2015. Seventeen (17) students who are five males and twelve females attended the test. The result shows that *Cinderella* is known since they were children from various media; TV, movie, and book. Parents also have an important role to acknowledge the story. It influenced their opinions on gender which tend to patriarchy ideology. They could not have left the dominant ideology, patriarchy.

**Keywords:** *Cinderella*, fairy tale, gender, patriarchy, feminism

### A. Introduction

Today, movie producers launch many fairy tales which are popular for children. These movies are reworked from canon fairy tales that people often found in the previous times. The titles are so familiar to us as parents such as *Cinderella* (2015), *Magnificent* (2014), *The Tangled*, and... But, there is a difference in the story we may find in them. The events do not expose objectified female characters. They prefer to show strong female characters. This work can be categorized as re-vision one. As cited by Kuykendal and Sturn, Parson states that re-vision, a term whose groundwork is laid in feminist postculturalist thought, indicates an author's decision about which original element to retain and which to refute when creating his new vision of the text" (2007:39). Not only re-vision fairy tales based on classic fairy tales, but the modern fairy tales such as *Barbie* also reveal the strong female characters.

Considering the change in entertainment business, classic fairy tales have an important role to recognize literature for children. Parents often tell their children stories before they go to bed. The stories contain many moral values which teach children to behave as the society conduct. The stories are told again and again, so that they remember what the parents especially mothers tell. Besides having told before going to bed, children often get the stories from their kindergarten teachers.

The female characters of classic fairy tales portray women as submissive,

weak, and calm persons. From their personalities they have, they are going to be helped by young handsome men or princes. Sperry and Grauerholz cited Zipes (1998a, 1998b) that “fairy tales written during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were intended to teach girls and young women how to become domesticated, respectable, and attractive to a marriage partner and to teach boys and girls appropriated gender values and attitudes”(2003:714). It will alter their destiny from poor women to be happy women (materialistically). They get help after being oppressed by others such as step-mother and step-sisters, and wicked witch, and usually they are abandoned by the family to make others get wealth from the close relative of the female characters. These characteristics are known by children, how Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty, and Snow White as female characters behave. It will be internalized by children whether they are boys or girls. It does not stop in that area, but these fairy tales conveys deep message, the ideology in the society. Researches conducted show that classic fairy tales bring patriarchal concepts.

Being submissive, weak, and calm for women are ideal in patriarchal society. Patriarchy which applies male domination in any field causes women as the inferior other. They cannot express what they want or define themselves freely. There is a border which limits them to behave in the society. The border makes line into two sides; for men and for women. Society will stamp stigma for women who go out at night, and have short-hair cut. On the other hand, men should be strong and dominant in the society. This causes gender identity, which gender is created by society, especially patriarchal society.

Telling children the fairy tales which embody gender identity can influence their thought and opinion about men and women. As written by Grant and Golnaraghi, the function of a story (myth) is the art of using words to produce pictures in the minds of the listeners (2). Children will define themselves as boys or girls from color, toy, and clothes. Boys will deny the pink color, and they will feel embarrassed if they have it. Parents also contribute to establish the concept by segregating the toys; girls play dolls and boys play car. From this description can be related to the fairy tales which children watch, read, and listen, they will influence they behave. Fairy tales describe the well-behave female characters will get reward.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there many changes in society paralleling the communication era which audio-visual media becomes an important and close tool in life. People read book to get literature exposure, now watching movie can be preference to improve the literary knowledge because downloading movie is an easy and cheap way to get it.

## **B. Literature Review**

This research needs theory and supporting references. It discusses on women role in society depicted in a prose entitled Cinderella. This research does not only discuss the text, but also students’ understanding on what they compare in fact (society) and in fiction (text). This research is also in feminism area.

### **Fairy Tales**

The word fairy tales consists of the word fairy and the word tale. The word fairy derives from Latin, fairy is from *fatum* which means fate and *fatus*, the past participle

of *fari*, which means to speak. Then, the word tales came from middle English which means talk and number. Fairy tales used to tell to others, but it changes. People used to tell children when they were going to bed. Now, people can read the story which they can find anywhere. Fairy tales are published.

Fairy tales include prose, it is one of literary genre which uses paragraphs as division. As a literary genre, fairy tales also have moral values which are easy to follow and understand for children, so do for adult (Kronborg; 2009:3). It is easy to understand because it is so close to our life. Fairy tales also reflect people's life, as Hans Christian Andersen wrote that 'Every man's life is fairy tale written by God's finger' (2009:3). Andersen's writing means that every man's life is a story and each fairy tale reflects it.

Today, fairy tales are often seen as children stories which expose beauty. But, they are also adult's stories. The stories also discuss on adult's problem and social problem that we do not often realize happens in our life.

### **Gender**

Gender is a part of feminism theory which discusses on the inequality right between man and woman. Talking about man and woman is an issue which people often find in society. Society constructs many norms which differ between men and women. We find female and male which indicate sex people have. Besides that, we also have women and men. According to Millet, a female is born and a woman is created. One's gender, however, is a social construct, being created by cultural ideals and norms. Consciously or unconsciously women and men conform to the cultural ideas established for them by society (Bressler; 1999: 183).

Discussing gender will reveal the norms and values which make border to separate women's right and men's right. The separation will create dominant group and oppressed group. Because society holds patriarchy principle, it influences the separation creation. Men will be the dominant group or significant person, and women will be the oppressed group or non-significant person.

The norms and values will limit the female movement in society. There are stigmas which society announces on female such as weak and unintelligent. The stigmas will make females only live in the area where they feel safe. The area is domestic (house). It is not healthy for society development when the female population increases. Weak can be in emotion and physic.

### **C. Method of the Research**

This is a descriptive research. The research will explore what a class group believes and practices relating to gender. As cited by Cohen et.al., Best (1970) said that descriptive research is concerned with condition or relationship that exist; practices that prevail, beliefs, points of views, or attitudes that are held; processes that are going on; effects that are being felt, or trends that are developing (2000:169). The researchers try to find out the students' opinion about gender after they read Grimm's *Cinderella*.

### **D. Findings and Discussion**

#### **Students' Gender Understanding in Grimm's *Cinderella***

Respondents of this research are seventeen students. These respondents

answered questions relating to the fairy tale story; *Cinderella* written by Grimm Brothers. This fairy tale is categorized as classic fairy tale, because there are no elements which are distorted by the authors. It still applies patriarchy ideology. Here are the answers of the respondents on understanding gender in *Cinderella*.

No	Respondent	Gender in Grimm's <i>Cinderella</i>
1	Male	Cinderella is a beautiful girl who lived with her step mother and two step sisters. The step mother is very cruel and two step sisters are very bossy, arrogant, and cruel. They treat Cinderella inhumanity, until the Prince comes asking everybody in the country to join his party. When the prince meets Cinderella, he falls in love and then he is looking for Cinderella to marry her and then happy ending.
2	Male	Cinderella is a good girl. She has step mother and 2 step sisters who always treat her bad. She is getting married with handsome prince and happy ever after.
3	Female	Cinderella is a one of innocent, good, pious girl who lived with her step mother and 2 step sisters.
4	Female	Cinderella has 2 sisters but the sisters are not good. Her sisters are very evil.
5	Female	Cinderella is a beautiful girl, clever girl, patient and just keeps on going.
6	Female	Cinderella is a beautiful girl. She is a patient woman, diligent, and obedient but Cinderella has a step mother and step sister are very evil.
7	Female	Cinderella is a young girl who is treated badly by her step mother and step sisters as a servant in her own house.
8	Female	Cinderella is a girl who works hard since her step mother and sisters treat her bad. Because of her patience, she is married with a handsome prince.
9	Female	Cinderella is a girl who has patience, good-looking, and a nice girl. She always helps her step mother and step sister but they reply her with a bad behavior.
10	Female	Cinderella is a beautiful girl who is always suffered because she had a cruel step-mother and step-sisters but then Cinderella is happy ever after when she met the prince.
11	Female	Cinderella is a good girl and has step mother step sister who are very evil.
12	Male	Cinderella is a good girl. She lived with her step mother, her two sisters and her father. Cinderella is like a maid in her own house, but she never thinks to revenge what they did.
13	Female	Cinderella is an orphaned girl who was tortured by the step mother and step sisters to work and serve them.

14	Male	Cinderella is a pious girl and good girl although she has bad sisters. She is like slave and spends time to do a strong activity such as cleaning house, and washing cloth. She tries to follow a party to meet a prince. She works hard to meet her. Finally, she meets a prince and gets married with the prince.
15	Male	Cinderella is a girl whose mother is dead and after her mother's death her father got married again with a woman which has two daughters. Cinderella's step mother and step sisters always insult Cinderella. Finally, in the last story, Cinderella marries a prince and lives happily.
16	Female	Cinderella is a pity girl. She always feels lonely. Her mother and step sisters are wicked.
17	Male	Cinderella is a good and pious girl. She lived with her step mother and step-sisters who always bully her every day, but she revenges what her step mother and sisters did to her.

In students gender understanding in Grimm's *Cinderella* the students share their opinions. They were free to write what they think in the fairy tale. They focus on actions and traits of the female characters; Cinderella, step-mother, and step-sisters. The male characters; father, the king, and the prince are not their focus to share their opinion. They only commented on the prince.

The data shows seventeen respondents giving comments on Cinderella characteristics as the female character of the fairy tale. Seven (7) students give comments on Cinderella as a good character. They state clearly that Cinderella is a good and pious girl. Four (4) students mention Cinderella physical appearance that she is a beautiful girl. Six (6) students comment on Cinderella that she is treated badly by her step-mother and step-sisters. The students' opinions on Cinderella state that generally Cinderella is a good girl who is treated badly by villains (step-mother and step-sisters), then she gets help from a handsome prince. All of the answers show positive values from patriarchy side. There are no comments which show that Cinderella has opposite characteristics from the patriarchy society wants.

The fourteen (14) answers show their emphatic feeling to Cinderella as a beautiful tortured girl. They show bad treatment from step-mother and step-sisters. For example, respondent 14 states "Cinderella is a pious girl and good girl although she has bad sisters. **She is like slave** and spends time to do a strong activity such as cleaning house, and washing cloth. She tries to follow a party to meet a prince. She works hard to meet him. Finally, she meets a prince and gets married with the prince." Here the respondent comments she is like slave, but it starts with a pious girl and good girl. She is like a slave is not her fault but it is caused by her bad sisters (step-sisters). Then as a reward for her sacrifice she gets married with the prince. Beside bad treatment from step-mother and step-sisters, there are two (13 and 15) respondents which show their emphatic feeling from Cinderella's mother death. Respondent 13 stated "Cinderella is **an orphaned girl** who was tortured by the step mother and step sisters to work and serve them." Respondent 15 stated "Cinderella is

a girl whose mother is dead and **after her mother's death** her father got married again with a woman who has two daughters. Cinderella's step mother and step sisters always insult Cinderella. Finally, in the last story, Cinderella marries a prince and lives happily." They give information that Cinderella, a girl is left by her mother. It will cause emphatic feeling for the readers.

The respondents share their opinion that women with bad attitude as shown by step-mother and step-sister are not appropriate. They think that the three people tortured Cinderella as stated by respondent 13. When they gave comment on step-mother and step-sisters, some of them reacted over. Respondent 4, 6, and 11 mentioned that "Cinderella is a good girl and has **step mother and step sisters who are very evil.**" The student compared to what Cinderella and step-mother and step-sisters did, but it does not mention what Cinderella did by giving a metaphor. Here, evil is the metaphor of what step-mother and step-sisters did. What Cinderella did is good and what step-mother and step-sisters did is bad. There is hyperbole in the statement, it is not only bad, but it is also evil to exaggerate their action. Respondent 16 stated that "Cinderella is a pity girl. She always feels lonely. **Her mother and step sisters are wicked.**" The word 'wicked' represents inappropriate manner to Cinderella who is an orphaned girl.

In the data above, the respondents did not share opinion on male characters much. The male character they mentioned is only the prince. Six students mentioned the prince, but they did not state what the prince did. The statements share the effect of Cinderella and the prince meeting, they live happily. Respondent 1, 2, 10, 14, and 15 gave comment that their marriage causes happiness for Cinderella. Respondent 8 commented that patience will give reward for Cinderella, who is getting married with the handsome prince. The role of the prince is the hero for Cinderella. He saves her from inconvenient condition in her own house. They did not give opinion on the father's role at all.

From the data, the students only focused on the female characters. Cinderella has big portion they commented. They think that Cinderella is a good female character. Step-mother and step-sisters are bad female characters. Bad and good are the two things which people conduct in society.

### **Students' Gender Understanding in Society**

Respondents of this research consist of 17 students from 18 years old to 24 years old. They are also male and female students who acknowledge fairy tales since they were children. The media which others used to acknowledge fairy tales to them are various. Books and movies dominate their reference. Beside media, they acknowledge fairy tales from other people; such as mother, grandmother and teacher. They learned from them. Reading, watching, and listening the fairy tale will influence their opinion especially on gender. Talking about gender will reveal man and woman roles in society.

No	Respondent	Gender in Society
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1	Male	I think all girls can be themselves but they don't leave attitude, performance, values, etc. May be there are different girls but every girl has her own characteristic. Attitude, I think every girl should have good attitude because attitude determines individual character. Performance for this, I think they have own performance and it depends on the individual
2	Male	To be a girl we need to have good attitude like friendly. A girl performance is better if they wear feminine clothes and good looking. A girl values are humble and friendly.
3	Female	All I have to do as a girl from attitude we have to be a girl who has good behavior, manner and low profile, and down to earth. Performance as a girl, we have to change ourselves from physical appearance as natural as we can. Not so over. From values all the things that we should take is be a precious girl.
4	Female	For girls. Attitudes are polite and speaks slowly. Performance are tidy, polite, do not wear make up too much, natural. Values are friendly, humbles, passive, and not arrogant.
5	Female	For girls. Attitude are speaking slowly and politely. Performance are tidy, polite, wearing make-up naturally, don't wear jewelry glamorous. Values are friendly, humble, and not arrogant.
6	Female	Patient, diligent, compassionate, speaks any kind, graceful, good attitude, polite.
7	Female	On attitude, a girl should meek, friendly, well-mannered, and the most important thing a girl should be smart. On performance, it will be better if a girl wears skirt and feminine clothes but we don't need to force ourselves to be a feminine girl just be ourselves. On values, of course a girl should be humble but can control herself.
8	Female	I think to be a girl that I know right now is girl loves wearing make-up, the first thing is make-up and for the style a girl doesn't wear girly things to be a girl right now. Girls mix and match their style to be confident.
9	Female	I think from this generation so different from the past, because being a girl does not need to be girly but it should match with our identity.
10	Female	A girl should be a good in physically and also her heart. They should be polite, speaks in low voice, friendly. In performance, usually girl wears skirt. Now if you want to wear jeans, it doesn't matter and it is already common. As long as she has good attitude like a girl should be like, it doesn't matter. Last, a girl should take care of their bodies to make them still perfect.

11	Female	Patient, don't be arrogant, kind, helpful, forgiving, feminine, beautiful, long hair, and struggling.
12	Male	Be polite, kind, have good attitude.
13	Female	Attitudes are polite and graceful. Performances are smart, intelligent, and friendly. Values are patient, resolute, and strong.
14	Male	A pious girl, clever, and happy face.
15	Male	Girls must be feminine and not boyish. They also must have good and soft attitude. They also must not be smokers, because I really hate girls who have smoking habit.
16	Female	Attitude. Because the girls have feminine. But I think it's better to appear ordinarily.
17	Male	She has to be friendly, good, pious, loves to parents, polite, always does positive things for her life.

The data shows that they do not share the man roles in society. They highlight woman or girl roles. Seventeen respondents share their opinions on being a girl or a woman. The respondents are male and female. All state that being a girl and a woman should conduct what society wants. Being friendly, polite, pious, calm, and feminine are the values and attitude a girl or a woman should have. Meek, diligent, smart, intelligent, and strong are also the values the respondents wants from a girl or a woman. The respondents also prefer girls and women to speak slowly.

There are some points which the respondents wrote. Performance, attitude, and manner become their priorities to represent girls and women. Their opinions on them are still on patriarchal track opinion toward female creatures. On the other hand, there is positive opinion on female value, they should be intelligent, clever and smart which are stated by student 7, 13, and 14. The statements show that female creatures also need to have good education, not only male creature. It has already changed the ancient opinion on female in patriarchy society that female did not need to have good and high education, because they live in modern era when females are trying to have equality in education.

Being feminine also became their focus on performance. Four students consider that being feminine is important for females. There are three students who are more moderate in their opinion on performance. Female not always wears feminine clothes, but also wears what they want and think good. Here, there is a change on performance and style (fashion) that female does not always wear skirt and make-up.

On manner and attitude, all students agree to what society wants from female in patriarchy society. All state that female should be calm, pious, diligent, meek, and polite. Then, there is a surprising opinion from student 13 that female should be strong. Female in patriarchy society is described as weak creature, but here the female student hopes female is also strong.

The study also explored on marriage which in patriarchy society, it happens between a man and a woman. The respondents who know the meaning of love answer the question on marriage as follows:



No	Respondent	Marriage in Patriarchy Society
1	Male	Marriage is a duty that should be obeyed. Promise sacred with God.
2	Male	Something sacred between male, female, and God.
3	Female	Marriage is kind of sacred thing, when man and woman officially become husband and wife. They have to share with, understanding each other, and find solution together. In marriage they promise to spend their life until the end.
4	Female	Marriage is a saying a holy promise to God about our love, to always together until God breaks our love.
5	Female	Marriage is a big promise to God to make happy another. For promise always together.
6	Female	Marriage is worship.
7	Female	Marriage is something sacred. It's done once a lifetime.
8	Female	Marriage for me is to be live forever with someone that we love and faithful is important.
9	Female	Marriage for me is a dua pikiran berbeda dijadikan satu pikiran. Susah senang bersama, menjalankan komitmen dan janji tidak mengingkari. For me marriage have to once till forever.
10	Female	Marriage is when you ready to build a new life with a person who you love. You already ready to share with a person who you love
11	Female	Marriage is a form of bound between the couple.
12	Male	Marriage is about our promise, our commitment to God.
13	Female	For me, getting married is an obligation but it is not just for status, but marriage is a sacred bond that binds the love of man and woman.
14	Male	Marriage is a process from teenager becomes adult.
15	Male	Marriage is a unification between a man and a woman and it must be once in the lifetime and it can't be separated by us, because what have been unified by God can't be separated by human.
16	Female	I think marriage is difficult. It needs more responsibility.
17	Male	Marriage is only for once in lifetime. We married our girl/man that we love so much and only with her/him we feel safe, comfort, and believe that we have to fight together for their future. And in marriage that should have a love between the couple who really serious to build and make their future, always together in any condition and situation.

From the data above, three (3) students relate marriage to love, seven (7) students connect the marriage to God, (1) one student states as a natural process, one (1) student relates to responsibility, two (2) students state as a bond of woman and man,

three (3) students relate to love and bond, four (4) students relate to God and bond and two students (2) connect to God and love.

The data also show one negative opinion on marriage that states marriage is difficult. It needs responsibility. The sixteen students show positive thinking on marriage from some sides which also express their hope in marriage. It looks from their words choices, such believe and promise. The two words express positive thinking. Besides that, the use of modal such as must and should show the moral conduct which society needs.

The good information of the data, the students share their opinion on balance roles between man and woman in a marriage. The male students and female students show this opinion. They did not put woman under man. They have already known how to respect each other in a marriage.

On the other hand, there is one opinion which shows possessive expression to mention the partner in marriage. It uses possessive pronoun to man and woman, but it does not tend to the woman. It is shown in student 17.

Religious teaching also influences their opinion on marriage. They express it by choosing the words, such as obligation, sacred, and worship. Their religions teach them how to view marriage.

#### **E. Conclusion**

The researchers conclude the result of the study on gender understanding taken from students' tests. The study is divided into two sub-discussions; gender understanding in Grimm's *Cinderella* and society.

Gender understanding in Grimm's *Cinderella* reflects their opinion on gender especially on the female characters; Cinderella, step-mother and step-sisters. 17 students describe Cinderella as a good model of female creature and step-mother and step-sisters are bad human beings. The students did not give opinions on male characters of the fairy tale.

Gender understanding in society shows that the students are still in public opinion which creates female manner and attitude as patient, meek, diligent, feminine, calm, and pious. Only one student hopes female becomes strong character. Four students hope female must not be feminine in performance, but they still hope feminine in manner. Three students show their hope toward female to be smart, intelligent, and clever.

The result shows that the opinions have not tended to feminism ideology extremely. They are still on public opinion track where gender puts female less than man. But, here there is positive information on education where the class in university level was attended by 12 female students. It shows more females can achieve higher education.

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