Louisiana State University
LSU Scholarly Repository

LSU Master's Theses
Graduate School

2002

Responses of African-American girls to two types of folktales

Corrie Kiesel
Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College

Follow this and additional works at: https://repository.lsu.edu/gradschool_theses

Part of the Education Commons

Recommended Citation

Kiesel, Corrie, "Responses of African-American girls to two types of folktales" (2002). *LSU Master's Theses*. 2268.
https://repository.lsu.edu/gradschool_theses/2268

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at LSU Scholarly Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in LSU Master's Theses by an authorized graduate school editor of LSU Scholarly Repository. For more information, please contact gradetd@lsu.edu.

RESPONSES OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN GIRLS TO TWO TYPES OF FOLKTALES

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

in

The Department of Curriculum and Instruction

by
Corrie M. Kiesel
B.A., University of Richmond, 1996
May 2002

Table of Contents

Abstract iii

Chapter

I. Introduction 1

Statement of Problem and Research Questions 3

II. Review of the Literature......5

III. Methodology 17

Selection of Tales......17

Selection of Participants 18

Collection of Data 19

Analysis of Data......21

IV. Findings of the Study......22

Case Study: Melissa......22

Case Study: Julia......27

Patterns of Response 31

Fairy Tale Expectations 31

Responses to Protagonists......32

Sibling Relationships 33

Relating Tales to Their Own Lives......33

Physical Appearance......34

V. Discussion 35

References......41

Appendices......44

Appendix A: Interview Guides 44

Appendix B: Parent Consent Form......49

Appendix C: Student Consent Form......50

Vita 51

Abstract

This study examined the responses of two 11-year-old African-American girls to two folktales: one with a passive female protagonist and one with an active female protagonist. The goal of the study was to add to the small body of previous research on children's responses to folktales by exploring the opinions of African-American girls, who had been thus far overlooked, and to illuminate areas for future research.

Data were collected through a series of four interviews with each girl and analyzed using qualitative research methodologies. Some of the data reflected previous findings from studies of Caucasian girls' responses to folktales. The data echoed the finding that children are "active makers of meaning" (Trousdale, 1987) in responding to folktales. Both girls in this study related the stories to their own lives by inserting modifications into the original tales. The data also suggested that the girls were drawn to active, helping female characters but held mixed feelings about emulating such active characters, reflecting a 1995 study (Trousdale).

The study challenges the assumption that children necessarily identify with the protagonists in fairy tales. In both types of tales the girls seemed to make qualified identifications with the main characters. The study also suggests that girls' readiness to identify with active female characters may depend on their prior experience with such characters. Moreover, the study found that both girls were reluctant to describe the characters in terms of specific physical traits. Further research was called for to determine whether such responses are typical of children from ethnic groups who do not often see themselves represented in literature.

Chapter I

Introduction

Folktales have long been a popular form of story to share with children. Fairy tale collections have existed since the fifth century (Opie and Opie, 1974, p. 23). However, it was Charles Perrault's seventeenth-century collection, Histories ou contes du temps passé, which identified the fairy tale as a form of story suited for children (Warner, 1994, p. xvi). Perrault's collection included tales that are still well known today, such as "Sleeping Beauty," "Little Red Ridinghood," "Bluebeard" and "Cinderella" (Opie and Opie, p. 25). Interest in folktales surged again in the 1800s with the publication of Kinder- und Haus-Marchen by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm. Their collection included such currently well-known tales as "Snow White" and "Hansel and Gretel" (Opie and Opie, p. 32). In the late nineteenth century in England, Andrew Lang collected folktales in his Blue Fairy Book (1889) and the Red, Green and Yellow Fairy Books that followed. In the 1900s, folktales took on even more popularity in the United States through their transformation into animated films. The Walt Disney Company popularized many tales with its films, beginning with Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (1937), Cinderella (1950) and Sleeping Beauty (1955), and more recently with films including Beauty and the Beast (1991) and Aladdin (1992).

Over time, the tales that became most widely known – those chosen both for canonization and, later, for animation – were typically ones that depicted passive female protagonists. In those stories, such as "Snow White," "Cinderella" and "Sleeping Beauty," the heroine typically suffers any injustice meekly while waiting for a rescuer to intervene on her behalf. In the later half of the twentieth century, an effort was made to rediscover tales with active female protagonists. Collections of such tales include Ethel Johnson Phelps' Tatterhood and Other Tales (1978) and

The Maid of the North (1981) and Rosemary Minard's Womenfolk and Fairy Tales (1975). More recently an effort was also made to make the heroines of animated film more active characters, such as in Disney's Beauty and the Beast and Mulan (1998).

Despite the popularity of fairy tales and their widespread use with children, very little research has been done on children's responses to the tales. While many scholars, most notably Bruno Bettelheim in his widely cited book The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales (1975), have theorized as to the benefits of using folktales with children and to the meanings the tales have, few have asked children themselves what they think of the tales. Kay Stone (1981) is one scholar who interviewed children and adults about their memories of folktales. Ann Trousdale (1987, 1995, 2001) also began to fill the gap in that research with studies of Caucasian girls' responses to folktales. A gap still exists, however, in research regarding African-American girls. This research aims to provide a starting point to fill that gap through a study of two African-American girls' responses to two types of folktales, one with a passive female protagonist and one with an active female protagonist.

African-American girls do not find themselves represented physically in popular depictions of fairy tale heroines. Scholars such as Max Luthi (1975) and Margery Hourihan (1997) note that fairy tales frequently associate dark skin with evil and inferiority. Meanwhile, the heroines of popular animated films are often blonde and almost always light-skinned. Although the Walt Disney Company has made an effort in the late twentieth century to depict heroines of different ethnicities – such as Aladdin's Princess Jasmine – African-American heroines are still absent. Scholars such as Alan Dundes (1980) and Rudine Sims Bishop (1997) suggest that the absence of African-American characters – or their stereotypical portrayal – from fairy tales and children's literature in general has a negative impact on children's self image.

Given the widespread use of folk fairy tales with American children, the response of African-American girls to the tales bears exploring. One wonders whether the benefits and meanings ascribed to the tales by Bettelheim and others (i.e. Cashdan, 1999, Metzger and Mommsen, 1981, and Jones, 1995) hold true for African-American girls who, as Hourihan notes, are often doubly marginalized by the stories, both as females and as ethnic minorities. The goal of this research is to begin to give a voice to girls whose opinions on fairy tales have yet to be heard in scholarly research.

Statement of Problem and Research Questions

My study was designed to see how African-American girls on the brink of adolescence would respond to folktales. Having read similar studies of Caucasian girls (Trousdale, 1987, 1995, 2001), I wondered how African-American girls would view the tales. While many scholars (e.g. Metzger and Mommsen, 1981, Jones, 1995, and Hartmann, 1969) suggest that children identify with fairy tale heroes, previous research (Trousdale, 2001) has raised questions about such theories by describing the responses of a girl who distances herself from the heroines of canonized tales. I wondered whether the responses of African-American girls would further problematize adult assumptions about children's readings of fairy tales, particularly given the fact that most female protagonists of canonized fairy tales published in the United States are portrayed as Caucasian. Moreover, by age 11, most girls have some familiarity with the canonized, patriarchal folktales, but will likely not have as much exposure to folktales with active heroines. In light of that, I wondered how girls' responses to one type of tale would compare to their responses to the other.

My research explored the following questions:

1) What expectations, if any, do girls have about fairy tale characters and plots?

2) How would the girls respond to a traditional fairy tale with a beautiful but passive heroine? Would they identify with such a heroine? If so, in what ways?
3) How would the girls respond to a "feminist" fairy tale with an active heroine whose physical appearance is de-emphasized? Would they identify with such a heroine? If so, in what ways?
4) Would the girls prefer one type of tale or protagonist to the other?
5) How would the girls respond to female sibling relationships that are described as competitive? How would they respond to female sibling relationships that are mutually supportive? Would they see one as preferable to the other?
6) Would the girls relate the tales to their own lives? If so, in what ways?

I believe this research is needed because of the widespread use of folktales in either book or film format with American children. If, as Dundes, Bishop and others suggest, children's literature in general – and fairy tales specifically -- can affect a child's self image, then the responses of children to those tales need to be studied. African-American girls are one group that has been overlooked in the small body of previous research on children's responses to fairy tales.

Chapter II

Review of the Literature

Folktales with passive female protagonists, such as "Cinderella," "Sleeping Beauty," "Bluebeard," "The Handless Maiden" and "Snow White," are the ones most commonly shared with American children through fairy tale collections and animated films. Many of those folktales were included in early folktale collections by the Grimm brothers, Charles Perrault and Andrew Lang. Folklorist Linda Degh (1979) points out the widespread knowledge of Grimm tales: "The common knowledge of the tales is so profound, so deeply ingrained, that, even without the story being told in full, a reference or casual hint is enough to communicate the meaning of the essential message of a tale" (p. 102).

The dominance of those types of tales among stories told to children has drawn criticism from some who object to the lessons those stories might teach about the role of women. The patriarchal tales typically depict a heroine who suffers cheerfully and achieves a reward without doing anything to help herself. Rosemary Minard (1975) writes, "Fairy tales abound with bold, courageous, and clever heroes. But for the most part female characters, if they are not witches or fairies or wicked stepmothers, are insipid beauties waiting passively for Prince Charming" (p. viii). Likewise, W.F.H. Nicolaisen (1993) points out the difference in depiction of male and female characters in popular folktales: "While male protagonists are sometimes cast in the role of unpromising hero in folktales, their female counterparts much more frequently fulfill that function. To the initial characteristics of extreme unpromise is often added the debilitating hardship of cruel persecution" (p. 61-62). Jack Zipes (1994) also discusses the canonization of patriarchal tales: "Fairy tales do not become mythic unless they are in almost perfect accord with the underlying principles of how the male members of society seek to arrange object relations to

satisfy their wants and needs. The fairy tales must seem natural and celebrate submission by the opposite sex or the dominated so that the dominated can feel the beauty of their actions" (p. 41).

In the canonized fairy tales, the female singled out for reward is typically portrayed as passive. Cinderella, a heroine who is not active but relies on a fairy godmother and small animals to help her, is one of the fairy-tale characters that has drawn criticism for its portrayal of gender roles. Alexandra Robbins (1998) writes, "this fairy-tale portrayal can give impressionable youth distorted perceptions of gender roles, as the fairy godmother and the prince reward Cinderella's winsome looks and passive manner with fancy clothes and a rich man, respectively. Cinderella encourages little girls . . . to aspire to become meek and inactive so that they, too, may achieve the utmost wish of someday riding off with the prince of their dreams and thereby escaping the heinous chore of cleaning their rooms" (pp. 103-104). Sleeping Beauty is another fairy tale heroine who has been described as passive. Madonna Kolbenschlag (1988) states, "at the universal level of meaning, Sleeping Beauty is most of all a symbol of passivity, and by extension a metaphor for the spiritual condition of women – cut off from autonomy and transcendence, from self-actualization and ethical capacity in a male-dominated milieu" (p. 5). Patriarchal heroines are not only passive about attaining their reward, they also passively accept the suffering which is commonly inflicted on them. The suffering ranges from the heroine being made to do physical labor to having her hands cut off, as with the "Handless Maiden" (Gordon, 1993). Joyce Carol Oates states (1997), "All 'good' heroines accept their fate passively, unquestioningly. To express even normal distress at being viciously maltreated would be in violation of the narrow strictures of fairy-tale 'goodness.'" Like Oates, Mary Aswell Doll (2000) discusses the idea of a "good" heroine, who is depicted as passive. Doll writes, "good girls become idealized, perfected objects, pedastaled for the male gaze. Schooled in passivity –

devitalized and dehumanized – the good girl is all surface" (p. 87). Doll's description of a good girl as an object stems from the passivity of heroines in patriarchal tales. Being passive means not being active, doing nothing. Such a girl is little more than an inanimate object to be placed on a pedestal.

While the canonized fairy tales are often criticized for their lack of active heroines, the animated films that are based on them have drawn even more fire. Such films do not always remain true to the traditional versions, which were handed down through the oral tradition before being published in anthologies. Widely known are the animated versions of fairy tales produced by the Walt Disney Company, the first of which were Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, Cinderella and Sleeping Beauty. Stone (1975) states, "if the Grimm heroines are, for the most part, uninspiring, those of Walt Disney seem barely alive" (p. 44). Thus, Disney's films are seen as amplifying the stereotype of passive female. Others, however, have defended Disney's animated versions of fairy tales. Betsy Hearne (1997) writes, "Disney's modifications originate from accurate readings of our culture. . . . We who criticize Disney have seen the enemy, and he is us." Hearne sees Disney's versions of fairy tales as conforming to the dictates of the culture. If the films' heroines seem passive, it is because passive heroines are what the culture wants to see portrayed. Beyond their portrayal of the heroine, Disney's films and similar productions have drawn criticism for simplifying fairy tales. Bruno Bettelheim (1976) and others who view fairy tales from a psychological perspective think animated versions of fairy tales deprive the stories of their symbolic significance. Stone (1981) writes, "Disney projected a literal rather than a symbolic belief in the positive aspects of Marchen: Good and beautiful young girls could expect to be rewarded with good and handsome (and high status) husbands" (p. 237). Looked at from

that perspective, Disney versions of fairy tales can be seen as stories that are flattened into one literal meaning rather than conveying metaphor.

In addition to being passive, the patriarchal “good girl” is valued for her beauty. Marcia Lieberman (1972) writes that in popular fairy tales the beautiful girl is the one chosen for reward. This singling out of the most beautiful girl identifies beauty as “a girl’s most valuable asset” (p. 385). The canonized fairy tales not only describe the heroine as beautiful, but her beauty is seen to be intrinsic to her goodness. She could not be a “good girl” at all if she was not beautiful, as evidenced by the description of Beauty in a version of "Beauty and the Beast”: “The youngest, as she was handsomer, was also better than her sisters” (Opie, 1974, p. 182). That story is typical of canonized tales in which the sister who is the most attractive is also the best. The emphasis on beauty may promote jealousy among girls (Lieberman, p. 385). Lieberman writes, “If a child identifies with the beauty, she may learn to be suspicious of ugly girls, who are portrayed as cruel, sly, and unscrupulous in these stories; if she identifies with the plain girls, she may learn to be suspicious and jealous of pretty girls, beauty being a gift of fate, not something that can be attained” (p. 385). Fairy tales that equate beauty with goodness and lack of beauty with badness pit pretty girls and plain girls against each other. Not only is beauty associated with goodness, but physical unattractiveness and strength are associated with evil. Lieberman points out that powerful women who are bad vastly outnumber powerful women who are good in fairy tale collections, and the wicked women are frequently assumed to be bad because of their race, as in Ogresses and trolls (p. 391).

Moreover, folktale characters tend to be flatly portrayed and, therefore, canonized fairy tales allow no shades of gray in signifying good girls. Female characters are either good or bad; there is no in between. Doll (2000) writes, “Some of Western-European culture’s most formative

texts present female characters as cast iron models for either good or bad. Fairy tales portray the drama as Cinderella versus stepsisters, Sleeping Beauty versus the old fairy, Snow White versus the stepmother. The good girl is everything already noted (docile, beautiful, passive=reward=marriage). The bad girl is not a true member of the family romance (read patriarchy)" (p. 89). The tale of Cinderella is an example of a fairy tale that pits good girl against bad girl. Cinderella is the heroine who cheerfully serves her awful stepmother, who makes Cinderella perform "the meanest work of the house" (Opie, 1974, p. 161). As Doll points out, this representation of one female as the villain versus another female as the heroine leaves only two roles for women – good or bad. This pitting of good girl versus bad girl in fairy tales may lead to distrust among the girls who grow up hearing the stories read to them. Oates (1997) writes, "the lot of women in a patriarchal society which privileged them as valuable possessions (of men) or branded them as worthless and contemptible, made it inevitable that women should perceive other women as dangerous rivals." Oates' comment echoes Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar (1979), who note that in the patriarchal realm of fairy tales, the Queen is threatened by the heroine's beauty. They write, "female bonding is extraordinarily difficult in patriarchy: women almost inevitably turn against women because the voice of the looking glass sets them against each other" (p. 38). Marina Warner (1994) also notes the rival aspect of the portrayal of women in fairy tales. She writes, "All over the world, stories which centre on a heroine, on a young woman suffering a prolonged ordeal before her vindication and triumph, frequently focus on women as the agents of her suffering" (p. 202). Thus, women are each other's worst enemies. This dividing of female characters into good or bad is in contrast to the depiction of male heroes, who face foes "totally unlike themselves" rather than "a negative mirror image" (Seifert, 1996, p. 176-177).

While tales with passive, beautiful heroines are the ones most often shared with Western children today, they are not the only tales, nor do they always represent the tales in their original form. Zipes (1983) points out that many fairy tales originally portrayed much more active female characters. He states:

> . . . the matriarchal world view and motifs of the original folk tales underwent successive stages of 'patriarchalization.' That is, by the time the oral folk tales, originally stamped by matriarchal mythology, circulated in the Middle Ages, they had been transformed in different ways: the goddess became a witch, evil fairy, or stepmother; the active, young princess was changed into an active hero; matrilineal marriage and family ties became patrilineal; the essence of the symbols, based on matriarchal rites, was depleted and made benign; the pattern of action which concerned maturation and integration was gradually recast to stress domination and wealth (p.7).

Thus, matriarchal stories were transformed into patriarchal stories on their way from oral tradition to published canon.

Other traditional folktales that fell outside the patriarchal canon have been rediscovered and anthologized since the 1970s (Trousdale, 1995, p. 168). One such collection is Phelps' Tatterhood and Other Tales (1978). Phelps writes in the introduction, "The protagonists are heroines in the true and original meaning of the word – heroic women distinguished by extraordinary courage and achievements, who hold the center of interest" (p. xv). Stories with active protagonists portray the central female character as brave, intelligent and competent (Minard, p. viii). Her beauty – if she is actually beautiful – is not portrayed as her primary asset (Phelps, p. xv). Cashdan (1999) asserts that feminist tales have emerged because fairy tales are "products of the culture and era of which they are a part" Those feminist tales "feature a heroine who is bold, resourceful, and sassy. She is more likely to rescue the prince than the other way around" (Cashdan, p. 240). However, while traditional fairy tales with active heroines exist, it is the patriarchal tales that are most well-known, and therefore most influential, in Western culture.

Some scholars believe that fairy tales have a greater impact on the psychological and moral development of children than other forms of literature. Robbins (1998) contrasts fairy tales to "mere short stories," stating fairy tales go further by getting into "a child's subconsciousness, where images and attitudes can then perpetuate societal standards" (p. 101). Similarly, Bettelheim (1975) states that fairy tales convey to children "the advantages of moral behavior" (p. 5). He thinks it is important for children to hear about fairy tale heroes who go out into the world, face struggles and end up victorious, because such tales help children learn independence (p. 11). Zipes (1983) examines fairy tales from a sociological perspective, stating that the stories "were written with the purpose of socializing children to meet definite normative expectations at home and in the public sphere" (p. 9). What the psychological and sociological perspectives have in common is the notion that fairy tales influence the behavior of children in a way that reflects societal standards. As Trousdale (1995, p. 179) points out, many cultural factors are involved in socialization. Other factors beyond fairy tales, such as media, education and the influence of parents, work together to socialize children. Warner (1994) names religion in addition to folklore as promoting certain characteristics in women. "Christian tradition held the virtues of silence, obedience and discretion as especially, even essentially, feminine, but this view spread far wider than the circle of the devout. The Silent Woman was an accepted ideal" (p. 29). The canonized fairy tales are just one aspect of American society that reinforces its patriarchal structure. Clearly, though, choices were made about which stories to canonize, and those stories reflected the role for women defined for them by the patriarchy. Such a one-sided canon of stories can have a profound impact on children when they align with other cultural influences (Trousdale, 1995, p. 179). Stone (1985) also discusses the impact of a one-sided canon of fairy tales: "If one agrees that childhood is a critically impressionable time of life, especially in terms of forming

sexual identity, and if popular fairy tales consistently present an image of heroines that emphasize their beauty, patience, and passivity, then the potential impact of such tales cannot be ignored. Certainly some who once favored Cinderella will later find her irrelevant, but many others will continue unconsciously or consciously to strive for her ideal femininity – or will be annoyed with themselves for failing to attain her position" (p. 138).

Previous research on children's responses to fairy tales has not been extensive. Bettelheim (1975) discusses the benefits of allowing children to respond to fairy tales:

> When fairy tales are being read to children in classes, or in libraries during story hour, the children seem fascinated. But often they are given no chance to contemplate the tales or otherwise react . . . . Talking with children after such an experience, it appears that the story might as well not have been told, for all the good it has done them. But when the storyteller gives the children ample time to reflect on the story, to immerse themselves in the atmosphere that hearing it creates in them, and when they are encouraged to talk about it, then later conversation reveals that the story offers a great deal emotionally and intellectually, at least to some of the children (p. 59).

Zipes (1979) also discusses the need to consider how children receive fairy tales: "How does a child receive and perceive a given tale? It is necessary to ask whether a child actually knows what a king is. What does a king mean to a five-year-old, to an eight-year-old, to a girl or boy, to girls and boys of different races and class backgrounds? . . . What is obviously necessary in working with the impact of tales on children is a method which takes into consideration the aesthetics of reception" (p. 170). Stone (1981) pointed out the lack of research on children's responses to fairy tales, stating that among the research on the effects of fairy tales "children themselves are rarely given a chance to respond directly" (p. 239). Maria Tatar (1992) also raised questions about the validity of theories about the effect of fairy tales on children: "With a few notable exceptions, nearly every study of children's fairy tales published in this century has taken the part of the parent, constructing the true meaning of the tales by using the reading

strategies of an adult bent on identifying timeless moral truths, folk wisdom of the ages, and universally valid developmental paradigms for boys and girls" (p. xvii).

The studies that have been done on children's responses to fairy tales call into question the meanings for children ascribed to the tales by adults. Stone (1981) interviewed children and adults about their memories of fairy tales in the mid-1970's. She found that the children were not disturbed by accounts of violence in fairy tales, but the adults were. However, the adults did not remember being disturbed by violence in fairy tales as children (p. 240). In another study of children's responses to fairy tales, Trousdale (1987) found that children were actively involved in determining the meaning of the stories, and those meanings may not align with the morals adults ascribe to the tales (pp. 179, 186). In 1995, Trousdale studied the responses of a 7-year-old girl, Cindy, to three folktales with active heroines: "Tatterhood," "The Twelve Huntsmen" and "Three Strong Women." She found that while Cindy liked the active heroines, she would not want to emulate them because of their unconventionality (p. 178). Trousdale (2001) also compared the responses of one girl, Nikki, at age 8 and age 12 to "Tatterhood," "The Twelve Huntsmen" and "Three Strong Women," as well as the story "Briar Rose," which has a passive heroine. The comparison raised questions about the validity of psychological theories on fairy tales' appeal to children and about how girls negotiate cultural scripts in a patriarchal society (p. 30). Rather than accepting or admiring the actions of passive heroines, such as Cinderella, Nikki criticizes their lack of action, pointing out how she would act differently (p. 20). She also expressed that there were similarities between herself and active heroines, such as Tatterhood (p. 29).

Some scholars believe that readers of fairy tales identify with their heroes or heroines. According to Steven Swann Jones (1995), one of the characteristics of fairy tales "is that the

audience is encouraged to identify strongly with the central protagonist, who is presented in an unambiguous way" (p. 17). Likewise, Michael Metzger and Katharina Mommsen (1981) write, "the fairy tale is capable of inducing in the hearer a compelling sense of identification with its personae" (p. 8). Waltraut Hartmann (1969) also writes about identification in fairy tales: "Children – and adults too – frequently cannot avoid identification with a literary figure by an act of will and thus respond to the portrayal of the hero instinctively so that he eventually becomes the identification figure" (p. 8). Hartmann argues that children are prone to identify with fairy tale heroes because of the characters' stereotypical and exaggerated portrayals (p. 10-11). In Hartmann's view, a child "mentally imitates" the hero through identification (p. 12). However, other scholars dispute the notion that children identify with fairy tale characters: "One could at least argue that a modern child can hardly identify with suffering heroes and rescues by magical helpers in these old stories. … Fairy tales offer children instead such a thick packet of long outdated familial, social, and conjugal norms that their divergence from actual patterns of living can lead to powerful disorientation" (Schenda, 1986, pp. 88-89).

Moreover, the theory that children identify with fairy tale characters does not consider that African-American girls rarely find themselves represented in fairy tales – or, for that matter, literature as a whole. In "The All-White World of Children's Books," Nancy Larrick (1965) notes the absence of African-American characters in children's literature. She states the lack of representation is detrimental to African-American children and white children alike: "Although his light skin makes him one of the world's minorities, the white child learns from his books that he is the kingfish. There seems little chance of developing the humility so urgently needed for world cooperation, instead of world conflict, as long as our children are brought up on gentle doses of racism through their books" (p. 63). When African Americans are represented in

literature, the depictions often reflect stereotypes (p. 64). Toni Morrison (1992) addresses the attempt to ignore the African-American presence in American literature in general: “There seems to be a more or less tacit argument among literary scholars that, because American literature has been clearly the preserve of white male views, genius, and power, those views, genius, and power are without relationship to and removed from the overwhelming presence of black people in the United States” (p. 5). Jacqueline Bobo (1995) also addresses representations of African Americans: “Representations of black women in mainstream media constitute a venerable tradition of distorted and limited imagery” (p. 33). Bishop (1997) points out the harm to students of literature that leaves groups underrepresented or portrayed in a stereotypical way: “students who do not see any reflections of themselves or who see only distorted or comical ones come to understand that they have little value in society in general and in school in particular. . . . As a part of the social and scholastic context, literature can contribute to the development of self-esteem by holding up to its readers images of themselves. When children are invisible in the literature sanctioned by the schools, or when the images they see are distorted or laughable or inaccurate, the effect on their self-esteem is likely to be negative” (p. 4).

The absence of African-American characters in children’s literature extends to popular fairy tales, despite the assertions of some folktale scholars that representations of female characters in fairy tales are universal. For example, Max Luthi claims that depictions of beauty in fairy tales are universal because beauty is not described in specific terms: “The listener must fall back on his own imagination; he can and must color in the outline to suit himself. . . . About the particular sort of beauty of the princess, it says nothing, and it should say nothing. For it is not a question of individual nuance; it is a question of beauty” (p. 3). However, later in his argument, Luthi makes it clear that this universal beauty extends only to light-skinned heroines:

“As ugly appear the blackamoor, skin which is burned brown or black, pitch and dirt, hair from which lice fall, or the mouth out of which toads appear,” while beauty is “the lustrous, the golden, and the bright” (p. 36). Margery Hourihan (1997) addresses the attribution of negative characteristics to non-whites in her discussion of hero stories, which include fairy tales: “Readers who belong to one of the groups marginalized by hero stories – primarily women and non-Europeans – are doubly affected by the narrative point of view of these tales. They see human beings like themselves depicted as unimportant and inferior, and sometimes as evil. But as they read they must participate in the hero’s perspective and share the feelings of the narrator towards these characters. Thus they are taught to despise themselves, to collude in the construction of their own inferiority rather than to rebel against being so labeled” (p. 44). Dundes (1980) also discusses the representation (or lack thereof) of African Americans in fairy tales. He writes, “A terse bit of Afro-American folklore conveys a unique indictment of the use of white folklore in classrooms containing black students. There’s the young black girl who asks a question of the mirror on the wall. ‘Mirror, mirror on the wall, who’s the fairest one of all?’ and the mirror answers, ‘Snow White, you black bitch, and don’t you forget it!’ In an educational system and society where the values come from white folklore, there is not much potential for a positive self-image for black students. Americans inherited from Europe an entire semiotic of color in which black was evil and white was good” (p. 49).

Chapter III

Methodology

The study was designed using qualitative research methodologies. Qualitative research is considered appropriate for obtaining a "holistic impression" or "more complete picture" of an issue (Fraenkel and Wallen, 2000, p. 501). Qualitative methodologies guided the selection of participants and the collection and analysis of data. Furthermore, the methodology of the study was guided by previous research on children's responses to folktales (Trousdale, 1987), which also made use of qualitative research methodologies.

Selection of Tales

The tales I selected were "The Fairy" (Opie and Opie, 1974) and "Tatterhood" (Phelps, 1978). "The Fairy" is typical of canonized, patriarchal tales with the elements of a passive, suffering, beautiful protagonist and a scheming mother who pits one sister against the other. I selected "The Fairy" because it has not been popularized through an animated film, and I thought the girls in my study would be less likely to have already formed opinions about the characters in the story than they would with more well-known tales. In the version of the tale I used, the heroine was unnamed, and her sister was named "Fanny." I gave the heroine a name, "Jackie," to avoid confusion during the interviews, and I changed Fanny's name to "Marcie" because I thought the name Fanny, which is not currently in style, might contain negative connotations in and of itself.

In "The Fairy," Jackie is sent to a well to fetch water. At the well she encounters a fairy in disguise as a poor woman, who asks her for a drink of water. Jackie gives the woman a drink and is rewarded with jewels and flowers that fall from her mouth every time she speaks. When her mother learns what has happened, she sends Marcie to the well to get the same drink. This

time the fairy appears disguised as a rich lady, and Marcie treats her rudely. Marcie is punished with lizards and toads falling from her mouth whenever she speaks. The mother blames Jackie for Marcie's misfortune, and Jackie runs to the woods to hide. A prince finds Jackie crying in the woods, and, enamored by her beauty and her jewels, decides to marry her.

In contrast, "Tatterhood" is a tale with an active, courageous heroine, who has a loving and supportive relationship with her sister. The story does not reveal whether the heroine is physically beautiful, because, the story says, "it didn't matter in the least" (p.6). In that tale, a mother has twin daughters. Tatterhood is born first, riding a goat and waving a wooden spoon, while her sister is described as "fair." Tatterhood fights off trolls from the palace, but during the fight the trolls switch her sister's head with a calf's head. Tatterhood and her sister head off on a voyage, during which Tatterhood restores her sister's head. They then arrive in a kingdom where they are invited to the palace. Tatterhood refuses to clean up or dress up for the event, but as she parades into the kingdom on her goat with two princes and her sister, she magically changes her tattered clothes into a velvet gown and her goat into a horse. While both folktales are European and thus do not feature African-American characters, "Tatterhood" does describe its heroine as having dark hair.

Selection of Participants

The subjects for my study were two 11-year-old African-American girls. Melissa was a student in a local public school, and Julia was a student in a local private school. I located both participants based on professional recommendations. Julia was recommended by her school principal, and Melissa was recommended by an elementary school teacher.

The number of my participants was limited to two to allow for an in-depth analysis of the data gathered through my interviews. I selected 11-year-old girls for this study because I believe

aspects of the folktales are particularly relevant to children that age. The two types of folktales I am using present differing impressions of what type of physical appearance is valued for females. This is relevant for any girl on the brink of adolescence, because that is a time when body image and physical appearance become more important for girls, who begin to explore the world of fashion and makeup and who begin to become aware of the way their appearance is perceived by others. However, the issue of physical appearance in fairy tales is particularly relevant to African-American girls, whose physical appearance does not match the image of beauty presented in canonized folktales and who are often left out of children's literature in general (Dundes, 1980, and Larrick, 1965). While the tales themselves often leave physical descriptions unspecified, popular versions of those tales, such as the animated films Cinderella and Sleeping Beauty, present their heroines as Caucasian, in many cases with blond hair and blue eyes. The two types of folktales also present differing images of relationships between girls, which is relevant to my subjects, because as girls enter their pre-teen years, they are increasingly conscious of social relationships.

Collection of Data

Data were collected through audiotaped sessions with the participants, interviews with their mothers and field notes. I met with each girl four times during the summer. Most of the sessions took place at each girl's house. With Julia, we sat on a couch in a guest bedroom/study with a tape recorder between us. With Melissa, we sat at the kitchen table for the first, third and fourth sessions. For the second session, we sat at a table at a local library to avoid distractions at her home, which her mother felt was unusually noisy on that day.

The first session with each girl began with a description of the study, during which I explained that there were no right or wrong answers to the questions I would be asking, and that

I was interested in the girls' opinions. I also conducted a brief interview with each participant about her impressions of fairy tales. Responses during this session, as with all subsequent sessions, were tape recorded and later transcribed. During the first session, I also interviewed each girl's mother about the makeup of the family and how the participant related to her siblings.

During the second session, I read "The Fairy," taking two breaks during the story to ask questions so that the participants would have an opportunity to digest and express their opinions on small sections of the story. I also asked additional questions at the end of the tale.

During the third session, I asked each girl to retell "The Fairy" in order to see what aspects of the story seemed most important to her and what, if any, revisions she might make. Previous researchers have noted the value of asking children to retell fairy tales. Stone (1981) wrote that children's retellings "often reveal more about children's reactions than is possible from direct questioning" (p. 243). Bettelheim (1975) stated that during retellings children might change details of the fairy tale or remember it differently in order to deal with aspects of the story that do not meet their emotional needs (p. 152). Following the retelling of "The Fairy," I read "Tatterhood," again taking two breaks during the story to ask questions with additional questions at the end of the story.

During the final session, I asked each girl to retell "Tatterhood." I ended the session by asking questions that compared "The Fairy" to "Tatterhood."

Immediately following each session, I took field notes to record the girls' nonverbal responses and my own impressions, insights and questions.

Analysis of Data

Data were analyzed through a reading and re-reading of the transcripts and field notes, comparing the girls' responses to the interview questions and looking for patterns in the

responses. According to Jack Fraenkel and Norman Wallen (2000), data analysis through qualitative methodologies "involves synthesizing the information the researcher obtains . . . into a coherent description of what he or she has discovered" (p. 505). Such analysis "relies heavily on description" (p. 506). In my analysis I thoroughly considered each girl's individual responses in addition to looking for similarities and differences between the two girls' responses. As I read and re-read the transcripts, patterns began to appear, and I was able to form categories with which to sort the data for further analysis.

Chapter IV

Findings of the Study

Case Study: Melissa

Melissa was 11 ½ years old when the study began. She is a talkative and outgoing girl and seems eager to make a positive impression. She seems meticulous about her appearance, and was normally dressed for our sessions in neat, matching outfits, with her hair pulled back either in braids or ponytails and wearing earrings. During our interviews, Melissa spoke articulately and expressively, frequently using whispers or facial expressions to emphasize a point.

Melissa lives in a two-parent household. Both parents are employed, and Melissa's mother, who is a member of the staff at a local university's College of Education, is also a part-time student. Melissa has a 7-year-old sister, whom her mother said she has "sibling rivalries" with, but overall "they get along very well." Melissa's mother emphasized education in her goals for Melissa, saying she hoped Melissa would "finish school, continue to be an honor student, go to college, get a job, get married and live happily ever after."

Melissa was familiar with the fairy tale genre before our first session, naming "Bluebeard," "Little Red Riding Hood" and "Beauty and the Beast" as among the tales with which she was familiar. She described female characters in fairy tales as "mean," "prissy" and "bossy" people who "clean around the house" and "take care of the children." Grown women in fairy tales "usually get married to a king or a prince." Male characters are also "bossy" people who do "jobs," "take care of their families" and "maybe want to be married."

In session two during our first break for questions, Melissa revealed to me that she had seen the story of "The Fairy" before in a coloring book. When we stopped for the second break for questions at the point in the story where the fairy made toads and lizards fall from Marcie's

mouth, Melissa said she did not know the rest of the story, because the coloring book version ended at that point. She later showed me the coloring book, which I found of use in my analysis.

One of the questions I asked during the first break was what Melissa thought the sisters in the tale looked like. Melissa seemed reluctant to answer that question. She first responded, "What do you mean, what do I think they look like?" When I rephrased the question, Melissa described the younger sister as "messy" because "she may work a lot" and the other sister as "real fancy like her mother, hair's done all the time, nails done." She avoided describing the characters in terms of specific physical traits, such as skin color, eye color or hair color. When I saw her coloring book later, I saw that even there she had not selected colors to use for the characters' physical features. She had not colored any of the characters' skin or hair, with the exception of coloring the mother's hair gray in one picture. During the first break during the "Tatterhood" session, she again answered the question about what the characters looked like without using specific descriptions of physical features except fingernails (she thought Tatterhood's nails were "messed up," while her sister's were "done"). At the end of the tale, Melissa said she wished the story would have told what Tatterhood's face looked like. I asked her what she thought it looked like, and she said, "tan and soft, silky, um, makeup but not too much, long eyelashes."

During the second break in "The Fairy," I asked Melissa to predict the ending. She first predicted two possible endings in which the heroine helped other characters. Then, as I prepared to begin reading the final section of the story, Melissa interrupted with her third prediction for what would happen to the heroine: "or she marries a prince or something."

After I finished reading the tale, confirming Melissa's third prediction that the heroine married a prince, I asked her if there was anything she would change about the story. She said, "I

would change the prince part." She suggested an alternate ending in which the heroine aids the prince, who has fallen off his horse and is really the fairy in disguise, and receives a reward. Then a "real prince" marries her. This alternate ending, along with Melissa's first two predictions for the ending during the second break, suggests her desire to place the heroine in an active, helping role.

At the end of "The Fairy," Melissa related the characters in the story to herself and her friends. She first made a comparison between the protagonist and her friends when discussing why the king married the girl. She described the protagonist as "nice," and then described her friends: "they're real nice, and if you ask them to do something they'll do it for you." The protagonist was also the character Melissa named as her favorite and said she would most like to be like, because "she's real nice and has manners," "she's real honest" and "she works hard." She compared herself to the protagonist, saying "she has manners . . . I have manners, too, but sometimes I don't use them." However, when asked if there was anything in the story that related to her own life, Melissa recognized that she possessed some of the protagonist's qualities and some qualities of the other sister. Melissa described herself as "sweet," "nice" and "honest," but also "bossy." Likewise, when asked if the story reminded her of anyone else she knew, Melissa compared her friends to both sisters, saying that some of her friends were "nice" but also "bossy."

During the third session, Melissa was introduced to the more active heroine of "Tatterhood," whom she admired in some ways and criticized in others. She identified politeness and magic as the qualities of Tatterhood that she would like to have herself and, based on those qualities, she named Tatterhood as her favorite character and the one whom she would most like to be like. However, despite her admiration for Tatterhood, Melissa distanced herself from the

character. She did not think that Tatterhood or any other character in the story was like herself or anyone she knew. She described Tatterhood's behavior as masculine early in the story, calling her "a boy," and she criticized Tatterhood's choice of clothing. During the second break in the story, Melissa said she would have changed clothes before going to the palace so she wouldn't "embarrass" herself. She speculated that Tatterhood refused to change because she was "proud to be herself, but I still wouldn't do that. No way I'd do that." Melissa's retelling of "Tatterhood" at the beginning of the fourth session suggests that the clothing was a significant issue for her. The parts of the story she remembered at first focused on Tatterhood's clothes. She remembered Tatterhood wearing "dirty clothes" at the beginning of the story, and she remembered that Tatterhood "basically changed herself into a princess" by transforming her clothing at the end of the story.

Melissa also responded to the sibling relationships in both stories. Melissa recognized that the sisters in "The Fairy" are not portrayed as having a good relationship. She described the relationship as "so little you wouldn't even call it a relationship." She then imagined aspects of a sibling relationship that the characters might have: "Maybe they like doing the same things. Maybe they share a room or something. Maybe wear the same things." Later when discussing "The Fairy," Melissa was reminded of arguments she had with her own sister, and she recited the following dialogue, which she had had with her sister:

> When I have money and she doesn't, "Mommy, [Melissa] won't give me no money, and she told me she'd give me some."
> "I did not tell her I was going to give her some."
> "Yes you did, you lying."
> Then she goes back to her room and <u>pout</u>. <u>So</u>, I have to hear <u>that</u> all day.

This interjection of her own sibling rivalry suggests that Melissa was relating the story to her own life.

In "Tatterhood," Melissa at first described the sisters as having "a good relationship," but then amended her description to "not really good," because Tatterhood would not change clothes when her sister asked her to. She said Tatterhood's sister treated her well because she would not marry until Tatterhood married. When directly comparing the sisters in "The Fairy" to the sisters in "Tatterhood," Melissa saw the tales as providing contrasting images of sibling relationships. She said, "In the first story, she treated her sister bad, and in the second story, she treated her sister good."

Melissa found lessons in both stories. She said the lesson of "The Fairy" was to "be nice," because "if you're not going to be nice to anybody you're not going to get anything in return, which most people don't get anything in return, but you'll feel good about yourself." She elaborated on that by saying one should try to help others "instead of just worrying about yourself or trying to get the same thing as something, 'cause life is not fair." Melissa found two lessons in "Tatterhood": "Follow directions the first time they're given. And don't judge nobody from the outside."

When comparing both stories during the final session, Melissa expressed mixed opinions about which story she like best. She said she would most like to be like the character Jackie from "The Fairy," because "she was polite and kind." However, if she could pick one of the stories to read to someone else, she would pick "Tatterhood." When describing what she liked about "Tatterhood," Melissa remembered the parts of the story in which Tatterhood was an adventurous, active heroine. She said she liked "the part where they when she rides on this goat and those little monster thingies come out . . . And her sister's head got cut off. And that's why they went sailing, to go find those thingies and then get her head back."

Case Study: Julia

Julia is the same age as Melissa; both were 11 ½ with January birthdays when the study began. Julia is a thoughtful girl with a reserved demeanor. During our first session she seemed lethargic. Subsequently I coordinated with Julia's mother to make sure we held our sessions during times when Julia was rested and had eaten. Julia seemed more comfortable and relaxed during the remaining sessions, although she was less talkative than Melissa. When responding to my questions, Julia typically looked toward the wall or ceiling as if contemplating her answer, only looking at me when she had finished responding.

Julia lives in a two-parent household with a twin sister, a baby brother, and her mother's godson, who is a teenager. Julia's father is a clergyman and is involved in her education as a member of an administrative board at Julia's school. Julia's mother had recently cut back her office job to a part-time schedule. Julia's mother said she and her sister "don't have the normal sibling rivalry." However, the mother said sometimes Julia's sister "does think she's the boss of the world and [Julia] tells her sometimes she's not the boss of the world." Julia's mother said her hopes for her are that "she graduates high school and goes to college and does what she wants to in life." Julia and her sister share responsibility for household chores. When I met with Julia for session three, it was the twins' turn that afternoon to prepare the family dinner. Julia's sister began cooking while I met with Julia.

Julia identified three stories that had been popularized by Disney films as the fairy tales she was familiar with: "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs," "Pochahontas" and "Cinderella." While "Pocahontas" is not, in fact, a fairy tale, Julia's inclusion of it in that category suggests the influence of Disney movies on her understanding of the fairy tale genre. She said male characters in fairy tales like to "fight," "build things" and "find things." Female characters "act sort of like

men," as "some of them are heroes." She cited Pochahontas as an example of a female character who was a hero, because "she saves the boy's life."

During our second session, I read "The Fairy" to Julia. During our first break, when I asked Julia what she thought the characters looked like, she had difficulty answering the question. After thinking about the question for several seconds, she said, "I can't explain how it is." Then she thought some more before replying, "I can't remember." I tried rephrasing the question: "When I was describing the girls when I read the story, did you have any kind of image in your head of what they might be like?" Julia this time came up with the description "poor." After thinking about it some more for several seconds, she said, "that's all I could think of." During the third session, with "Tatterhood," Julia volunteered more information about what the characters might look like. During the first break, she described "Tatterhood" as "dirty," "tall" and "skinny" and probably having long hair. She said the sister was "clean," "pretty" and probably had "short, blond hair." Julia provided those descriptions after hearing the part of the story when the sister was described as "fair." While the story later confirms Julia's prediction that Tatterhood had long hair, Julia had not yet heard that description.

At the end of "The Fairy," Julia described the prince as her favorite character, saying he was "kind and nice." She thought he married Jackie "because she was beautiful" and to rescue her from her house. She said the prince was a hero because "he helped the girl" and that the story did not have a heroine. She said the prince's actions reminded her of the story "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs."

At the end of "Tatterhood," Julia said she did not have a favorite character because she liked the characters equally. She thought Tatterhood was the heroine of the story because "she

was strong and she got the trolls to get away and she went and got her sister's head back." She did not think the story had a hero.

Julia did not consciously relate the characters of either story to her own life. She said none of the characters reminded her of herself or anyone else she knew, and she did not see any lessons in the tales. However, during the second break in the reading of "Tatterhood," Julia placed the twin sisters at her level by saying she thought they were 11 years old, while the older prince was probably 13. Julia may have been inclined to place the twins on her level because she is a twin herself.

Julia also focused on the characters' chores, something she bore some responsibility for in her own house. When first describing the sisters in "The Fairy," she said, "they're girls who always have to clean up the house." She described the mother as being mean to the sisters because "she makes 'em clean up all the time." She speculated that the protagonist ran away from home "so her mother wouldn't beat her, and so she wouldn't probably have to clean up anymore." When comparing "The Fairy" to "Tatterhood" in our final session, Julia said the stories were different because the two sisters in "The Fairy" both had to clean, while in "Tatterhood," "Tatterhood was used to cleaning up and the younger sister probably wasn't." When comparing the protagonists of the two stories, Julia said, "they both like to clean up." Julia reached this interpretation even though "Tatterhood" does not actually contain any description of the protagonist cleaning -- unless one considers Tatterhood's ridding the palace of trolls as a type of cleaning! Furthermore, in "The Fairy," the tale describes the protagonist as being assigned household chores, but makes no mention of the other sister having to clean.

Julia saw contrasting depictions of sibling relationships in the two stories. She described the relationship between the two sisters in "The Fairy" as "a bad relationship." She explained,

"they love each other, but still they don't, probably don't get along." In contrast, she described the sibling relationship in "Tatterhood" as "a good relationship," because "she's not that mean to her." Later, when asked to compare the relationships in both stories directly, Julia recognized that the relationships were portrayed differently. She described the sisters in "The Fairy": "The older one was probably much nicer to the younger one, but the younger one was probably mean." In contrast, in "Tatterhood," "they were both nice to each other. They weren't mean like most of the time. And they got along."

Julia saw elements in both stories that she wanted to change. After reading Julia "The Fairy," I asked her if there was anything she would change in the story. She replied that she would change the mother's punishment of Jackie to cleaning "the whole house" rather than beating her, because "that's child abuse." During Julia's retelling of "The Fairy" during our next session, she did, in fact, change that element of the story, saying only that the mother "got mad" and leaving out the beating altogether.

After reading "Tatterhood," Julia said she would change the part in which the market woman tells the queen how to have babies by putting buckets of water under her bed. Julia said, "If she didn't have babies, she just doesn't get a baby. . . . Because it kind of doesn't make sense, to eat a leaf and grow it under your bed."

When comparing both stories during our final session, Julia said she did not have a favorite character, because she liked all of the characters. The character she would most like to be like was Tatterhood, although she qualified that response by saying "not to get anybody's head back." Although Tatterhood was her favorite overall character, she would choose the story of "The Fairy" to read to someone else because "it was more interesting."

Patterns of Response

After examining the girls' individual responses, I was able to organize the data into patterns of responses. While the patterns reflected my initial research questions, themes also emerged from the data that I did not expect. For example, I was surprised by both girls' hesitancy to discuss specific physical characteristics of the heroines.

Fairy Tale Expectations

Both girls' responses to the stories seemed to be influenced by the expectations they had already formed about fairy tales. During the initial interview, both girls said fairy tales included unrealistic details, and both girls pointed out unrealistic elements in both "The Fairy" and "Tatterhood" when describing why they thought those stories were fairy tales. In "The Fairy," both girls noted that the jewels or toads coming out of the sisters' mouths could not really happen. In "Tatterhood," both noted that the trolls were not real, while Julia also pointed out the magical element of Tatterhood transforming her clothing.

In addition to the magical elements, Melissa named "having a moral to the story" as an element of fairy tales. Given her expectation that tales contain morals, it was not surprising to me that Melissa saw lessons in both stories. On the other hand, Julia said she did not think there was a lesson in either story.

Melissa also named marriage as something that "usually" happens in fairy tales. This expectation was reflected during the second break during the reading of "The Fairy," when I asked her to predict what would happen next. Her third suggestion was that the heroine "marries a prince or something" because "it's in a fairy tale, and most fairy tales do that." Later, when discussing the ending of "Tatterhood," Melissa noted that the story does not say whether Tatterhood and the prince got married, but thinks they "probably" did.

Julia also saw the relationship between the heroine and the prince in “The Fairy” in light of her prior experience with fairy tales. She said the tale reminded her of “Snow White” because the prince in “Snow White” found the heroine after she had eaten the poisoned apple. Similarly, the prince in “The Fairy” found the heroine crying in the woods.

The two girls’ differing impressions of the character Tatterhood may also stem from their expectations for fairy tales. During our initial interview, Julia said that the girls in fairy tales are sometimes “heroes” and “some of them save other people’s lives almost.” In contrast, Melissa did not attribute heroic actions to female characters, saying they “clean around the house” and “take care of the children.” Julia thought the character Tatterhood was a heroine while Melissa did not. This may be explained by Julia’s initial expectation that a girl could be the hero in a fairy tale.

Responses to Protagonists

The girls had differing opinions of the characters in “The Fairy.” Melissa identified the protagonist as her favorite character, while Julia’s favorite was the prince. Melissa liked the protagonist because she was “honest” and “nice,” although her alternate ending for the story indicated her desire for the protagonist to be a more active character. Julia, on the other hand, expressed a preference for the more active character of the prince, whom she identified as the hero of the tale for rescuing the protagonist.

Both girls expressed admiration for the active heroine Tatterhood, identifying her as a character they would like to be like. However, when describing why they would want to be like Tatterhood, both girls picked qualities other than her heroic activities. Julia specifically qualified her answer by saying she would want to be like Tatterhood, but “not to get anybody’s head back.” She named Tatterhood’s “cleaning” as the part she wanted to be like. Melissa named

Tatterhood's politeness and magic as the qualities she would want to have. She rejected Tatterhood's choice of clothing despite her assertion that Tatterhood dresses in tattered clothes to "be proud to be herself."

Sibling Relationships

Both girls perceived that the sisters in "Tatterhood" had a better relationship than the sisters in "The Fairy." While Melissa thought Tatterhood did not have a "really good" relationship with her sister because she refused to change clothes, on direct comparison, both girls agreed that the sisters in "Tatterhood" had a good relationship while the sisters in "The Fairy" did not. Moreover, both girls came up on their own with elements of the sibling relationship in "The Fairy" that were not in the text of the tale and that made the relationship more positive than the story described it. Melissa's speculation that "maybe they like the same things" and Julia's assertion that the sisters "love each other" are details not included in the story itself.

Relating Tales to Their Own Lives

Both girls took steps to relate the tales to their own lives, in some cases rewriting sections of the tales to make them conform to their lives. Melissa projected details onto the sibling relationship in "The Fairy," saying "maybe they like doing the same things, maybe they share a room or something, maybe wear the same things." Likewise, Julia stated that the sisters in "The Fairy" "love each other," a detail which is not part of the tale. Julia also added details to "Tatterhood." She focused on Tatterhood's having to clean, something that is not mentioned anywhere in the story, but which reflects a task Julia does herself. Moreover, she speculated that Tatterhood was 11 years old, the same age as herself.

In addition to rewriting elements of the tales, Melissa consciously compared the characters in the stories to herself and her friends. Melissa saw both herself and the protagonist in "The Fairy" as "nice," although she also saw herself as "bossy," like the other sister. Similarly, she described her friends as "real nice" but sometimes "bossy." In discussing "The Fairy," Melissa also gave an account of an incident of sibling rivalry between herself and her sister, relating to the sibling relationship in "The Fairy." When discussing "Tatterhood," Melissa also compared herself to the heroine, pointing out how she would act differently. When discussing Tatterhood's choice of clothes she said, "No way I'd do that."

Unlike Melissa, Julia did not consciously compare the characters to herself. In fact, she said none of the characters in either story reminded her of herself or anyone else she knew. However, given that Julia projected details from her own life onto the tales, it would seem that she did relate the stories to herself, even if she was not aware of doing it.

Physical Appearance

Both girls initially deflected questions relating to the physical appearance of the characters. Neither provided any physical description the first time they were asked what the sisters in "The Fairy" looked like. Further prodding yielded the descriptions "poor," "messy" or "fancy" but not any specific description of physical traits. "Tatterhood" provides a couple of clues to its characters' appearances, describing the sister as "fair" early in the story and Tatterhood as having "long dark hair" near the end of the story. Perhaps as a result of those clues, the girls provided more specific descriptions of the characters in Tatterhood. Early in the story, Julia speculated that the sister had "short blond hair," while Tatterhood probably had long hair. At the end of Tatterhood, Melissa speculated that Tatterhood's face was "tan" and "silky."

Chapter V

Discussion

This study was designed to record and analyze the responses of two 11-year-old African-American girls to two types of folktales. This study was limited in its scope. I purposely interviewed only two girls to allow for a thorough analysis of the results of interviews that took place over the course of several weeks. My hope was that through this study areas would emerge for further research of a broader scope. My intention was never to generalize the results of this study to all 11-year-old African-American girls.

I considered the girls' responses to the protagonists and other characters in the stories in light of the theories that one-sided portrayals of females in canonized fairy tales limit the roles girls see for themselves. Scholars (i.e. Doll, 2000, Oates, 1997, Gilbert and Gubar, 1979, and Lieberman, 1972) have stated that the splitting of fairy tale characters into good, beautiful, passive girls, versus bad, ugly, strong girls could lead girls to be jealous of each other and to "aspire to become meek and inactive" (Robbins, 1998, p. 104) like the "good" girls of fairy tales.

Melissa did not seem limited by the good girl/bad girl characterization in "The Fairy." While Melissa did name the protagonist as the character she would most like to be like, she also saw qualities in herself and her friends that were like both the protagonist and the "bad" sister. Thus, Melissa did not limit herself to being either the "good" girl or the "bad" girl, but saw part of herself in each. Furthermore, while Melissa admired the protagonist of "The Fairy" for being "nice" and "polite," she indicated her desire for the protagonist to take a more active, helping role when she described the change she wished to make to the ending.

Julia's responses to "The Fairy" suggested that she did not "aspire to become meek" (Robbins, 1998) like the protagonist. Julia said she did not want to be like any character in that

tale, and the prince – not the protagonist – was her favorite character. Julia saw the prince as "kind and nice" and as a hero because of his helping role.

However, Julia's responses to "Tatterhood" suggest that she may have mixed feelings about being active herself. While she identified the active heroine of Tatterhood as the character she would most like to be like, she was quick to add, "but not to get anybody's head back," distancing herself from the very action that made Tatterhood an active, helping heroine.

Melissa's and Julia's responses about the characters reflected findings of a previous study (Trousdale, 2001). In that study, the girl participating, Nikki, was drawn to active characters who used their strength to help others. In contrast, she was critical of a passive protagonist. Similarly, Melissa expressed her desire to see the passive protagonist of "The Fairy" in a more active, helping role.

Julia also focused on active helping in her responses to the characters. She was drawn to the active character of the prince in "The Fairy," who was her favorite character in that tale and who she thought exhibited heroism by helping the protagonist. In her responses to "Tatterhood," Julia identified Tatterhood as the only heroic character, based on Tatterhood's strength and her ability to help by defeating the trolls and restoring her sister's head. Although she was drawn to the character of Tatterhood, Julia maintained that she herself would not want "to get anybody's head back."

While Julia saw heroes or heroines as active helpers, she seemed reluctant to visualize herself in that active role. In that respect, her responses reflect those of Cindy, another girl from a previous study (Trousdale, 1995). In that earlier study, which also considered "Tatterhood," Cindy named Tatterhood as her favorite character, but said she would not want to be like Tatterhood because she would rather "be normal" (p. 174). Cindy and Julia may be sorting

through conflicting views about gender roles. They admire active female characters like Tatterhood, but would not want to be one themselves. Melissa's comment that Tatterhood was "a boy" suggests that Tatterhood's actions are seen as masculine.

Another possible explanation for Julia's reluctance to be like Tatterhood may be that she wants to distance herself from any act of violence or gore, which fighting off trolls would entail. Her revision to "The Fairy" – taking out the mother's beating of Jackie – also suggests her discomfort with violence.

Some of Julia's responses also align with theories that fairy tales present marriage as the reward for the passive, beautiful heroine (Robbins, 1998). Julia thought the prince married the protagonist in "The Fairy" because she was "beautiful" and to prevent her from having to return to an abusive home. Thus, in Julia's mind, the protagonist's beauty and inability to help herself led to her marriage to a prince.

Later, in discussing "Tatterhood," Julia again identified physical appearance as a factor leading to marriage. Julia commented on Tatterhood's refusal to change her clothes by saying "she will probably not get a husband." After the end of the story, when Tatterhood transformed her appearance, Julia said, "I think the prince that rode by her would want to marry her now." Those comments suggest that Julia sees "getting" a husband as desirable and that tending to one's physical appearance is necessary to achieve that goal.

Some of the girls' responses also echo previous findings that girls were "active makers of meaning" in fairy tales by reading them in light of their own experiences (Trousdale, 1987, p.179). In that study, the three participants related the stories to their own lives, with one of the girls, Casey, even projecting sibling rivalry into the story of "Snow White," in which there is no sibling relationship.

Likewise, both girls in my study related the tales to their own lives, projecting details from their lives onto the stories. Melissa compared characters to herself and to her friends. She also related the sibling relationship in "The Fairy" to her own relationship with her sister, projecting details onto the fairy tale siblings: "maybe they like the same things."

Julia projected details onto the stories as well. For example, she saw Tatterhood as being an 11-year-old, just like herself. Additionally, she responded to the tales in light of her own experience doing household chores. She focused on cleaning in her comments about both stories, expanding its role in "The Fairy" and adding it to "Tatterhood," which never mentions cleaning. Her views on cleaning seem conflicted. She thought one of the reasons the protagonist in "The Fairy" ran away from home was so she would not have to clean the house. Later, however, she stated that the protagonists in both "The Fairy" and "Tatterhood" "like to clean up." Those conflicting readings may reflect her own conflicting feelings about having to help with household chores.

Furthermore, Julia and Melissa both seemed to view the fairy tales in light of their prior experiences with fairy tales. Julia, who thought girls in fairy tales were sometimes "heroes," identified Tatterhood as a heroine, while Melissa did not. Julia was familiar with Pocahontas, which shows a female in an active, heroic role, while Melissa identified only tales with passive female protagonists as the tales with which she was familiar. This suggests the importance of exposing girls to literature that shows characters in a variety of roles, as their ability to see female characters in active roles may depend in part on their prior experience with such characters.

The responses of the two girls in this study support the assertion of some scholars (e.g. Jones, 1995, and Hartmann, 1969) that children identify with fairy tale heroes – but with

qualifications. Julia asserted that neither story related to her life or had any characters that reminded her of herself or anyone else she knew. It was clear to me that the girls did not identify with the characters as presented in the tales altogether; their own modifications were necessary to that process. Julia accomplished that by projecting details from her own life into the stories. Like Julia, Melissa thought nothing in “Tatterhood” related to her own life, but she put herself in the shoes of the heroine by pointing out how she would have acted differently. Melissa did think “The Fairy” related to her life and that there were characters who reminded her of herself. However, rather than identifying solely with the heroine, Melissa saw characteristics of herself in both the heroine and the “bad” sister, describing herself both as “nice” and “bossy.”

Moreover, the girls’ modifications to the tales question the idea of the universality of fairy tale characters suggested by Luthi. If the heroines are in fact universal, then one wonders why the girls would feel the need to adapt the stories to make the characters more like themselves.

I suggest further research into the question of identification with fairy tale characters to see if the responses of the two girls in this study reflect a larger population. Previous research (Trousdale, 1987) suggested the same tendency to make qualified identifications with fairy tale characters by three seven- and eight-year-old girls. Given that the trend has emerged in two narrow studies with girls of different ages and ethnicities, I think the issue merits broader research.

Furthermore, I think the issue of girls’ responses to physical representations of fairy tale heroines merits additional study. Both girls in this study were at first hesitant to describe how they pictured specific physical characteristics of the characters and only added some details when asked about the characters in “Tatterhood,” a story that provided a couple of specific clues

to physical appearance. Even in her coloring book version of “The Fairy,” Melissa avoided specifying physical details such as hair color or skin tone for the heroine. I wondered if the girls avoided giving the heroines a physical description that matched their own appearance because they had never seen an example of a fairy tale heroine who looked like themselves. Thomasine Mencer, an African-American professor in the College of Education at Louisiana State University, suggested two possible reasons for the girls’ reluctance to discuss physical traits (personal communication, February 7, 2002). First, she thought the widespread exposure of children to television shows and videos discouraged them from using their imaginations, because “everything is painted for them.” Second, she wondered whether the girls might have been afraid of offering the “wrong” answer about characters’ features to a researcher they did not know very well. Mencer said she could not think of a cultural factor that would explain the girls’ reluctance to describe physical characteristics. Further research would be needed to see whether the responses of the two girls in this study are typical of African-American girls and of girls from other ethnic groups, both those who are underrepresented and those who are typically depicted in the tales.

References

Bettelheim, B. (1975). The uses of enchantment: The meaning and importance of fairy tales. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Bishop, R.S. (1997). Selecting literature for a multicultural curriculum. Using multiethnic literature in the K-8 classroom. Ed. V.J. Harris. Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon Publishers, Inc.

Bobo, J. (1995). Black women as cultural readers. New York: Columbia University Press.

Cashdan, S. (1999). The witch must die: How fairy tales shape our lives. New York: Basic Books.

Degh, L. (1979). Grimm's household tales and its place in the household: The social relevance of a controversial classic. Western Folklore, 38 (2), 83-103.

Doll, M.A. (2000). Like letters in running water: A mythopoetics of curriculum. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Dundes, A. (1980). Interpreting folklore. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Fraenkel, J.R., and Wallen, N.E. (2000). How to design and evaluate research in education. Boston: McGraw Hill.

Gilbert, S.M., and Gubar, S. (1979). The madwoman in the attic: The woman writer and the nineteenth-century literary imagination. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Gordon, S. (1993). The powers of the handless maiden. Feminist Messages. Ed. J.N. Radner. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.

Hartmann, W. (1969). Identification and projection in folk fairy-tales and in fantastic stories for children. Bookbird, 7 (2), 8-17.

Hearne, B. (1997). Disney revisited, or Jiminy Cricket, it's musty down here: Walt Disney's influence on storytelling and fairy tales. The Horn Book Magazine, 73 (2), 137-146. [Accessed electronically.]

Hourihan, Margery. (1997). Deconstructing the hero: Literary theory and children's literature. London: Routledge.

Jones, S.S. (1995). The fairy tale: The magic mirror of imagination. New York: Twayne Publishers.

Kolbenschlag, M. (1988/1979). Kiss Sleeping Beauty good-bye: Breaking the spell of

feminine myths and models. San Francisco: Harper and Row.

Lang, A. (Ed.) (1889). Blue fairy book. London.

Larrick, N. (1965). The all-white world of children's books. Saturday Review, Sept. 11, 1965, 63-65, 84-85.

Lieberman, M.K. (1972). "Some day my prince will come": Female acculturation through the fairy tale. College English, 34, 383-395.

Luthi, M. (1984/1975). The fairytale as art form and portrait of man. Trans. J. Erickson. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Metzger, M.M., and Mommsen, K. (1981). Fairy tales as ways of knowing: Essays on marchen in psychology, society and literature. Las Vegas, NV: Peter Lang.

Minard, R. (Ed.). (1975). Womenfolk and fairy tales. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company.

Morrison, T. (1992). Playing in the dark: Whiteness and the literary imagination. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Nicolaisen, W.F.H. (1993). Why tell stories about innocent, persecuted heroines? Western Folklore, 52, 61-71.

Oates, J.C. (1997). "In olden times, when wishing was having . . .": Classic and contemporary fairy tales. The Kenyon Review, 19, 98-110. [Accessed electronically.]

Opie, I., and Opie, P. (Eds.). (1974) The classic fairy tales. New York: Oxford University Press.

Phelps, E.J. (Ed.). (1978). Tatterhood and other tales. Old Westbury, NY: The Feminist Press.

Phelps, E.J. (Ed.). (1981). The maid of the north: Feminist folk tales from around the world. New York: Henry Holt.

Robbins, A. (1998). The fairy-tale facade: Cinderella's anti-grotesque dream. Journal of Popular Culture, 34 (3), 101-115.

Schenda, R. (1986). Telling tales – spreading tales: Change in the communicative forms of a popular genre. Fairy tales and society: Illusion, allusion and paradigm. Ed. and trans. R.B. Bottigheimer. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Seifert, L.C. (1996). Fairy tales, sexuality, and gender in France, 1690-1715. Cambridge:

University Press.

Stone, K. (1975). Things Walt Disney never told us. Journal of American Folklore, 88, 42-49.

Stone, K. (1981). Marchen to fairy tale: An unmagical transformation. Western Folklore, 40 (3), 232-244.

Stone, K. (1985). The misuses of enchantment: Controversies on the significance of fairy tales. Women's folklore, women's culture. Ed. R.A. Jordan and S.J. Kalcik. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Tatar, M. (1992). Off with their heads! Fairy tales and the culture of childhood. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Trousdale, A.M. (1987). The telling of the tale: Children's responses to fairy tales presented orally and through the medium of film. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. The University of Georgia.

Trousdale, A.M. (1995). I'd rather be normal: A young girl's responses to "feminist" fairy tales. The New Advocate, 8 (3), 167-181.

Trousdale, A.M., & Tyler, S.M. (2001). "Cinderella was a wuss": A young girl's responses to feminist and patriarchal folktales. Manuscript submitted for publication. Louisiana State University.

Warner, M. (1994). From the beast to the blonde: On fairy tales and their tellers. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Zipes, J. (1979). Breaking the magic spell: Radical theories of folk and fairy tales. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Zipes, J. (1983). Fairy tales and the art of subversion: The classical genre for children and the process of civilization. New York: Wildman Press.

Zipes, J. (1994). Fairy tale as myth/Myth as fairy tale. Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky.

Appendix A

Interview Guides

Session One

Parent Interview

1) Introduction, description of study and signing of consent form.

2) What is the make-up of the family? How many siblings does ___________ have? What are their ages? How do they relate to each other?

3) What are your hopes for _________________? What are your hopes for her siblings?

Student Introduction

Description of study: I'm doing a study of what girls think about two different stories. First I'll ask you some general questions about fairy tales, then I'll be reading you two stories and asking you what you think about them. There are no right or wrong answers, I just want to know what your opinion is.

Description and signing of assent form.

Pre-Reading Interview Guide

1) Could you tell me what fairy tales you are familiar with?

2) What kinds of things happen in fairy tales?

3) What are the girls in fairy tales like? The boys or men? The women?

Session Two

"The Fairy"

I'd like to read you a story from this book and see what you think about it. If you have any questions or if anything isn't clear to you, please ask me at any time. We'll take a couple of breaks during the story to see what you think so far, but you don't have to wait until we get to a

break to ask a question. There are no right or wrong answers to my questions. I just want to know your opinion.

First Break (before first full paragraph on p. 130, after Jackie gets reward from fairy)

1) What do you think so far?
2) Tell me about the daughters. What are they like? What do you think they look like?
3) Tell me about the mother. What is she like?
4) Why do you think the fairy gave the girl a gift?
5) What do you think might happen next?

Second Break (after first full paragraph on p. 131, after Marcie gets punishment from fairy)

1) What do you think about what has happened?
2) Has anything surprised you so far?
3) Why do you think the fairy gave the sister toads?
4) Why do you think the other sister ran to hide in the woods?
5) What do you think might happen next?

Post-Reading Interview Guide

1) Why do you think the king stopped to talk to the girl? Why do you think he married her?
2) Would you call this story a fairy tale? Why?
3) Did it sound like any other fairy tales you've heard?
4) Is there a character in this story who was your favorite? Who?
5) What made her/him your favorite?
6) Is there anyone in this story you'd like to be like? In what ways?
7) Do you think there is a heroine in this story? What makes her a heroine? Do you think there is a hero in this story?

8) What kind of relationship do you think the two sisters have?

9) Is there anything in this story that relates to your own life? That reminds you of yourself? Of anyone you know?

10) Do you think there is a lesson to be learned in this story? What would you say it was?

11) If you could write this story, is there anything you would change?

Session Three

"The Fairy"

Do you remember the story we read last time, "The Fairy"? Do you think you could retell it?

"Tatterhood"

The next story is "Tatterhood." Again, if you have any questions as we go along, feel free to ask.

First Break (before first full paragraph on p. 3, after twins are born and description of Tatterhood)

1) What do you think so far?

2) Tell me about "Tatterhood." What is she like? What do you think she looks like?

3) What is her sister like? What do you think she looks like?

4) What is the queen like?

5) What do you think might happen next?

Second Break (after 8th paragraph on p. 5, after Tatterhood refuses to change clothes for palace visit)

1) What do you think of what has happened so far?

2) Has anything surprised you?

3) What kind of relationship do you think Tatterhood has with her sister?

4) Why do you think the sister wouldn't marry the prince?

5) Why do you think Tatterhood wouldn't change her clothes for the feast?

Post-Reading Interview Guide

1) Tell me about the end of the story.
2) Did anything surprise you?
3) Would you call this story a fairy tale? Why?
4) Does this story remind you of any other fairy tales you have read?
5) Do you have a favorite character from this story? Who?
6) What made her/him your favorite?
7) Is there anyone in this story you'd like to be like? In what ways?
8) Do you think there is a heroine in this story? What makes her a heroine? Do you think there is a hero in this story?
9) Do you think there is a lesson to be learned from this story? What would you say it is?
10) Is there anything in this story that relates to your own life? That reminds you of yourself? Of anyone you know?
11) If you could write this story, is there anything you would change?

Session Four

"Tatterhood"

Do you remember the story we read last week, "Tatterhood"? Do you think you could retell it?

Summary

1) We've read two stories, "The Fairy" and "Tatterhood." Do you remember "The Fairy?" Do you have any questions about it?
2) When you think of the characters in both stories, would you say that one of the characters was your favorite? Which one? What made her/him your favorite?

3) Think about the two sisters in “The Fairy.” What was their relationship like? What was the relationship of the sisters in “Tatterhood” like? Were the relationships between the sisters in the two stories alike? Not alike?
4) Think about the girl with diamonds in her mouth in “The Fairy.” How does she compare to “Tatterhood?” Were they alike? Not alike? Do you think they would be friends?
5) When you think about all the characters in both stories, which one would you most like to be like? In what ways?
6) If you could read one of these stories to a friend/sister, which one would you choose? Why?

Appendix B

Parent Consent Form

To: The parents of ___________________
From: Corrie Kiesel
Date: ______________

Dear Parents:

I am a graduate student working on my master's degree in curriculum and instruction at Louisiana State University. I am interested in folktales for children and would like to do a study of fifth-grade African-American girls' responses to hearing folktales read aloud. The title of the study is "Responses of African-American Girls to Two Types of Folktales." In the study, I would meet individually with girls in four sessions to read them two folktales. I would ask them some questions during each of the sessions and tape record their responses. Each session will last approximately 45 minutes.

I hope to conduct my research during the summer at times and in locations that are convenient for your child. At this time, I would like to obtain your permission to have your child participate in this study. The identity of your child will remain confidential. Your child's participation is entirely voluntary, and you may withdraw consent and terminate participation at any time without consequence. My hope is that your child will enjoy listening to the stories and that my study will add to the body of research on folktales for children. Please indicate below whether or not you give permission for your child to participate in my study. If you have any questions or concerns, you may contact me at 231-2486. You may also contact my thesis adviser, Dr. Ann Trousdale, at 388-2330.

Thank you for your cooperation and support.

My child, _____________________________, **can** participate in the study. I have been fully informed of the above-described procedure, its possible benefits and risks, and I give my permission for the participation of my child in the study.

My child, _____________________________, **cannot** participate in the study.

Parent or guardian's signature: _______________________________ Date: __________

Appendix C

Student Consent Form

I, ___________________________________, agree to participate in Corrie Kiesel's research project on folktales. I understand that I will be listening to two folktales and answering questions during four sessions.

I also understand that the sessions will be tape recorded, and that these tapes will be reviewed for data analysis only. My identity will be protected through the use of a pseudonym.

I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary and that I may choose to withdraw from the study at any time.

Vita

Corrie Michele Kiesel, a native of Erie, Pennsylvania, earned her Bachelor of Arts degree in journalism at the University of Richmond in 1996. She completed her Master of Arts degree in education at Louisiana State University in May 2002.

She began her professional career as a copy editor for <u>The Orlando Sentinel</u> in Orlando, Florida, in 1996, before moving to Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and working as a copy editor for <u>The Advocate</u> in 1997. Currently she is employed at Episcopal High School of Baton Rouge as the director of publications and public relations and as a journalism class teacher. She is a member of the Public Relations Association of Louisiana.