

Fairy Tales and the Narrative Self

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Introduction

“Once upon a time.” Four famous words that have begun the stories that have shaped generations of people’s values, beliefs and morals. Fairy tales are a special sort of story that have a long history of being used to teach children the ideals of society through overly simplified characters, words and symbols. Yet, this does not mean they are not complex. They are designed to teach children the difference between right and wrong, how to act in a desirable way and what they should value, all of which is in accordance with the society they live in. Fairy tales have served this purpose for many years yet their influence in the development of one’s moral judgments is often underestimated and written off as rudimentary. However, I argue that fairy tales are fundamental to the foundation and development of humans as moral agents.

In Cressida Heyes’ (2007) paper about Cosmetics and the Televisual Makeover, she highlights that cosmetic television shows, such as “The Swan,” use the fairytale act structure to make their show more appealing to audiences as the structure is familiar to them because they grew up reading stories that followed it. Essentially, the fairytale act structure has impacted these audiences, who are mostly adults, so much so that they feel inclined to search for stories that

follow it. In this paper, I will expand upon that idea to further argue that fairy tales not only impact one on a surface level, but also shape both one's moral and aesthetic judgments and therefore shape how one constructs one's narrative identities. I will first define what the fairytale act structure is and Cressida Heyes' position on the fairy tales and their impact on the audiences. Then I will discuss how fairy tales shape both one's aesthetic and moral judgments. Finally, I will explore why this impacts the construction of one's narrative identities and how fairy tales shape how one tells stories about themselves.

The "Fairy Tale Act" Structure

Humans do not like to acknowledge the messiness of real life. Instead, humans engage in the perpetual pursuit of finding the "easy way out." A clean, straightforward guide to life is the desired ideal. Take, for example, the American Dream. It is marketed as a plan that leads to a life of success and fulfillment. Get educated, go to college, get a good job, get married, buy a house and start a family. Step by step, the ideal life is laid out. However, this is a highly utopian idea. Yet, society still clings to it. I'd argue that this is because, while growing up, one internalizes certain things that they are taught about the world. These beliefs stick with them throughout most of their lives unless they receive a jarring realization that they are false. Otherwise, that person will continue to think that same way.

Adolescent influences are key to one's development as not only a thoughtful human being, but a moral agent. Decisions between right and wrong arise from what one is taught in their childhood. Now, one's sense of what is good and what is bad is not set in stone and has the

potential to change; however, throughout most of one's life, their moral values change very little. I propose that this is because of how vital moral values are to a person's way of living. If one's morals were constantly changing, their definitions of what is right and what is wrong essentially being extremely fluid, their internal thoughts and society would descend into chaos. One would not be able to survive in this world because they would be so conflicted on what constituted as morally correct. There would be no change, no progress, no innovation; only chaos.

Therefore, adolescent influences continuously affect one internally, though they may not appear to externally. They become something that exists underneath one's surface and come out in one's mannerisms, understanding of events and interests. In Cressida Heyes' (2007) paper on cosmetic surgery and the impact of televisual programs that promote cosmetic surgery, she touches upon this idea and argues that it is due to the role of media the audience was exposed to when they were younger that makes these shows so appealing. Specifically, she argues that the role of the fairy tale act structure and its influence on the audience which creates this gravitational pull around the show (Heyes, 2007). Heyes (2007) argues in her paper on Cosmetic Surgery and the Televisual Makeover that extreme makeover shows tell the audience a "sanitized fairy tale of identity becoming" in which the desire for an external change is portrayed as an almost entirely intrinsic desire (i.e. wanting to look like who they see on the inside) to enhance one's individual authenticity. One show Heyes (2007) singles out is *Extreme Makeover*; the show, she argues, tries to present the participants' desires for cosmetic surgery as intrinsic using the fairy tale act structure but struggles to do so as the wish to conform to societal beauty standards is blatantly written in each participant's story. Yet, the show still uses fairy tale tropes

in their narrative structure that are culturally familiar and therefore comforting to a Western audience, to further try and present cosmetic surgery as a way to bring out an authentic self (Heyes, 2007). The fairy tale trope is so effective because it erases the messiness within identity transformation and creates a satisfying and simplistic story structure with a flawless resolution which creates a more appealing view of identity transformation (Heyes, 2007).

The fairy tale act structure typically follows this course of events: the beginning where the main character is introduced with their desires and “attractive qualities”, an obstacle appears (usually a power of evil), the character must find a way to overcome this obstacle and defeat the evil, the character uses their highlighted good qualities and/or assistance to defeat the evil and the character becomes adored by all and they live happily ever after.

We see this in classic Western fairy tales such as Cinderella, Snow White, The Little Mermaid, Little Red Riding Hood and more. In Cinderella the readers are introduced to the beautiful Cinderella who lives a sorrowful life with her stepmother and stepsisters. When the Prince’s ball comes along she is forbidden to go by her stepmother: the power of evil in this scenario. She overcomes this obstacle by using the Fairy Godmother’s help. The magical assistance she receives enhances her beauty and allows her to meet the prince who falls in love with her. After the prince finds her once again, she lives happily ever after in the castle and away from her abusive family. As Heyes (2007) points out, these shows follow this act structure, giving the participants their own “Cinderella experience.” The undesirable traits of the participants are first pointed out by their families and friends and the participants themselves

(Heyes, 2007). The participants criticize their facial structures along with parts of their bodies they do not like, and then the show gets a plastic surgeon who conducts cosmetic surgery on them and changes their appearance to be one that fits society's beauty standards (Heyes, 2007). The show sells it as bringing out the participants' inner beauty, bringing out their "potential" and makes this journey of transformation seem to be something that individualizes the person and makes them more true to themselves (Heyes, 2007). However, making them "more true to themselves" is really just subjecting them to conform to society's ideals.

It's an interesting concept—making one more attractive in terms of society makes them more true to themselves. However, I do not think that it is a completely wild idea, as paradoxical as it seems. Humans who live in a society are taught the ideals of the society from a very young age. They are taught what is right and wrong, what their roles in society are and thus what their duties are. The idea that by conforming to beauty standards makes one more authentic to who they are on the inside has some truth to it. While I believe that everyone is unique and different and of course, by trying to look like the ideal person, as dictated by society, one becomes more similar to the masses and lose more of their individuality, I also believe that humans are taught to want to meet these beauty standards and thus by achieving this look, they feel like they have opened a new part of themselves because of the desire to conform. This is because of what they are taught when they are young.

Fairy Tales and Normalization

Cressida Heyes (2007) furthers her analysis of this idea and uses the example of cosmetics in Western society to discuss the theory of normalization which both enables individualization and enforces conformity. Heyes (2007) argues that beauty norms are a form of disciplinary power as they require individuality for them to be enforced. She argues that *Extreme Makeover* is an obvious example of normalization used to homogenize because every patient on the show is physically changed to further adhere to societal beauty norms while narrating this process in such a way that it appears to be enhancing their individuality (Heyes, 2007).

I believe that the tactic of normalization is also in a twisted way, something that adds to the allure of these shows. I believe that fairy tales are not simply just effective due to their status as an “adolescent influence” but also due to the fact that they enforce the narrative structure of normalization. In her paper, Heyes (2007) discusses Foucault’s theory of normalization which as Foucault defines it, a process that encourages people to conform to the social norms around them. She says “Foucault’s parsing of the term suggests that even as normalization homogenizes, it also, paradoxically, individualizes. It is [dynamic]” (Heyes, 2007). Which sounds strange, yet considering the idea that conformity can also bring about individuality that was discussed above, not implausible.

I’d like to argue that fairy tales are an actor of normalization and the usage of the fairy tale act structure not only adds to the appeal of these shows because they bring comforting familiarity to the audience, but also because fairy tales act as a disciplinary power. Disciplinary powers are things that create a system that controls individuals, such as a prison which dictates

when a prisoner's routine, what they wear, how they act and what they eat. Essentially, they regulate the individual. In her paper, Heyes (2007) says that the surgeon "renders his disciplinary gaze visible" by marking up the patient's body. In that scenario, the surgeon uses his disciplinary power to "regulate" the individual by making their body conform to the beauty standards of society (Heyes, 2007).

I'd also propose that the fairy tales children read act as a disciplinary power that shapes how they act and believe. Fairy tales are used just like a disciplinary power in Western society. Foucault says that disciplinary methods "lowered the threshold of describable individuality" (Heyes, 2007). Through teaching children moral values and meaning-making skills by using the fairy tales available to one, children are taught how to make sense out of situations and do not come to an individual realization. This is not inherently a bad thing; fairy tales often reflect the moral and aesthetic ideals of a society or community making them perfect tools to teach children how to act and appear respectably in the eyes of society. It inherently teaches children how to conform. Conformity, in this essay, should not be seen as a negative term. Rather a neutral term that can either positively and/or negatively affect an individual. For example, fairy tales tend to revolve around the idea of goodness and being kind. I'd argue that children who are taught to be kind to everyone through the usage of fairy tales are more likely to go out and help someone that they find is struggling. This is a form of conformity as they are acting as agents of the societal moral values that have been instilled in them. This is not necessarily an individual trait (even though some will take this idea more seriously than others, it depends on upbringing). This hold that fairy tales have over someone is invisible, however disciplinary powers are not something

that is visible. As Heyes (2007) puts it, “disciplinary power is itself invisible yet renders its subjects hyper-visible in order to tighten its grip” (Heyes, 2007). Fairy tales instill within a person moral and aesthetic judgments that are not visible to the eye unless one expresses them through action. This may be seen through helping someone up after they fell down (moral value of kindness) or through someone choosing to play a certain song on their playlist over every other song (aesthetic taste).

Fairy tales as an agent of normalization is alluring to people because humans are drawn to sameness. Whether that attraction is constructed by society or is intrinsic, nonetheless, people wish to be accepted, which conformity provides (even if it is simply in the short term). Humans love to try and make sense of things. They try to put every feeling into words and create labels for practically everything. Fairy tales provide humans this sense of sameness because they are able to teach many people within a society a very similar lesson about morals and aesthetics, essentially cohering the society on the basis of moral and aesthetic values, two very important, integral parts of the human identity. Additionally, the simplistic nature of the fairy tale act structure also instills within humans a desire for simplicity. Overall, fairy tales as a disciplinary power make humans desire conformity and simplicity, even though they may not be actively aware of it.

The structure of fairy tales and how they are used to teach children in society instill within humans a sense of what should be important to as a person living in society. The usage of fairy tales as a disciplinary power only perpetuates this sense and fundamentally shapes a human

being. Thus, the influence of fairy tales on adolescents provides the foundations for narrative identity construction as they teach children what should matter to them. They provide examples to children of how stories should be constructed, how they should be conveyed and they can be used as lessons for later life; all of which are the basis of constructing a narrative identity.

FAIRY TALES AND AESTHETIC JUDGEMENT

Aesthetics are an underlooked aspect of the self. I believe that they have immense influence over one's sense of self and their understanding of who they are. Consequently, aesthetics are very important to narrative identity construction as that concept is all about understanding how events have changed one as a person. To know how one has changed, I'd argue that one would need some sort of understanding of who one was as a person before the change took place.

"The Aesthetic Self" by Fingerhut et al. (2021). explores to what extent aesthetics is important for one's perceived identity based on multiple empirical studies. According to the authors, there is a relationship between aesthetics and personal identity so much so that when one's interests in music and art change, it can be considered fundamentally transformative (Fingerhut et al., 2021). There are many dimensions of the self, argue the authors, and one of these dimensions seemingly relates to the arts (Fingerhut et al., 2021). One's aesthetics can help create social groups which one's identity becomes associated with. Through their experiments, Fingerhut et al. (2021) found that aesthetics and identity have a strong link and that a change in aesthetic values has a very large impact on the self. They found that this relationship is not just

limited to one artform either (Fingerhut et al., 2021). Whether fine arts or music or arts in general, Fingerhut et al. (2021) found that a greater change in preferences leads to a greater change in the self. Their research also shows that social relationships with aesthetics may play a role in this connection but it is clearly not the only reason why aesthetics have such an impact on the self (Fingerhut et al., 2021). This relationship is akin to the relationship between morals and identity and Fingerhut et al. (2021) pose the question of whether or not these two relationships are similar because they are emotionally charged. Overall, their findings resulted in the suggestion that one's aesthetics go beyond things that they merely like, rather a way to assert their sense of self (Fingerhut et al., 2021).

Themes of Attractiveness in Fairy Tales

In most Western fairy tales, there is a recurring theme of beauty¹. In Cinderella's story, the readers see Cinderella's life change for the better after she is given the beautiful ball gown and goes to the ball. In Snow White, the princess is saved from the evil around her because a prince fell in love with her beauty and kissed her, awakening her from the eternal sleep she was cursed to. In the Ugly Duckling, the Ugly Duckling is only accepted when he grows to become a beautiful swan. When someone or something is beautiful in the eyes of society, it is as if only good follows them. Fairy tales end with "happily ever after" and as children, the readers are satisfied with that. The audience isn't left to wonder whether or not Cinderella is happy with her new life at the place or if the Ugly Duckling ever finds people who accept him for not just his

¹ This paper will only discuss Western fairy tales and Western society.

looks. Children aren't taught to think beyond the ending of the story. Instead, they are taught that when they are beautiful, good things will come. Shows like *Extreme Makeover* and *The Swan* use this message to promote their shows. They make capital on the internalized idea that being beautiful will make one loved, protected and powerful.

Now, these explanations of these fairy tales are quite simplified and there are more moral messages that can come from these stories which I will discuss later on. However, I oversimplified these explanations and emphasized the role that beauty plays in each of these stories to bring to light the importance of how these fairy tales are introduced to children and how these stories affect aesthetic judgement. In every single one of these fables, the importance of beauty in the story impacts the entire plot. When this is taught to kids, they internalize the idea of what beauty looks like according to these stories and society. While this isn't the main message of many of these stories, this is a message that many children take away from these stories because of how Western society treats these stories. One message from these stories that Western society consistently references is the idea that being conventionally attractive will change one's life, save them from their troubles and allow one to become accepted in the world. This idea is every. This is the same idea that shows like *Extreme Makeover* and the *Swan* use to cater to their audience and the same idea that keeps the majority of the cosmetics industry alive. Modern society still references stories like *Cinderella* and *Snow White* and they are most prevalent in the beauty industry. Therefore, when the fairy tales that people read when they are young are coupled with how Western society keeps these stories relevant in daily life, this leads to children internalizing aesthetic values that can be traced back to the impact that these fairy

tales had on them. It is not simply the fairy tales that reflect this, but rather the way society teaches children what to take away from these fairy tales that allow fairy tales to be used as an agent to reinforce societal beauty standards and aesthetic values.

The Entanglement of Aesthetics and Morals

The ideals of beauty that people are taught from these stories become their aesthetic values. While one's aesthetic values are subject to change over time, I believe that there are some values that one retains for a very long time, similar to one's moral judgments. These long lasting aesthetic values, I argue, may shape one's moral self. The previous fairy tales I talked about are not only about physical beauty, rather they emphasize inner beauty. Cinderella is so beautiful not only because of her looks but her kindness and generosity. Despite all the adversity she has faced, she remains loving and nurturing to the animals and people around her. When Snow White is chased into the woods, she lives with the Seven Dwarfs and is kind to them and the nature around her even though they are different from her. In Sleeping Beauty, Beauty and the Beast, Rapunzel, the same trope is found repeatedly: goodness tied to beauty and evil tied to ugliness. This is how one's moral and aesthetic values are tied together. One begins to associate a character's goodness with their beauty. This can lead to implicit bias when people are first introduced. The term "pretty-privilege" comes to mind when I discuss this issue and I'd like to pose the question that since fairy tales create this association between goodness and beauty, do people who learned and grew up reading these fairy tales, allow their aesthetic judgments to influence their moral ones when they meet new people?

Pretty privilege is described as people who better fit society's definition of attractive are able to get away with much more than someone who does not fit society's ideals as much. As a collective, society seems to give "pretty people" the benefit of the doubt much more than it does with those who are not conventionally attractive. Is it because of the impact of the fairy tales most people read when they are young that associate inherent goodness with beauty? Do they make the assumption that one's wrong actions are either more excusable or that one was falsely accused of wrongdoing because they are more attractive? I'd argue that they do.

I feel this example is perfectly illustrated through the media and especially T.V. shows. In many T.V. shows, the villain tends to not be a very attractive person. However, when they are, there are many more people coming to the defense of the villain simply because they are attractive. Thus, one has to imagine that if this villain wasn't so conventionally attractive, would they still have such a defense? Or is it because of one's internalized linking of goodness and beauty and evil and ugliness that they are quick to defend an attractive person more so than a person they do not find as attractive? I believe because of the linking between goodness and beauty that fairy tales indirectly instill in a person, they are more forgiving of conventionally attractive people rather than people society does not consider attractive. Due to this linking that develops when one is young, their aesthetic values shape their moral values in this instance and thus gives power to "pretty privilege."

Now, of course, people find different people attractive. In the paper "Aesthetic Experience," author Antonia Peacocke (2024) touches upon the idea of the universal aesthetic

experience which argues that anything truly beautiful will evoke the same feeling within everyone and this idea is focused solely on the object's merit. However, Peacocke (2024) points out that this idea doesn't take into account the subjectivity of the aesthetic experience as many people find different things beautiful. Yet, I would also like to propose that this idea is firmly focused on the individual aesthetic experience that is unaffected by environmental factors. While there are a diverse set of aesthetic interests, I'd argue that since children are surrounded by and taught by a multitude of societal interests, many individuals within a society will inevitably share some overlapping aesthetic values.

In the paper, "Experimental philosophy," by Mikaloyntè et al. (2024), the authors found that by using aesthetic adjectives humans not only assign attributes to something but also convey their different views of beauty. These views of beauty, I'd argue, are heavily shaped by fairy tales. They also found that morals and aesthetics are related as both morals influence aesthetic judgement and aesthetics influence moral judgement (Mikaloyntè et al., 2024). This further proves the point that by linking goodness and beauty and ugliness and evil, fairy tales are able to shape both one's moral and aesthetic judgments which in turn affect how they view the world and profoundly impact the development of their narrative identity. The authors also bring up that aesthetics are connected to emotion and help with emotional expressiveness and help one feel more connected to either their emotions or others (Mikaloyntè et al., 2024). They then found that emotions can also influence moral judgments (Mikaloyntè et al., 2024). In one study they found that happy music can increase judgments of goodness and other positive attributes while sad

music can increase judgments of wrongness (Mikaloyntè et al., 2024). This idea can be applied to the influence of fairy tales.

The story creates a connection between a reader and the characters of the story, heightening those emotions with action and plot and thus creating a lasting impact on the reader once the story ends because of the emotional bond the story has created between the reader and the characters of the fairytale. This creates a sense of idolization around the characters of the fairytale which is exemplified in society through the excitement of children when they get the Cinderella costume they've always wanted or the continual referencing of these stories and their tropes in media today. This sense of idolization, which makes people want to be like these characters or share certain traits with them, shapes their moral and aesthetic judgments. Through wanting to become like someone else, humans adopt their habits and mimic their actions to do so. This is what leads to the creation of social groups based on aesthetic and/or moral values. People who like the same type of music often form social groups. People who value the same things band together and oftentimes become more like each other and adopt each other's mannerisms which leads to the adoption of group moral and aesthetic values because humans value emotional connection and belonging. Belonging is one of the needs that is highlighted in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs which just proves how vital it is for a human. Humans form social groups and seek out connections and their want to fit in often trumps their want to retain all forms of individuality. This is likely why the utilization of normalization in shows like *Extreme Makeover* and *The Swan* is enticing to audiences. It allows the audience to recognize something in the show that they value both morally and aesthetically and therefore allow them to easily

connect with the show and its message. This sense of connection and understanding is born from the widely shared and internalized aesthetic and moral values that one learns from fairy tales. The sheer size of the impact that fairy tales have on shaping children's mindsets are why fairy tales are used time and time again as the messengers of societal morals and values.

These ideas that one is taught when they are younger, shape both their desires and intertwine their morals and aesthetic values.

Fairy Tales, Moral Development and Narrative Scaffolding

While this paper has touched on moral development and fairy tales in the section above, I would like to expand that discussion and bring in the idea of narrative scaffolding to further inform my argument.

In the paper "Narrative Scaffolding" by Regina Fabry (2023), Fabry argues that fictional textual narratives can serve as a material resource that can be used as both an affective and cognitive scaffold. Essentially, fictional stories can be used to transform how readers understand social situations and their capacity to empathize. This is important to the argument that the consumption of fairy tales shapes moral values as the idea of narrative scaffolding argues that some mental capacities are dependent on external influences and thus are shaped by influences in one's environment (Fabry, 2023). In the paper, Fabry (2023) touches upon how the idea of narrative scaffolding is best understood in the context of the extended mind thesis which argues that many of one's cognitive abilities extend from their brain to their body and surrounding environment. Fabry (2023) then also splits the term of "mental capacities" into two specific

domains: cognitive (rational abilities, i.e. remembering, reasoning, problem-solving) and affective (emotional abilities). Fabry (2023) proposes the possibility that cognitive capacities may impact affective capacities and vice versa, further adding proof to the earlier point that aesthetic and moral values have a bidirectional relationship.

Fabry (2023) defines a narrative as something that contains a discourse which is “dedicated to at least one unified subject,” and has events that follow some sort of chronological order and are casually connected to each other. A fairy tale fits this definition as a fairy tale engages in discourse that follows at least one focused plotline or character and all the events are connected not only by time but by each other as well. Therefore I would like to submit fairy tales to be considered as a narrative. Fabry (2023) also distinguishes between the idea of story and plot and pulls from sources to define a plot of a narrative as a dictation of the arrangement of events and characters’ actions and how this arrangement emotionally impacts an audience. Fabry (2023) uses this definition to establish the fact that narratives can have an emotional impact on audiences because the plot is able to invoke an emotional connection.

Fairy tales follow this exact pattern and utilize the very apparent emotional aspects of their plots to connect with a wide array of audiences. It is not only the inherent emotional appeal of these stories that lead to their wider impact but also how they are situated in one’s socio-cultural environments. I’d argue that fairy tales have become socially shared narratives which means that their discourse is socially shared and has larger social implications than narratives that are not as prevalent socially. Fabry (2023) argues that engaging with narratives has “the

potential to modify [one's] experiences of the lifeworld" and therefore fairy tales modify how one engages and perceives the world. Fairy tales contain interpretative norms, which are norms that have some wider significance beyond their representational systems (Fabry, 2023). Due to the presence of these interpretive norms, enculturated readers, readers who have their individual cognitive capacities transformed through the "acquisition of reading," are able to "establish narrative scaffolding relations" (Fabry, 2023). Children become enculturated readers as they are introduced to children's stories and fairy tales as their cognitive capacities are transformed as they take in all the new material that they are reading. Fabry (2023) says that fictional textual narratives can be understood as a "lifeworld technology" and a "cultural technology" in which the design of the narrative as a whole "negotiates developments in the lifeworld" which, Fabry (2023) argues, is key to narrative scaffolding. This is what happens to children when they are exposed to fairy tales. They learn from the interactions within the discourse of the fairy tale and learn to apply some of those characteristics into social situations in their own life. I'd also argue that fairy tales affect children's cognitive capacities even as they develop into adulthood as fairy tales have become a part of the Western canon, they are everywhere. Whether it be spin-offs, remakes, references or the utilization of fairy tale act structure, modern media continuously refers back to classic fairy tales such as Cinderella, Snow White and Sleeping Beauty. Living in Western society, one is constantly reminded of the lingering presence of fairy tales. Even if it is not explicitly made known, I'd argue that this omnipresent role that fairy tales play in Western society allows them to become a narrative that affects cognitive capacities on an ontogenetic timescale.

This is why I'd argue that fairy tales heavily shape one's moral development as they move through life. Fabry (2023) brings up the narrative practice hypothesis which argues that "[one's] engagement with narrative makes crucial contributions to [one's] skill" of explaining actions and acting while appealing to reason. This hypothesis argues that the narrative quality of containing "reason-action connections at the story level" provides both the skill for understanding reasons and an understanding of norms present in the story. Since fairy tales are a part of the larger social canon, the reason-actions connections that are present within it inform the reader with not only an understanding of norms present in the story but also norms present in society. Fairy tales are definitely not the only informant of social norms that children are exposed to but they are still influential in the introduction of certain norms.

This introduction is what leads to the shaping of moral values within a child. Due to the fact that narratives can "sometimes provid[e] normative templates to help [one] make sense of another's behavior" (Fabry, 2023), fairy tales expose children to moral values and instill them inside of them. Fairy tales make a clear distinction between good and evil characters. These stories also only present the reasoning behind the "good characters'" actions and the evil characters' reasoning behind their actions are never explained. This teaches children what type of reasoning they should have behind each action and therefore what type of morals they should hold. The idolization surrounding the "good characters" in fairy tales that is enforced by society further enforces this idea. The character actions that one sees within these stories inform children of real life situations and therefore teaches them how to act and I'd argue, what to value. By showing children why certain characters took certain actions, children learn what they should

prioritize in their lives. These priorities eventually develop into lasting moral values. For example, Cinderella remains kind to everyone around her, even when she is facing adversity. The reason offered by the story for this is the fact that she is simply a good person and due to her inherent goodness, she always chooses to be kind. This is what is taught to kids by many influences in society. Thus, this view is internalized by children and soon develops into a moral value that they carry on for most of or the rest of their lives.

Narratives act as an important source that informs readers of the boundaries of what is socially acceptable (Fabry, 2023). Fairy tales often deepen children's social understanding by doing just this and are an important factor in the development of how a child grows as a moral agent. By exposing children to examples of reason-action situations and patterns, fairy tales help aid children build moral judgement by providing children with a foundation of core moral values. Fabry (2023) argues that narratives can "unfold its full transformative potential" through public conversation about this narrative. This is why I believe fairy tales are such a powerful narrative and are able to influence the development of moral values. Fairy tales are simply everywhere in Western society and therefore their influence on the people who live in the Western world never stops. Their emotional influence upon them is lasting as well, reinforcing their impact upon society. Thus, they have become a narrative whose transformative power can be easily utilized by society to instill and reinforce moral values and views that are common within the current society.

Fairy Tales and Narrative Identity

Fairy tales shape one's aesthetic and moral self and thus, they ultimately have the ability to shape how one constructs their narrative identities. The creation of a narrative identity starts in social contexts where one shares a story about themselves (McAdams & McLean, 2013). Narrative identity describes a "person's internalized and evolving life story" (McAdams & McLean, 2013). This identity includes both one's past and imagined future to help one create a narrative about themselves and provide an understanding of who they are and a semblance of their life's purpose.

In McAdams' and McLean's (2013) paper about narrative identity, they explored the concept of narrative identity and its relationship with psychological adaptation and development. They found that the way individuals construct their life stories, especially how they narrate suffering or adversity, plays a huge role in their psychological adaptation and development (McAdams & McLean, 2013). Individuals who told stories in which agency appeared as a huge theme tended to have better mental and physical health (McAdams & McLean, 2013). This shows that narrative identity construction is something that impacts the quality of one's livelihood.

McAdams and McLean (2013) found that when adults make meaning out of negative events they use a two step process. First, they contemplate deeply about the event and then they determine a positive outcome they can take away from that experience (McAdams & McLean, 2013). I'd argue that this is all connected to adolescent experiences as these processes are very

similar to how children learn from fairy tales. McAdams and McLean (2013) found through their research that middle-age adults who exhibit a strong commitment to progress and improving society “tend to construct life stories that showcase many instances of redemption sequences” (McAdams & McLean, 2013). A redemption sequence, as they define it, “marks a transition in a life narrative account from an emotionally negative scene to a positive outcome or attribution about the self” (McAdams & McLean, 2013). By constructing narrative tales of redemption to explain their life experiences, middle-age adults “may sustain the hope or confidence that is needed to weather short-term setbacks” (McAdams & McLean, 2013). This is quite similar to the Western fairy tale structure as typically, the main character of the narrative is faced with a challenge and must overcome it, whether with the help of others or through their own actions. In doing so, at the end, they come out victorious and with a renewed sense of hope and possibility. This is one of the reasons why I’d argue that the fairy tales that one reads growing up shape how they construct their narrative identities and tell stories about themselves.

McAdams and McLean (2013) determined that different cultures have an effect on narrative identity—specifically different cultural contexts shape how different people tell stories and therefore construct their narrative identities. Fairy tales are the one way that many cultures use to teach their values and ideals to children. These are some of the first stories that children are exposed to that introduce them to the norms of the society they live in. Not only do these stories introduce them to societal norms and values, but they also instill them within children and instill specific moral and aesthetic values within them. Thus, these stories shape how people construct their narrative identities. Fairy tales introduce to a child how their society constructs

and tells stories, which plays a huge role in how these children construct their narrative identities. Furthermore, by impressing moral and aesthetic values within children, fairy tales influence what types of things people will emphasize and highlight while telling stories about themselves. They will bring attention to certain desired qualities and construct their narrative identities around these values. These fairy tales also introduce to children examples of what their life purpose could look like, and many children may inherit this vision as what their life purpose should be. This also influences narrative identity construction and once again, influences how people frame their life stories in a narrative context. It also heavily influences how people view and reflect on their lives, showing how impactful a role fairy tales play in one's life.

Additionally, the authors found that developing a narrative identity starts with parent-child conversations that teach the child how to make meaning out of events (McAdams & McLean, 2013). Many of these instances, I'd argue, include parents using fairy tales to teach their children mean-making skills. Many parents and other adults in children's lives utilize the simplicity of fairy tales to help teach moral values, social understanding and indirectly teach them story telling skills. They use fairy tales to provide examples of how to make meaning out of situations that may occur in real life due to the reflective nature of fairy tales. Researchers found that these types of conversations are critical in the creation of a child's narrative skills (McAdams & McLean, 2013). While narrative identity construction tends to happen in late adolescence and early adulthood, the foundation of narrative identity construction uses the base skills formed in early adolescence (McAdams & McLean, 2013). Furthermore, fairy tales do not

just influence one in their early adolescent years. Fairy tales still remain relevant in one's life no matter what stage of life someone is in due to their prominence in society.

In "Consciousness and Personal Identity," Owen Ware and Donald Ainslie (2014) explain the stances of 17th to 18th century philosophers (Locke, Hume, Rousseau and Kant) on the ideas of consciousness and personal identity. In the sections about Rousseau and Hume, they touch upon the idea that both philosophers found that humans depend on others' attitudes about themselves (Ware & Ainslie, 2014). They explain that Hume focused on four categories that tend to define one's identity: vices and virtues, bodily qualities, property and riches and "external advantages and disadvantages" (Ware & Ainslie, 2014). These four categories are features that "tend to trigger the indirect passions and thus tend to define [one] as who [they] are" (Ware & Ainslie, 2014). Hume argued that "[humans] emotional reactions to one another" create their social landscape (Ware & Ainslie, 2014). Humans define themselves based on personal features others react to. Hume believed that people have a tendency to define a person by a particular feature and assume that others will also define that person by that same feature (Ware & Ainslie, 2014). Thus, the awareness of these features being perceived and being considered as defining are what people become self-aware of. One's personal identity is thus dependent on external social perceptions and definitions of themselves.

Rousseau shared a similar idea. He believed that humans were "fundamentally determined" by "socially mediated emotional responses to one another" (Ware & Ainslie, 2014). He believed that it was a social influence that determined one's personal identity (Ware &

Ainslie, 2014). He argued that there was something called amour-propre which leaves humans dependent on each other and when trying to control the terms that define themselves leads them to conform to social norms (Ware & Ainslie, 2014). Amour-propre is a type of self-interest that is distinct from amour de soi (Ware & Ainslie, 2014). Rousseau argued that while amour de soi concerned personal wellbeing, amour propre created a concern with one's social status which is "determined in part through others' reactions to [them]" (Ware & Ainslie, 2014). Rousseau believed that amour-propre usurps a person's amour de soi as they develop into a social person (Ware & Ainslie, 2014). It is because of this that a person lives reliant only on the opinion of others and draws from external judgments the definition of his existence (Ware & Ainslie, 2014). This, he argues, is what compels people to create public personas that fit with societal norms (Ware & Ainslie, 2014).

While I do not believe people solely define themselves based on social reactions to their person, I do believe that a lot of one's identity is shaped by the social landscape they live in. I believe that one is conscious of emotional reactions to their features and it is these reactions that shape their perceptions of themselves and thus their narrative identities. While this paper discusses personal identity (Ware & Ainslie, 2014), I'd argue that since narrative identity uses one's personal understanding of themselves to help construct their ever-evolving life story, what influences personal identity construction has an impact on narrative identity construction.

It is because of the relationship between social influences and personal identity construction that I believe explains why fairy tales are so impactful in narrative identity

construction. Fairy tales are so widely dispersed within society that they set the basis for many children's understanding of social situations. Fairy tales present children with examples of how to react to others' defining features. These stories are also the first stories that children are introduced to in their society which means that they are the first representations of how their society constructs stories. This provides children with a foundation of how to construct stories and thus, how to construct their own life's narrative. The idolization of fairy tales and continuous referencing of them in social life also reinforces the aesthetic and moral values that children learned from these stories and therefore shape how they perceive others which in turn shapes how they define others and how others define them. This leads to the creation of social norms and the creation of similar narrative identity structures within a society. McAdams and McLean (2013) found that people from different societies constructed their narratives differently when compared to each other. They found that people living in the same society tend to share a similar narrative structure when it comes to constructing their narrative identity.

McAdams and McLean (2013) also emphasized that narrative construction which involves emotionally charged events plays a huge role in both an individual's mental and physical health. This is where the importance of fairy tales shaping moral and aesthetic values comes into the picture.

In his paper about social identities, Nathan Placencia (2010) writes that one identifies with aspects of their identity that they have intense emotions about. In this paper, Placencia (2010) argues that one's opinion of their social identity does not matter when defining it. Rather,

it is what one cares about and what one feels emotionally connected to that defines their social identity. Placencia (2010) walks the reader through four different scenarios regarding social identity: self-avowal (in which someone identifies with some social status as a means to achieve something, e.g. land a job), self-hatred (when someone disapproves with a social status they identify with, e.g. their race), self-discovery (when some discovers they identify with some social status) and self-knowledge (when someone is unaware that they identify with a certain social status). He distinguishes two types of psychological social identity: an actual identity, an identity one actually identifies with, and a self-represented identity, social statuses one explicitly accepts (Placencia, 2010). Placencia (2010) does this because he argues that humans are often confused about what they actually identify with. He argues that one's social identity is very connected to their emotions and what they care about connects their psychological states (Placencia, 2010). Humans tend to deeply care about their moral judgments as they guide them with the decision making process every single day. Their morals dictate what they believe worthy of caring about, what they believe is right and wrong and helps them identify groups that they belong to. This leads to the shaping of not only one's aesthetic beliefs and actions, but their identity as a whole. When one's moral values are threatened or actively engaged with, this can create a strong emotional impact on a person. Aesthetic values play a similar role in defining one's identity as they have the power to evoke powerful emotional responses within them and this can shape their moral judgments.

This is very important to the construction of one's narrative identity as the emotional reactions that are produced by an event engaging with one's moral or aesthetic values can make

an event emotionally charged and therefore more likely to be included in the construction of one's narrative. Fairy tales shape these values and therefore play a role in some of the emotionally charged events, even though one may not be consciously aware of this. Fairy tales shape some of one's values and priorities which means that fairy tales influence one's emotional reactions to events. It also means that they have the ability to influence one's definitions of who they are and their understanding of their life's purpose and aspirations. These types of emotional events may hold more weight in one's analysis of themselves and their life's narrative, therefore allowing the conclusion to be drawn that fairy tales influence what one emotionally reacts to through the shaping of their moral and aesthetic judgments allows for fairy tales to influence narrative identity construction.

Limitations of my Argument and Concluding Remarks

While fairy tales are influential in narrative identity construction, they are definitely not the sole defining factor in what shapes narrative identity construction. As time progresses, it will be interesting to see how the role of fairy tales in society may change. Currently, there has been pushback on fairy tales and their messages that have been directed at children. Specifically, there has been a lot of criticism of how certain fairy tales such as Cinderella have the potential to teach young girls to be docile and subservient. Some proponents of this argument have been encouraging and calling for new sets of diverse fairy tales to replace classic Western fairy tales. One may raise a criticism of my argument because of this. However, I'd argue that this goes to show how people still will use fairy tales to teach their children moral and aesthetic values.

Likewise, while classic fairy tales may lose their mammoth-like presence in Western society in the future, that does not mean they do not continue to influence people now. While new sets of fairy tales may replace them, once again, in the future, those fairy tales will simply take the role of the fairy tales one grew up with and will still be used to enforce the society's thesis.

Another possible criticism of this argument is that beauty standards change, societal aesthetic values change, nothing stays the same, so how could fairy tales from the past continue to influence generations to come? To this I argue that these fables and tales have survived for years. Their influence has reigned for centuries and time and time again in the Western world and society references these stories when teaching children about moral values. While the fairy tales that are currently prevalent may lose influence in the future, I'd argue that that future is quite far away and another set of fairy tales will simply come to replace them.

Another criticism of this argument is that not every culture has fairy tales. While in this paper I have only talked about Western society and the impact of fairy tales in the Western world, I believe that even if certain cultures do not have fairy tales, stories made for children still have the same impact as a fairy tale would have. The fairy tale is a type of story that teaches children what they should believe according to the society they grow up in. I believe that any sorts of children's stories that are widely known within a society or culture can and will shape the construction of one's narrative identity. In McAdams and McLean's (2013) paper they found that different cultures provide their people with different "menus of images, themes, and plots" which is used for the construction of narrative identity (McAdams & McLean, 2013). They

found that people within these cultures and societies internalize these narrative devices and retain or modify aspects of them as they tell their own stories (McAdams & McLean, 2013). They found that starting in childhood, individuals draw from this array of devices to tell personal stories. Narrative identity is “exquisitely contextualized in culture” and McAdams and McLean (2013) believe that the development of narratives in many different cultures must be studied in order to further understand narrative identity construction.

Thus, fairy tales or stories that are adjacent influence narrative identity construction because not only do they shape the moral and aesthetic preferences of many individuals in a society, they serve as an example and a reinforcement of how one’s society crafts stories and therefore how one crafts their own life story.

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