# Female Stereotypes in Cinderella's Reconstructed Stories

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**Abstract.** This study aims to find out female stereotypes depicted in the reconstructed stories of Cinderella in the children's storybook entitled Ketika Rapunzel Menjadi Rapinem (KRMP). These stories are mainly inspired by the classic fairy tale of Cinderella, which is then reconstructed through the archetype process. It is essential to study the stories due to the prevalent issue of female stereotypes. Women's conditions in such reconstructed works certainly bring a perspective, especially the depiction of women, as existing social reflections. The study uses a qualitative descriptive method to support the goal. The data collection uses a purposive sampling technique by conducting in-depth readings on the reconstruction of Cinderella stories, representing women's stereotypes. The data is analysed using the feminism theory. As a result, the stories clearly and consistently define the stereotypes of women from their physical appearances, personality traits, domestic roles, and occupations. In this case, women's portrayal in the reconstructed versions openly continues to glorify physical beauty as a standard for women's appearance; on the other hand, they should also maintain femininity and do domestic works as housewives or caregivers.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Gender recognition becomes the basic concept of individuals to recognize males and females in socialization. It is a societal construct with a distinct set of norms of social behaviour that society maintains to attribute to both men and women with their different responsibilities. Further, this conception limits an individual's expected opportunities in developing life, which insulates both genders' identities with generalizations from society, which then people conclude as stereotypes of women and men.

In social conditions, Bedore (1992) states that stereotypes generally involve many things about generalizations adopted by society to refer to people, places, and events. A stereotype is a general view or prejudgement about attributes, characteristics, or roles that ought to be held by or presented by females and males (Ohchr.org, 2021). Accordingly, in social life, the basic concept of being a woman is competent to take care of children at home, while men take on working outside. However, it is harmful to females one-sidedly, whether overtly hostile, which weakens females and strengthens males' domination, such as females are weak, irrational, and witch, while males are bold, rational, and independent. Thus, harmful stereotypes of females enshrine inequalities between males (Ohchr.org, 2021).

However, society in such cultural dominance widely plays a major role in maintaining the gender distinction; it thus appears in various cultures and forms in the

realm of social life. In literature, more precisely in children's literature, many stories implicitly and explicitly reflect the imbalance of gender stereotypes (El Shaban, 2017). Many scholars have also studied female stereotypes in children's stories, to reassure inequality issues in gender depiction. Some studies argue that women depictions in fairy tales, such as the classic Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty, and Snow White are mostly described as being beautiful characters (Nanda, 2014; Octari, 2017), passive (Sovič & Hus, 2015; El Shaban, 2017; Zamanov, 2018), submissive (Shamna, 2018), even those who are not socially accepted are marked as being evil, unusual, and selfish (Sovič & Hus, 2015).

Meanwhile, other studies show women are different compared to female stereotypes that weaken the female characters in the classic fairy tales. For example, some studies of the representation of women in modern fairy tales, which means these tales are reproduced with archetypes from the classic fairy tales. The studies found stories with more positive female representations (Chun, 2015) and women who could break negative stereotypes (Putri, 2013). Chun investigates female initiation through the model of Koly, as a modern Cinderella, positively revived in Gloria Whelan's novel Homeless Bird. Koly, as the main character, is described as an independent, passionate, and courageous woman (Chun, 2015). On the other hand, Putri found a change of female image through Snow White in Mirror Mirror movie. She states that a woman is no longer imaged as weak; Snow White breaks the old stereotypes of women who can only do

domestic household jobs (Putri, 2013). In line with those previous studies, many stories are not stagnant, meaning that they are dynamic, developing over time and spaces. It is reasonable that female stereotypes can change and evolve in literary works. June Hannam (2007) also asserts that, traditionally, women are socially constructed and therefore can be altered (Hannam, 2007, p. 22).

In response to the results, this research attempts to study reconstruction stories from the point of view of the authors. Ketika Rapunzel Menjadi Rapinem (abbreviated as KRMP) is a bilingual (English and Bahasa) book from classic fairy tales, such as Cinderella, Snow White, Rapunzel, and several traditional Indonesian folk tales, which have been reconstructed by several authors and produced in 2020. Since these stories are developmental works, which mean they are developed from the original classic tales, this thesis derives from depicting female characters in the reconstructed stories, representing female characters somehow, such as their appearances, personal traits, and roles or occupations. For example, in Cinderella's reconstructed stories, some Cinderella characters are depicted as beautiful characters, yet they also have a good position in their domestic life.

Regarding these, this study has two crucial things. First, the stories are much concerned with the representation of women. The last, the existence of female characters in the reconstructed stories, is related to social reflections, which the writers reconstruct. Therefore, as a grand theory of the women's movement, feminism is much considered to analyse the issue, especially women's representation in literary works. Besides,

reconstruction theory is also essential to further understand the stories.

In general, feminism is defined as the women's movement. This movement emphasizes women's struggle for their rights and criticize of the dominant role of men in social life concerning racial conflict, particularly gender conflicts. Historically, feminism began at the end of the 18th century as a breakthrough for women following the inequality of opportunity between men and women in a patriarchal society. It then spread rapidly throughout the 20th century, marked by the promotion of equal political rights for women.

As a theory that focuses mainly on gender issues, feminists believe that gender involvement in any social culture limits the space between men and women, whose social norms are built on their sexes. In these terms, social perspectives apply traditional gender roles that place men as rational, strong, protective, and decisive, while women are emotional or irrational, weak, nurturing, and submissive. (Tyson, 1950). Accordingly, feminism constantly questions patriarchal ideology, which benefits males as a dominant role in people's lives. Feminists like Simone de Beauvoir agree that women's conditions are constructed. The representation of women in every form of media, such as children's stories, strengthens and perpetuates patriarchal ideology. De beauvoir asserts, "One is not born, but rather becomes, woman." (Beauvoir, 2011, p. 330).

Accordingly, as one of the focuses of feminism's attention, gender issues often appear in children's literature. According to Taxel (1995) in Soelistyarini (2013), children's literature is a product of agreement rooted in the dominant belief system and ideology when the work was written. Thus, in a society dominated by a particular ideology, the cultural implications of that society are believed to be reflected in the forms of literary works, especially in children's literature.

Apart from the gender issues in children's literature, studying it will have no end because children's literature is not stagnant; they continue to evolve with the times. In line with that, Bradkunas (1975), cited by Citraningtyas (2015), states that a story is always alive and growing, like a plant that grows and adapts to a specific environment. Accordingly, story reconstruction means a process to rebuild a story. It comes from the English words to reconstruct and or reconstruction. The Merriam-Webster dictionary (2021) means "the act or process of rebuilding, repairing, or restoring something". Citraningtyas (2016) also states that a story reconstruction is an act of rebuilding an existing story to correct errors and justify parts that are not constructive or change values that are no longer appropriate for the readers of the current era. Thus, the reconstructed stories of Cinderella in this KRMP book are a form of story development that tries to absorb the cultures from the environment the writers are in and represent them through story characterizations. The study, therefore, attempts to answer the question of how the reconstruction stories of Cinderella define female stereotypes in the book of *KRMP*.

## II. METHOD

This study directs to a qualitative method in developing information and thoughts. In its application, the study explores and develops descriptively the

compiled information on the phenomenon of women's stereotypical representation obtained from the primary data source in a children's story reconstruction book entitled KRMP. The analysis is done by investigating accurate information from many sources related to the issue.

Thus, there are several steps in collecting the data. The first step is doing a purposive sampling technique by focusing the data on the seven reconstructed stories of Cinderella, which seven authors rewrite. This technique is essential to adjust the data with the problem and objective of the research in this study. The next step is reading in-depth to determine the main points related to the issue, purpose, and research problem formulation. The last step is collecting and classifying the main points into a list of selected essential data associated with the depiction of female stereotypes, which refers to basic kinds of gender stereotypes for further analysis using feminism theory and other supporting sources.

In analyzing the selected essential data, the research focuses on the analytical induction method, placing the primary data as the social and cultural phenomena to be interpreted with the feminism theory to generalize the hypothesis. In short, the analysis comes from the data of the stories to answer the research question, presenting the common stereotypes of female characters in the object of the study.

## III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section explains the findings and analysis of female stereotypes in children's reconstruction stories of Cinderella in the book of KRMP. There are seven Cinderella reconstruction stories which seven authors

write under the title: *Cindereant, Elizabeth and the Beautiful Witch, Princess Anna, The Lucky Girl, Mozarella, Sukarella*, and *Barbie Ella*. Those stories are analyzed into basic kinds of gender stereotypes, which include: physical appearance, personality traits, domestic roles and or occupations (Parenthood, 2021). In its application, this categorization helps analyze female characters' representation, especially their depictions through physical appearance, personality traits, domestic roles and or occupations in these reconstructed stories. In finding out the picture of female stereotypes, the study applies feminism as a grand theory and reconstruction theory as a supporting theory. The application of the feminist view is related to presenting the common stereotypes of female characters in the object of the study.

In this research, the researcers found thirteen data as the selected essential data classified into the basic kinds of gender stereotypes. There are five selected data classified into physical appearance, three selected data for personality traits, and five selected data found of domestic roles and or occupations. These selected essential data represent the depiction of female stereotypes, in which women are represented through their physical appearance, personality traits, domestic roles, and or occupations. The details can be seen in Table 1.

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**Table 1. Finding of Basic Kinds of Gender Stereotypes**

| Basic Kinds of Gender Stereotypes | Frequency | Title of the Stories |
|---|---|---|
| Physical Appearance | 5 | Cindereant, Elizabeth and the Beautiful Witch, Mozarella, Sukarella, Barbie Ella |
| Personality Traits | 3 | The Lucky Girl, Mozarella, Sukarella |
| Domestic Roles and Occupations | 5 | Elizabeth and the Beautiful Witch, Princess Anna, The Lucky Girl, Sukarella, Barbie Ella |

### Discussion

### a. Physical Appearance of Women

Previously, in several well-known versions, Cinderella successfully reminds readers of her beauty, as well as other female characters who desperately want to be beautiful (Charles Perrault, 1697; Grimms brothers, 1812; Disney, 1950, 2015). This finding also appears in the reconstructed versions, reflected through the narrative and dialogue between characters in the stories of Cindereant, Elizabeth and the Beautiful Witch, Mozarella, Sukarella, and Barbie Ella. These stories still adopt traditional descriptions of women as sweet, beautiful, charming, and having attractive roles.

This finding approves that beauty still dominates the female physical stereotype. Socially, men and women are expected to appear stereotypical to their gender; here, the six reconstructed stories indicate that the female characters still adopt traditional gender ideologies, specifically how women are imaged by their appearance. The essence of beauty and women's portrayal becomes the fundamental thing the seven writers present. In English, beauty itself is identical to attractiveness in a physical way and primarily attributed to women or a physical aspect of a woman (Webster, 2021). Beauty becomes the standard or the essential quality for female characters in these reconstructed stories. Beauvoir (2011) mentions the necessity of beauty as a tool for women to achieve their aims in fairytales (Beauvoir, 2011, as cited in Shamna, 2018). Thus, the female's beauty in these stories can be understood and interpreted as: female's dream, attraction, and power.

In Cindereant, the reconstruction appears to eliminate the existence of ugly-looking women. Instead, beauty becomes dominant equally for all female characters. Citraningtyas (2012), in her analysis, reconstructs Perrault's Cinderella into Cintarela, a more constructive version, stating that the significance of creating balanced-looking women will only reduce a stigma of women, that ugly women must have bad attitudes, and those who are beautiful physically must have good hearts. In the end, beauty is still labelled to women in the story.

In Cindereant, Gisel, as the main character, seems to be reinvented into the classic Cinderella, who is still described as physically beautiful, with blonde hair and a pretty face. "Gisel was the most beautiful ant (girl) in Antless. Every ant loved her. She was different from others. She had blonde hair, pretty face, good smile, and kind heart"

(Widyasari, 2020, p. 39). However, this description also belongs to her sister, Ginda. Subsequently, it has been reasonable ever since the production of early stories. Women, for instance, are only given two choices on many levels, to be ugly or to be reconstructed to be beautiful. In Elizabeth and the Beautiful Witch for example, the appearance of a witch who is generally portrayed as an ugly old woman, as written in Snow White or The Sleeping Beauty, is then reconstructed into a beautiful woman. "When she arrived at the witch place, Elizabeth surprised that the witch wasn't like what she was imagined. That witch was a beautiful woman" (Fahlevi, 2020, p. 47). Consequently, the story presents the conflicts in which women compete to achieve the perfect beauty. The following dialogue shows how female characters are intrigued by the prince's party invitation to be the most beautiful at the ball. "I'm trying to use the best make-up that suits me. I want to be the most beautiful ant (girl) in the party. The most important thing for her was to become the only female ant for the prince" (Widyasari, 2020, p. 41).

In the other story of Elizabeth and the Beautiful Witch, female characters also fight over each other's beauty labels. "She wished she could beat the beauties of her two stepsisters" (Fahlevi, 2020, p. 46), and the story of Barbie Ella, "They quarrelled each other over the prettiest predicate" (Pandu, 2020, p. 82). The remains, Mozarella and Sukarella also present a beauty standard of woman's appearance. Moza, in Mozarella, as the main character uses her physical beauty as her advantage. "Moza looked so pretty and ready to go to the party" (Wulandari, 2020, p. 66). Likewise with Sukarella. "One day, there was a beautiful girl named Sukarella – She was preparing herself and wearing a beautiful headband" (Ammar, 2020, p. 70-72).

Those reconstructed stories clarify that being a woman, having an eye-catching appearance is still crucial as a female's essential quality. It suggests that a woman's acceptance of her physical beauty is significant for society's survival. As mentioned in Beauvoir's The Second Sex, women are kept busy by taking care of their appearance. Understandably, attention to their physical appearance can become an absolute obsession of young girls; being a princess or shepherdesses, they should always be pretty to obtain love and happiness (Beauvoir, 2011, p. 353).

Whilst, similar to the development of early versions, the depiction of female characters who have good quality in appearance may always be a consideration. In other words, most of these fairy tales have adapted traditional ideologies, where the advantages of being beautiful physically are essential to women's status. Women will automatically be quickly married to noble families as they are beautiful. "She (Cinderella) was taken to the young prince" (Perrault, 1697). However, from the gender analysis perspective, this does not lead to any positive movement; women are still vulnerable and dependent on men (Zamanov, 2018). Naomi Wolf, in her book, The Beauty Myth, also asserts that if women's attention to physical appearance increases, their focus on treatment and equality of rights becomes a weak priority. In other words, this system will only strengthen male dominance in social life (Wolf, 2002).

### b.  Personality Traits of Women

Besides the beauty standard, another category of female stereotypes is personality traits. Personality traits are related to the characteristics associated with a particular individual or character, which refers personally to the attributes of their thoughts, feelings, and habits (Parenthood, 2021). Furthermore, it also refers to understanding the concepts of femininity and masculinity in social cultures. Thus, people who understand these concepts will readily recognize and even generalize a person's characteristics because of their gender. Accordingly, the finding shows that there are three Cinderella's reconstructed stories in the book of KRMP that indicate personality traits, which means women's stereotypes can be seen from women's personality traits; they are written under the title: The Lucky Girl, Mozarella, and Sukarella. These stories mainly maintain that women's depictions still follow traditional ideologies by which women are socially recognized if they have 'feminine' qualities: typically passive, gentle, sensitive, submissive, nurturing, industrious, etc. These qualities are believed to guarantee happiness; on the other hand, those who do not characterize their 'femininity' will be described as cruel, violent, worldly, and jealous (Tyson, 2006, p. 89).

In the story of Sukarella, for instance, Sukarella is the main character who is physically beautiful and sweet. As expected by societies, she is also represented as virtuous, submissive, and industrious. "One day, there was a little beautiful girl named Sukarella. She lived in a little house only with her mother who had been sick in a long time. She hoped that one day her mother would be recover from her illness – Every morning, she always woke up early to pick bananas from the garden" (Ammar, 2020, p. 70-71). It shows that femininity still becomes the central issue in this story. In addition, by bringing back Perrault's Cinderella archetype, Sukarella succeeds in presenting the existence of a living biological mother and guiding the main character always to be virtuous. Interestingly, this reconstruction also eliminates the exhibition of a cruel stepfamily. It deliberately neutralizes stereotypes about stepmothers who are rude and bad-hearted as those found in Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty, and Hensel and Gretel. The other stories, Treasure in The Lucky Girl and Moza in Mozarella, respectively, represent the virtuous, gentle, and obedient young girls raised in a biological family with their siblings described as 'feminine'. This idea then reinforces that the impression of cruel stepmothers in the classic Cinderella can be reconstructed through their absence and replaced with biological families, supporting the concept of femininity for female characters.

Furthermore, regarding the concept of femininity, women's roles also qualify this quality. In the story of Mozzarella, as an example, the story presents a more constructive and positive issue in terms of family relationships, compared to the classic Cinderella with the theme of disharmonious family. Vania and Nasya as Moza's sisters are not compared to Anastasia and Drizella in the classic Cinderella anymore. They are depicted in such supportive characters. "Peter's birthday was coming. Vania and Nasya came and helped Moza to choose the

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gown, and they were so exited" (Wulandari, 2020, p. 66). Whilst, Moza, as the main character, is represented in her scope as a woman who is friendly, sensitive, patient, and obedient. It can be traced from her decision to leave the prince's party and return home. What she does afterwards is nothing, except patiently waiting at home until the prince arrives. Another character who has a similar trait is Treasure in the story of The Lucky Girl. Treasure is exiled into the deep forest and trapped by the wizard's magic, who curses her into a mare. Instead of fighting against the magical curse, she only cries until the prince finds and saves her. "He (the prince) was curious about the mare. The mare cried and said that she was Treasure. She cursed into a mare because she drank a potion from a witch – After that, the prince brought her to the fairy godmother and saved her" (Savica, 2020, p. 62). Hence, the stories indicate that their passiveness, patience, and dependence are long-held values to guarantee happiness. In the story, Treasure relies on patience and pitiful to get her happiness which is then rescued by the prince. Adopting feminine values from such female characters dictates other young women to behave like 'feminine' women, encouraging male domination by freezing women as objects through their immanence (Beauvoir, 2011, p. 37).

**c. Domestic Roles and Occupations of Women**

In the previous discussions, the reconstructions of Cinderella's children's stories describe women mainly through their physical appearance and personality traits. The following part focuses on how women are accepted and involved in societies regarding their domestic roles.

As part of societies, both men and women have roles based on gender identity. This concept defines male and female roles within the domestic and public spheres. Accordingly, women's roles are narrower and more straightforward, such as homemakers, caretakers, wives, and mothers, or princesses that need rescuing or are more inferred from private sphere activities; in contrast, men's roles are in the broader scope, such as adventurers, hunters, farmers, merchants which usually also involve physical activities, such as fighters, rescuers, athletes, soldiers; and who have position and power, such as kings, princes, presidents; and they are all concluded as public sphere activities (Temple, 1993; Narahara, 1998; Erum, 2009; Sovič & Hus, 2015). Meanwhile, the separation of roles based on gender identity does not necessarily limit the roles of women and men in their social life but also leads to the characterization and selection of types of works for both men and women. The generalization of occupations based on gender identity arises as an opportunity provided by society for both sexes. Men are involved in various roles and jobs that require physical strength and intelligence. On the contrary, women are involved in domestic matters, which do not require special skills, but rather because of their qualities. Taking care of children, cooking, washing and cleaning the house are some women's tasks while being a nurse or caregiver is a job that is closely related to the characteristics of women who are gentle, friendly, and considerate.

In Cinderella's reconstructed stories, the representation of women in terms of their

roles and occupations shows various findings, even leading to a positive movement for women's empowerment in children's stories. In classifying females' domestic roles and occupations, this research found that there are five reconstructed stories indicating females' domestic roles and occupations in the book of KRMP. They are written under the title: Elizabeth and the Beautiful Witch, Princess Anna, The Lucky Girl, Sukarella, and Barbie Ella.

In the story of Princess Anna, as a princess, Anna directly ascends the throne to become the sole queen in the kingdom after her father's death. "After the king (Anna's father) died, she (Anna) rose to lead the kingdom" (Khanifa, 2020, p. 52). In this story, Anna's character shows the superiority of women in their roles, which is generally dominated by male characters. Anna is not depicted as a faithfully waiting-woman, like in the classic Cinderella, Snow White, or other princess characters waiting to be saved by the princes. Anna, who replaces her father as the new leader, breaks the normative perspective that marriage is a way out to solve problems. Thus, Anna does not wait to marry a prince to make him a king, but she becomes a queen shortly after her father dies.

Regardless of this finding, Sukarella presents traditional women's roles rather than moderate ones. Sukarella, as the main character, is described as physically beautiful, diligent and obedient to her mother. She sometimes works as a planter and trader in the market; at a glance, it shows that women can go on public, leave the domestic sphere, which indirectly refers to the household routines. However, it is not comparable to men's dominant roles. In the story, the terminally ill mother is in dire need of help. Sukarella, a planter and trader, cannot help her mother. In this situation, she can only rely on others, and basically, on men. This dialogue confirms that she is somehow helpless for her mother's sickness. "She needed the man to heal her mother – I am a medical doctor, maybe I can help you," offered the man" (Ammar, 2020, p. 77-78). It implies that such a profession as a doctor belongs to men. Therefore, men are placed in a high or superior position than women. Men are doctors, while women are planters. In addition, the traditional characteristics of women are also still enshrined in this story. Women depend on men as supporting characters.

Furthermore, the other three stories perpetuate traditional women's roles as active actors in the household. These roles are presented in the stories entitled: Elizabeth and the Beautiful Witch, The Lucky Girl, and Barbie Ella. "Elizabeth had to work hard all day – her step-family charged her to stay at home and tidied the house" (Fahlevi, 2020, p. 45). "She worked as a maid in a castle" (Savica, 2020, p. 59). "Her step-mother told her to clean the whole house" (Pandu, 2020, p. 83).

## IV. CONCLUSION

Children's stories are timeless stories whose development follows the transformation of social cultures. Story regeneration, adaptation, and even reconstruction are part of the story development processes to provide a type of literary work with a new perspective, including creating a new image of a more honest depiction of female and male characters. However, this kind of effort does

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not altogether contribute to women's empowerment. The prevailing stereotypes of women in the reconstructed versions of the Cinderella story in KRMP still reflect the social perspectives and cultural conditions. The stories still maintain the patriarchal ideology by which women are portrayed as beautiful, having good personality traits, and sustaining the household works. This idea aligns with the feminist terminology about the formation of women as "the Other" in the structure of social life, preserving women's stereotypes as the ideal things women should believe, have, and maintain. Despite the stories in the book of KRMP are new publications, which means they were produced in the modern era, yet, the existing portrayal of female stereotypes in the book confirms that the ideology of patriarchy has been still prolonged and deeply rooted in the generations' mindset. It shows such a paradox rather than the essence of reconstruction necessary for gender empowerment.

Therefore, it is critical to examine further the book. Such a psychological approach may be applied to reveal the authors' background for reconstructing the tales.

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