Damsel in Distress or Princess in Power? Traditional Masculinity and Femininity in Young Adult Novelizations of Cinderella and the Effects on Agency

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Damsel in Distress or Princess in Power? Traditional Masculinity and Femininity in Young Adult Novelizations of Cinderella and the Effects on Agency

Rylee Carling

A thesis submitted to the faculty of Brigham Young University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

Damsel in Distress or Princess in Power? Traditional Masculinity and Femininity in Young Adult Novelizations of Cinderella and the Effects on Agency

Rylee Carling
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Master of Arts

Retellings of classic fairy tales have become increasingly popular in the past decade, but little research has been done on the novelizations written for a young adult (YA) audience. Critical multicultural analysis determining the effect of race, gender, disability, and more has been completed for both original fairy tale retellings and fairy tale retellings for children, but scholars have neglected popular YA novelizations. This study aims to determine how traditional masculinity and femininity affect agency in both male and female characters in YA novelizations of Cinderella.

To examine the role of traditional masculinity and femininity in young adult novelizations of Cinderella, a qualitative study was designed to look at the five main archetypal characters of Cinderella, the prince, the stepmother and stepsisters, and the fairy godmother. The study used critical multicultural analysis as defined by Botelho and Rudman (2009) to examine uses of agency and other utilization of power from the characters, and the Bem Sex Role Inventory (1974) was employed to determine traditionally masculine and feminine traits exhibited by characters. Each novel was analyzed on an individual level to determine how traditional masculinity and femininity affected the agency of the characters, after the books were examined on a broader level to establish themes found across the selection. The general trend seemed to indicate that traditionally feminine traits hinder the agency of female characters while affecting male characters less or not at all. The analysis is followed by a discussion about the implications for both educators and readers of young adult literature.

Keywords: critical multiculturalism, critical multicultural analysis, fairy tales, young adult literature
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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

When *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins first came out in 2008, I loved the character of Katniss Everdeen. I don’t know if I can perfectly explain why, but I loved that she was brave, independent, and could shoot a bow and arrow better than any of the boys. Immediately afterwards, I noticed a slew of female protagonists who demonstrated similar qualities: physically strong, willful, and hesitant to show emotion. However, after reading several books with this type of female protagonist, I began to wonder where the more traditionally feminine (Bem, 1974) characters had gone. Had they been forgotten in favor of these new so-called “strong female” characters? Was it simply a trend in the literature, or were they gone for good? Was it still possible to have a female character who acted agentically but acted with traditionally feminine traits in the most popular YA novels? While there were still traditionally feminine characters represented in YA novels (especially in those that might be termed teen romances), I was curious about the far-reaching influences and effects of these female characters in young adult literature who seemed so defined by their traditionally masculine traits.

Statement of Problem

In our current era, lines surrounding gender and its meaning in society are becoming increasingly blurred and significantly reimagined for the upcoming generation (Bergman & Barker, 2017; McPhail, 2004; Rankin & Beemyn, 2012). However, various traits associated with one’s gender which once seemed to define individuals almost entirely still hold significance in contemporary times because of how our past affects our present and futures. One important framework that initially addressed the idea of gender extending past the boundaries of a binary system and which still has wide acceptance and application across disciplines today is the Bem
Sex Role Inventory (1974). Sandra Bem (1974) originally conceived this scale as a way to make sense of traditional masculinity and femininity, but ultimately she hypothesized the two-gendered traits were independent factors rather than opposite points on a scale, and “that many individuals might be ‘androgynous’; that is, they might be both masculine and feminine” (p. 155). This inventory was quickly implemented by researchers of the day (e.g., Gaudreau, 1977; Taylor, 1981), and has been used in multiple studies across many disciplines to address the idea of traditional masculinity, traditional femininity, and androgyny (Auster & Ohm, 2000; Boldizar, 1991; Geldenhuys & Bosch, 2017; Gibson et al., 2016; Hol & Ellis, 1998; Vafei et al., 2014). Because of its prominence in several fields, I was hopeful that utilizing the inventory in the realm of YA literature would help my study enter into the conversation with other significant studies on traditional gendered traits.

In my profession as an 8th grade English teacher, I often take it upon myself to recommend books to my students. My interest in helping these young readers find engaging texts stems from both my burgeoning engagement with scholarly writings (e.g., Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000; Ivey & Johnston, 2013; Tracey & Morrow, 2012) through graduate studies and my own observations in the classroom. Studies have shown that children who read for pleasure demonstrate increased reading speed and comprehension (Boakye, 2017), increased vocabulary (Sullivan & Brown, 2015), and score higher on both academic and common knowledge tests than those that identify as non-readers (Cunningham & Stanovitch, 1998). Even as these scholars promote reading for the purposes of improving traditional academic literacies, research has also found that reading young adult literature can help to shape adolescent identity, sense of agency, and affect their moral, relational, and intellectual lives (Coats, 2011; Ivey & Johnston, 2013). Perhaps most importantly, reading young adult literature helps readers to connect with other
humans in a unique way, increasing empathy in particular (Guarisco et al., 2017; Kidd & Castona, 2013), as they connect with the world on different levels, both intellectually and emotionally.

Despite these well-proven benefits, many students in my 8th grade classes often profess a disinclination to read. Adolescents often develop more negative feelings towards reading as they develop (Mckenna et al., 1995), and middle school students in general “show a significant lack of interest in reading” (Greenberg et al., 2006, p. 168). The types of reading forced upon adolescents in school often exacerbates the problem; when more testable skills such as structure analysis and decoding are drilled (Decker, 1986), class novels are not scaffolded adequately by teachers (Dredger, 2013), and teachers don’t consider readers’ choice (Bickmore & Youngblood, 2017; Dredger, 2013), reluctant readers become even more reclusive. Instead of instilling a love of reading in their students, we teachers sometimes have the tendency to drive them away from it.

In an attempt to fight an uphill battle and keep my students interested in reading, I like to recommend high-interest young adult novels to the young teenagers in my classes as “great writing, engaging stories, and memorable characters...can knock the reluctance out of reluctant readers,” (Crowe, 2001, p. 146). Furthermore, I find that teenagers are aware that “with their inevitable transition from adolescence to adulthood, they stand to lose something...nebulous [and] intangible” (Bickmore & Youngblood, 2017, p. 251), and that the literature written specifically for them should give them “a way to ‘belong’ in an unfamiliar and ever-changing world” (p. 262).

It is worth noting that while educators such as myself find young adult (YA) literature to be incredibly important and impactful for adolescent readers, its prominence within public
consciousness is rather recent. Different from children’s literature, which has arguably existed in some form or another in Western society since the 17th century (Stevenson, 2010), it has been argued that YA literature was not recognized as its own entity prior to the publication of *Seventeenth Summer* (Daly, 1942) which is often credited as the first YA novel in the modern period (Vogel, 1994). In the nearly 80 years since the publication of this novel, “YA literature has gone from having no acknowledged existence, to forming a generally recognized category with a central canon, to displaying a more fragmented, ever-changing multiplicity of canons” (Hunt, 1996, p. 7). Because of its relative newness, YA literature often lacks academic attention. The absence of theoretical criticism leaves a void of understanding about how these texts influence the adolescents who read them (Hayn & Cobern, 2016).

As a female scholar and an advocate for diverse representation in literature, I find YA texts to be particularly important means of highlighting the experiences of historically marginalized populations that my students and I need to better understand and appreciate. While far from perfect, young adult novels increasingly feature characters from traditionally marginalized groups, such as LGBTQ (Jimenez, 2015), Latinx (Garcia, 2019), African-Americans (Hughes-Hassell, 2013), religious minorities (Baer & Glasgow, 2010), those with different levels of ability (Koss & Teale, 2011), immigrants (Webber & Agiro, 2019), and many more individuals from a wide variety of cultural backgrounds. This increased awareness of traditionally marginalized groups demonstrates YA literature’s ability to “advance cultural literacies for an inclusive society—in and out of school. Literature is a source for beginning and maintaining cultural literacy for a society that is more inclusive and just, with equality and equity” (Rodriguez, 2018, p. 233). This idea reflects the idea of windows and mirrors in children’s literature, first presented by Bishop (1990) and carried on by Botelho and Rudman
(2009); some books allow students to see through windows into the lives of individuals from outside their realm of experience, but it’s equally important for young readers to see themselves reflected in the literature they read through characters that look and act like them.

As stated previously, finding diverse window, mirror, and sliding glass door (Bishop, 1990; Botelho & Rudman, 2009) representations of female characters and femininity in young adult literature has been a struggle for some time. Texts featuring female protagonists often tend to focus on the outer appearance of female characters (Jacobs, 2004), and male characters are encouraged to reject traditionally feminine characteristics (Khan & Waccholz, 2006). In these and other ways, many contemporary texts are “infused with gender stereotypes” (Coats & Trites, 2006, p. 142) like many of the classics that are so often promoted in secondary English classrooms. However, I am encouraged that some contemporary YA fiction nevertheless portrays female characters across genres and time periods acting with agency as they navigate a patriarchal society (Rice, 2006), and these are the types of texts that I wish to share, discuss, and interrogate with my students.

Statement of Purpose

An important trend that has received increased attention among both researchers and practitioners is the prevalent retelling of fairy tales. Such texts are popular with my students, and from film adaptations to television shows to novelizations to graphic novels, these fairy tales updated for a contemporary audience seemed ubiquitous, turning into a “multimedia phenomenon” (Schwabe, 2016, p. 82). However, I am curious to better understand what “updated” truly means. On one hand, I expect to see these classic tales influenced by current societal expectations, especially being shaped by the dystopian novels that have dominated the YA market for so long. However, because fairy tales often originate in an era far different from
our own, particularly in regards to gender roles and female empowerment, I feel it important to examine them for the ways that they attend to issues of agency and power amongst female characters and what commentary they make about traditional masculinity and femininity. In simple terms, I echo Baumgarder and Richards (2004) who ask: “What does it mean to be a girl today? And, more narrowly, what message are we sending to girls and boys about the value of femininity?” (p. 60). In what follows, I briefly explain the importance of traditional tales and how they have been examined in scholarship thus far. I then describe how my classroom experiences and my engagements with the existent literature led me to create a study that critically examined six novelizations of Perrault’s (1697/1954) Cinderella.

Despite the fact that many fairy tales began in the oral tradition (Zipes, 2007) and their true origins remain elusive, they have endured through time to the present day. Bruno Bettelheim (1976) argues that their enduring legacy stems from their ability to address what he calls “the existential predicament”:

that a struggle against severe difficulties in life is unavoidable, is an intrinsic part of human existence—but if one does not shy away, but steadfastly meets unexpected and often unjust hardships, one masters all obstacles and at the end emerges victorious (p. 331).

In addition to addressing issues of the humane psyche, fairy tales echo themes of transformation (Luthi, 1991; Tatar, 2010; Zipes, 1988), and allow readers to imagine that they might be able to make similar transformations in their own life (Zipes, 2007). These stories reveal the nature of self and one’s place in society (Bettelheim, 1976), and often portray individuals overcoming obstacles to achieve their happy ending (Luthi, 1991; Bottigheimer, 2010). More than simply acting as moral guides for children, these ideas have so permeated our
societal expectations that even our everyday language reflects these ideas; a “fairy tale romance”
describes an ideal relationship while one might determine that an outcome is appropriate “if the
shoe fits.”

One particular story that has endured, and even thrived, in contemporary society is the
story of Cinderella. Some argue that Cinderella’s rags-to-riches story contributes to its popularity
(Collier, 1961; Yolen, 1988), others attribute its enduring qualities to its ubiquitous theme of
family discord (Tatar, 2004), and some assert the original audience of the oral tale and modern
classic fairy tale readers simply love an underdog (Zipes, 2016). For these reasons and more, Cinderella
is the most well-known fairy tale worldwide (Bettelheim, 1976; Tatar, 2004; Zipes 2016).

Hundreds of versions of the Cinderella story exist, from those featuring magical fish,
cows, and snakes, to those in which the central figure dons glass slippers, golden sandals, or
leather moccasins (Fleischman, 2007). Indeed, the story has been so broadly shared that “more
versions of this tale exist than any other” (Botelho & Rudman, 2009, p. 222). However, “if one
were to select the single most popular version out of all the hundreds of texts of Cinderella that
have been reported, that version would almost certainly be the tale told by Charles Perrault”
(Dundes, 1988, p. 14). Even Marian Emily Roalfe Cox’s (1893) foundational collection of
Cinderella-type stories, Cinderella: Three Hundred and Forty-five Variants of Cinderella,
Catskin, and Cap O’Rushes, considered Perrault to have originated the literary version in 1697.
Many of Perrault’s additions (a fairy godmother, a magic pumpkin, and a midnight curfew being
among the most recognizable) have endured in societal retellings of the tale; indeed, they are
notably present in Disney’s film adaptation Cinderella (Geronimi et al., 1950), which is based
upon Perrault’s interpretation, and “the story in the mass market has not been the same since,”
(Yolen, 1988, p. 26).
Perhaps because of its popularity in both literary and popular culture, Cinderella has received increased attention over the years and had multiple critical lenses, including a feminist lens, to its contents. Perrault’s treatment of the character, which was only amplified by her Disney-ification, presents a meek, passive heroine whose patience and submission is rewarded by the extreme intervention of a magical being (Lurie, 1990) with marriage to a wealthy man (Lieberman, 1972; Zipes, 2016). While the modern character of Cinderella may have had more “shrewd and resourceful” (Sloane & Vardell, 2004, p. 249) predecessors, her docility may be a result of the patriarchal nature of fairy and folk tales which occurred frequently as traditionally oral stories were recorded by male authors (Zipes, 2006). However, seemingly in response to these critical approaches to Cinderella, there has recently been an increase in modernizations of the classic story in several types of mediums, with each interpretation of the character attempting to modernize Cinderella and bring her into the 21st century (Sibielski, 2019). Contemporary retellings of Cinderella and other fairy tales have often created more aggressive female characters (Stone, 1991) and lessened the focus on romantic relationships as a solution to her problems (Rowe, 1991). As these feminist retellings become more available to young audiences (Parsons, 2004), children and adolescents are eager to find stories where traditional gender roles are challenged (Trousdale & McMillan, 2003).

While plenty of fairy tale novelizations with more modern views on gender are becoming available, scholarly work is still lacking. Important work has evaluated the Cinderella tale through various lenses (eg., Crowley & Pennington, 2010; Jorgensen, 2008; Parson, 2004; Sibielski, 2019; Sloane & Vardell, 2004; Trousdale & McMillan, 2003). These studies have connected ancient narrative to current society, pushed for progressive readings of classic stories, and advocated for their adaptation to the modern world. Despite this valuable work, I see a void
of research where Cinderella intersects with young adult novelizations, and specifically how those novelizations depict gender and agency.

With this in mind, my study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How are traditionally masculine and feminine traits portrayed in YA novelizations of Cinderella?

2. How does a character’s use of traditionally gendered traits affect how they enact (or do not enact) agency?

In the following sections, I will engage more deeply with the literature, provide an explanation of my methods of inquiry and analysis, discuss the findings of my analysis, and conclude with implications and where future studies might lead.
CHAPTER 2

Review of Literature

This chapter describes the research that influenced the origins of this study. This review will examine the history of fairy tales, their enduring presence in contemporary culture, and the critical lenses through which they have been analyzed. It will also address the need for critical research in the young adult sector.

Fairy Tales as Reflections of the Social Unconscious

Stories have been interwoven through the fabric of human history. First passed down orally, stories were often simplistic and short. The characters were simple and often followed stereotypes around class and gender (Zipes, 1988/2007), the setting unimaginative (Young & Ward, 2008). However, when shared, these stories connected listeners in ways that recognized the universality of human experience. As stories were repeated amongst various communities, there arose common tales that became regional folklore (Zipes, 2006). Among these folk stories grew fairy tales, stories in which magic or fantasy played a major role.

The unique origin of fairy tales and their dependence on an audience made up of listening young people creates a unique purpose. As Warner (1994) states, “The genre’s need of an audience forces the teller to enter that audience’s economy of beliefs; the memory of its oral origin makes fairy tales long to please” (p. 409). In addition to creating stories that young audiences would want to listen to, it was essential for the tellers to incorporate a community’s values into their tales. According to Ra’ufman and Veinberg (2017), because these are community stories, we see them as a reflection of the human psyche, making them an effective way to explore shared values and beliefs among a population. Bettelheim (1976) agrees, explaining that over centuries of repetition, “fairy tales became ever more refined, they came to
convey at the same time overt and covert meanings—to speak simultaneously to all levels of the human personality” (p. 5).

The seminal work of Bruno Bettelheim (1976) focuses on how fairy tales affect the individual, especially psychologically. He argues that readers, especially children, are able to confront some of life’s harsh realities and their effects on their young psyches by engaging with darker fairy tales. By reading these stories, “the child can externalize what is going on in his own mind” (p. 65), especially if adults allow the child to come to those results on his or her own. According to Bettelheim, these tales can also help children recognize the moral dilemmas that they may encounter and how to deal with them. Most importantly, he argues that “more can be learned from [fairy tales] about the inner problems of human beings, and of the right solutions to their predicaments in any society, than from any other type of story within a child’s comprehension” (p. 5).

Maria Tatar (2004) expands on Bettelheim’s ideas, asserting that these stories “mix fact with fantasy to tell us about our deepest anxieties and desires” (p. xxii). However, she rejects the idea of fairy tales as a moral compass for children, pointing out that the heroes and heroines of the stories aren’t always paragons of virtue (Tatar, 1993). Rather, Tatar argues that the purpose of fairy tales lies in a child’s ability to identify and utilize symbolic expression as he or she grows to adulthood, a transformation reflected in the agentic conduct of a fairy tale’s protagonist (2010). She also argues for the rigorous study of fairy tales and folktales and their contemporary retellings, contending that they “tap into something much deeper—primal questions that are not just up close and personal but also deeply implicated in our collective aspirations” (Tatar, 2017, p. xiii). Furthermore, she points to the cultural importance of feminist fairy tales, asserting that stories which emphasized the agency of female characters show “that social change is possible
once we become aware of how the tales have guided our social, moral and personal
development, shaping our identity in ways we fail to process and a conscious level” (p. vi).

Another important voice in fairy tale scholarship, Jack Zipes (2006), similarly focuses on
the potential of fairy tales to shape social change with his analysis of fairy tales more closely
examining how the stories affected and were affected by their societal and cultural contexts. He
argues that community stories like fairy tales “civilize” children or help them to integrate
themselves in their culture. He applies the term “meme” to fairy tales, describing the common
cultural transmission that occurs when sharing community stories (Zipes, 2013). He notes, for
example, “in the case of fairy tales...memes help create and build traditions by creating pools of
stories, millions of stories, predicated on the human communication of shared experience” (p.
30). Because of a cultural meme’s flexibility and adaptability, it has the opportunity to change
with the times.

The first tale adapted itself and was transformed by both common nonliterate people and
upper-class literature people from a simple, brief tale with vital information; it grew,
became enormous, and disseminated information that contributed to the cultural
evolution of specific groups. In fact, it continues to grow—embracing, if not swallowing,
all types of genres, art forms, and cultural institutions, and adjusting itself to new
environments through the human disposition to re-create relevant narrative, and via
technologies that make its diffusion easier and more effective. (Zipes, 2013, p. 32)
Thus, for Zipes, the various adaptations of fairy tales in the modern era provide opportunities for
readers to examine the different versions through various critical lenses and interrogate the
underlying messages of both the original tales and their modern-day retellings.
Fairy Tales Through Critical Lenses

Perhaps paradoxically, the fairy tales that we most often associate with children were first meant for an adult audience (Zipes, 2006). When one considers the violence, deception, and implicit sexual content that frequents these stories, it’s no wonder that adults were the intended audience. In addressing these complex and mature issues, the existent research on fairy tales demonstrates a wide variety of ways that they have been examined through critical lenses (e.g., feminist, dis/ability, queer, critical race). From these, I gathered a number of key insights that informed this study which I briefly describe below.

A significant portion of research on fairy tales has focused on the representation of gender. Rowe (1991) asserts that traditional fairy tales, and especially the romantic fairy tales, condition female readers to accept and look forward to their role in patriarchal society. She warns that “dedicated romanticist will reconstruct their reality into tenuous, self-deluding fantasies by suppressing any recognizing of a secondary status and defending more vehemently the glories of matrimony and the patriarchy” (p. 365). Fortunately for Rowe, many contemporary researchers have continued to study fairy tales, especially modern retellings, and their impact on the female psyche. Smith (2014) compared how gender is represented in two translations of Grimm’s Rapunzel story. Through the comparison, she concludes that the version from 1968 enforces more traditional gender roles while the more recent 1993 adaptation promotes the idea of the emancipated woman. She further theorizes that more modern renditions of fairy tales more frequently reflect gender equality. D’amore (2017) has examined more current retellings of fairy tales, focusing instead on film adaptations and the agency they give female characters. Rather than simply restore the agency so frequently denied to female fairy tale characters, the women in these stories seek revenge against the men who have limited them. This “vigilante feminism is a
reaction to the powerlessness that accompanies growing up female” and “[shifts] the narrative of empowerment to girls and women” (p. 402).

While the majority of critical analyses on fairy tales has addressed gender, other critical lenses have been applied as well, including dis/ability, queer, and race lenses. For example, Yenika-Agbaw (2011) argues that many characters in Hans Christen Andersen’s fairy tales have defining attributes that could be read as disabilities, such as the little mermaid’s mutism and Thumbelina’s dwarfism. Throughout their stories, characters with these disabilities are frequently dominated in a society that favors so-called “able-bodied” individuals, reinforcing the white, patriarchal society in which Andersen lived. Baker (2010) also contends that fairy tales were utilized to enforce cisgender, patriarchal power, arguing that many antagonists in fairy tales, such as the cross-dressing Big Bad Wolf, are portrayed as the “monstrous queer,” and meant to act as a warning figure to readers. In terms of a critical race lens being employed in the study of fairy tales, Hurley (2005) addresses the color symbolism frequently found in Disney’s version of fairy tales. In these film adaptations, white is frequently seen as pure and good while black typically represents evil, which Hurley argues can be harmful for young readers of color. To combat this trend, she recommends an increase in transcultural literature, allowing students from all backgrounds to see themselves represented in text.

Even though fairy tales were originally meant for a more adult audience, they have gradually transitioned to stories for children. With acknowledgment towards their current audience, a significant portion of research on fairy tales has focused on their influence on children. Within the specific context of educational research, studies have shown how familiar fairy tales can be used in order to encourage younger readers to engage in critical readings of children’s texts. For example, Bourke (2008) examined how allowing students the space to
question simple symbols such as light versus dark or other colors in familiar tales such as “Jack and the Beanstalk” or “Three Billy Goats Gruff” gave first graders their first taste of critical analysis of literature. Students found that these young students were capable of recognizing the symbolism of color and applying it to what they saw in the world around them, particularly in people of color. Similarly, other studies involving elementary students performing critical analyses of both traditional fairy tales and their more modern versions demonstrate that even very young learners are capable of sophisticated readings of these texts (Harwood, 2008; Hurley, 2005; Kuykendal & Sturm, 2007; Wee, et al., 2017). It is worth noting, however, that while there is a significant body of research critically examining fairy tales and the responses of those most likely to read them (i.e., young children), there are almost no studies which examine the retellings written for YA audiences.

**Fairy Tales and Young Adult Literature**

In recent years, society’s obsession with fairy tales has manifested in the publication of numerous re-imaginings of these classic stories, frequently appearing in young adult fiction. The new stories often take the characters and turn them into well-developed, three-dimensional characters. Authors typically modify the simplified settings plotlines, as they now attempt to portray the gritty realities more familiar to current readers. Moreover, at times they make such significant changes that only small reminders of the original story remain: a poisoned apple or a shoe with life-changing qualities. In sum, contemporary novelizations transform simple tales from the past into complex stories for our present. For, as Young and Ward (2008) state,

Today’s tweens and teens are able to savor fairy tale novels that are much more complicated than the original stories. Novelized fairy tales allow authors to draw from familiar stories and create complex plots featuring multidimensional characters. These
well-rounded characters and intricate storylines offer the same satisfaction as the original tales, but at a deeper level. (p. 30)

Zipes (2013) explains this resurgence of fairy tale literature: “Fairy tales embody worlds of naive morality that can still resonate with us if their underlying dramas are re-created and re-designed to counter as well as collide with our complex social realities” (p. 125). When these new fairy tales are aimed at an adolescent audience, it gives even more meaning to the complex social realities being addressed. Additionally, fairy tales “offer a way of putting questions, of testing the structure as well as guaranteeing its safety, of thinking up alternatives as well as living daily reality in an examined way” (Warner, 1994, p. 411).

The examination of young adult literature has long been overlooked when taking on critical theory (Hayn & Coburn, 2016; Hunt, 1996). Because young adult literature was considered by many to be simply an extension of children’s literature, it wasn’t considered for serious study (Daniels, 2006; Garcia, 2013). A dearth of research exists in this niche genre, creating friction, as “young adult fiction drives cultural engagement for a large portion of literate America” and can play an integral role in “fermenting public opinion, cultural understandings of race, class and power, and ways to engage in American civic life” (Garcia, 2013, p. 4). Kohl (2007) argues specifically for this research and using it to study power “since power relationships also provide examples and models...of social and moral behavior” (pp. 4-5). Implicit messages in this understudied field of young adult literature provide strong literary influences for adolescents, shaping their engagement with society.

An Examination of Cinderella

The story of Cinderella has a long and documented history. In the Aarne-Thompson-Uther classification system of international folktales (Uther, 2004), Cinderella and other similar
stories are classified as 510a, each involving a persecuted heroine who is mistreated by her stepmother and stepsisters, earning her cruel nickname by sleeping by the hearth or in ashes. In these stories, an advocate provides the protagonist with assistance, often through magical means. And very frequently, the resolution involves marriage to an eligible, if not royal, suitor.

Crowley and Pennington (2010) assert that “fairy tales have always been in a state of reincarnation” (p. 298), and the multiple regenerations of Cinderella reflect that assertion. Versions of Cinderella echo the story readers are familiar with and have been told and retold since the early Chinese Ye Xian (sometimes written as Yeh-Shen), first written in 860 AD (Heiner, 2012) during the Tang dynasty. In this ancient version, Ye Xian, a strong, smart young woman mistreated by her stepmother, feeds a small golden fish she finds in a pool and develops a special bond with it as it grows bigger. The stepmother, wanting her stepdaughter to be miserable, tricks the fish by wearing Ye Xian’s clothes and eats the fish. Ye Xian finds the buried fish bones and discovers they have the ability to grant wishes. She attends the national festival in a beautiful new dress and shoes (gifts from the fish bones) but flees when her stepmother finds her there. Intrigued by the shoe, the king summons its owner. When she arrives, he honors her kindness and they marry (Zhang, 2009).

While this early Chinese tale is often credited as the first Cinderella story, Haas (2006) asserts that rather than organizing these tales linearly, they should be thought of as an interrelated network, as this helps to account for other Asian versions that contain similar elements. For example, in the Korean iteration, a frog assists the heroine; in the Vietnamese, a flock of birds (Zhang, 2009). Outside of Asia, similar stories have appeared in African, European, Greek, and Indian cultures (de la Rochère, et al., 2016).
One version in particular, that of French author Charles Perrault, rose to prominence when he wrote/retold one of the many European versions, of which there are over 500. He entitled his retelling *The Little Glass Slipper*, and this written version, published in 1697, popularized the shoe of glass, a fairy godmother, and a magic pumpkin, with these and other iconic details becoming recognizable around the globe. Furthermore, Perrault’s version provided the model for the 1950 Disney classic (Geronimi, et al.), which still experiences enormous popularity to this day. The film drew explicitly from Perrault’s telling of the story, both in terms of its iconic items and narrative elements. And, though many viewers may not consciously know it, Disney’s version, which endures as the most prevalent in societal imagination, does so in large part because “like Perrault’s version, it emphasizes patience and forbearance, presenting a heroine who waits for a better life instead of pursuing her desires” (Ohmer, 1993, p. 245).

With the popularity of Cinderella, it comes as no surprise that researchers have studied its widespread influence and implications. For example, scholars have examined it for its commentaries and impact on class (Panttaga, 1993; Smith, 2013), gender (Crowley & Pennington, 2010; Harries, 2001; Hine et al., 2018; Parsons, 2004; Sibielski, 2019; Trousdale & McMillan, 2003), familial relationships (Ko, 2007; Sloane & Vardell, 2004), and race (Yenika-Agbaw, 1997). Additionally, it has been examined for the underlying ideologies presented in versions from different cultures (Alexander, 2006; Serafini, 2007). Generally speaking, however, these studies examine Cinderella tales while envisioning the worlds of very young readers, and more often than not, YA literature is left out of the conversation entirely. With the exception of one study which examined Cinderella retellings published before the year 2000 (Parsons, 2004), there is a dearth of research interrogating YA texts. Thus, in my study I sought to create a more expansive space in which to explore current YA retellings of Cinderella.
The following section will describe the design of my study, including the theoretical framework, text selection, and method of analysis. The ensuing chapters will present the findings of the study both on novel and thematic levels, as well as present overall conclusions and implications for future research.
CHAPTER 3

Methods and Theoretical Frameworks

The purpose of this study was to critically examine traditional masculinity and femininity as they are represented in young adult novelizations of Cinderella. As mentioned previously, a recent trend in YA literature features traditional fairy tales being retold for a modern adolescent audience. While these novels have become increasingly popular, there is surprisingly very little research interrogating and discussing their portrayals of gender, traditional femininity and masculinity, and agency. With this in mind, the following questions guided my study: How are traditionally masculine and feminine traits portrayed in young adult novelizations of Cinderella? How does a character’s use of traditionally gendered traits affect how they enact (or do not enact) agency? The following chapter will describe how the study was framed, the process of text selection, and the ways in which the texts were analyzed.

Design

In order to examine these texts, I designed a qualitative study framed through critical multicultural lenses. Key voices in critical multicultural research (e.g., May, 2003; Nieto, 2002) have argued that studies guided through critical multicultural frameworks can lead to the breaking down of established hierarchies and the building of culturally responsive learning environments. Additionally, those within the fields of literacy and literature research have contended that employing critical multicultural lenses can push students toward important readings in which they can question both the texts they read and the world around them (Hade, 1998; Yenika-Agbaw, 1997).

Because I wanted to examine agency and how it was influenced by and intersected with gender, I sought a means of analysis that could cast a wide enough net to encompass these topics
that were central to my questions of inquiry. Botelho and Rudman’s (2009) critical multicultural analysis allowed for such an examination, as it focuses on how “discourse, ideology, subjectivity, and power lead the reader to locating how the power relations of class, race, and gender are exercised in text” (p. 4). In critical multicultural analysis, readers, young and old alike, are encouraged to maintain active stances throughout the reading process. This encourages readers to question their own feelings about the texts, their positionalities, as well as those of the characters, authors, or illustrators. At every step, readers should be questioning and engaging with the text.

In order to further examine traditional masculinity and femininity and agency in the novels, I employed the Bem Sex Role Inventory. Developed in 1974, this inventory was initially envisioned as a means of describing traditional masculinity and femininity as individual and independent traits rather than two points on a spectrum. Over time, however, this analytical tool has become well-known among researchers as a way to identify traditionally masculine and feminine traits, as well as what Bem called “neutral traits,” which were not specific to one gender. In this study, the Bem Sex Role Inventory was used as an entry point into thinking about key characters’ traits, and, combined with the critical multicultural analysis rooted in the work by Botelho and Rudman (2009), I was able to uniquely investigate six YA novelizations of Cinderella and access important findings that will be discussed at length in subsequent chapters.

**Examining Power**

Botelho and Rudman (2009) argue that in the past, the term multiculturalism was used to describe any viewpoint that varied from the typical middle-class, white experience. However, they instituted the far more specific “critical multicultural analysis of literature, an orientation towards reading, learning, teaching, and seeing the world” (p. xiv). This theory and method for
analysis includes not only looking at race, but also gender, socioeconomic status, and class. Each of these are “social constructions that establish sociopolitical and economic hierarchies or power relations among people” (p. 115).

By using critical multicultural analysis to study literature, critical readers engage in a political act (Cai, 2002), becoming observers of the world and relationships around them. “A critical multicultural analysis locates how power is exercised, circulated, negotiated, and reconstructed” (Botelho & Rudman, 2009, p. 31). When readers of fairy tale novelizations engage in this political act of identifying power, they are better able to recognize power exertion in their own world.

Botelho and Rudman designed a power continuum wherein these complex issues of power could be examined. They drew inspiration from Foucault (1995), who argued for asking the following questions:

Who exercises power? How? On whom? Who makes decisions for me? Who is preventing me from doing this and telling me to do that? Who is programming my movements and activities? Who is forcing me to live in a particular place when I work in another? How are these decisions on which my life is completely articulated taken? (p. 41)

In answering these important questions, Botelho and Rudman (2009) developed four positions of exercising power: domination, collusion, resistance, and agency.

**Domination**

The conflict between Cinderella and her stepmother is replete with examples of Botelho and Rudman’s (2009) first power position: domination. The stepmother’s elevated social status creates unequal power, a sign of domination. By restricting her access to society by forbidding
Cinderella to attend the ball, the stepmother “[exercises] power over social circumstances,” preventing the heroine’s “participation, decision-making, and access” (p. 118). In addition, the stepmother’s demands that Cinderella take over the household chores points to a manipulation of social constructs and systems as she relegates Cinderella to the role of a servant. The central conflict of the tale of Cinderella is domination in all its forms, creating a text ripe for analysis.

**Collusion**

Collusion, the next step in the power continuum from Botelho and Rudman (2009), manifests itself in Cinderella most recognizably through the stepsisters. They have “internalized oppression or domination” (p. 118) and treat their stepsister Cinderella in the same way their mother does. The younger stepsister, “who was not quite so rude as the elder, gave her the name of Cinderella” (Perrault, 1697/1954, p. 4), demonstrating that even the kinder of the two sisters gave the protagonist her mean-spirited nickname, demonstrating their contribution to Cinderella’s mistreatment. The two women “remain silent even when they have knowledge of wrongdoing” (Botelho & Rudman, 2009, pp.118-119). In the original version of Cinderella, it is unknown if the stepsisters recognize their participation in the subjugation of Cinderella, but their cruel actions toward her place them in the role of colluders.

**Resistance**

The act of resistance is important in Cinderella because it allows us to analyze her actions in relationship to her wicked stepmother. Cinderella endures years of abuse before taking action against her stepmother. Botelho and Rudman (2009) argue that resistance is not spur of the moment action nor rash reactions to situations. They state, “It is not haphazard nor purely reactive. It is an unwillingness to be universalized and essentialized. It is by definition oppositional to imposition and coercive power” (p. 119). By finally confronting her stepmother,
Cinderella acts in resistance. The term resistance implies that there is someone or something to resist. Someone in a position of resistance, therefore, recognizes the power structure and their place in it, but chooses to actively go against the status quo. Cinderella’s central conflict involves interacting with another individual in power; therefore, if the Cinderella character chooses to act in intentional reaction against those individuals, she demonstrates resistance.

**Agency**

The position of agency is unique because a character acting as “an agent can be an agent while at the same time holding another subject position” (Botelho & Rudman, 2009, p. 119). When a character acts with agency, they act in their own self-interest and can navigate the systems around them. “Agency is understanding; it’s the ultimate subjectivity” (p. 119). Parsons (2004), who also studied fairy tales, gender, and power, stated, “The issue of agency is often evident in the strong voice of the protagonist. The goal of agency is self-discovery and personal development rather than domination over others, and human interdependence, rather than competition, is stressed,” (p. 140).

**Gender**

Botelho and Rudman (2009) assert “like race and class, gender is not simply a biological phenomenon; it is a socially and biological bound identity” (p. 221). The inclusion of gender in critical analysis is essential in determining how readers see the world. It brings to light “the complex, subtle, and sometimes not so subtle, ways in which frequently taken-for granted gendered assumptions...are discursively produced, sustained, negotiated, and challenged in different contexts and communities” (Lazar, 2007, p. 142).

One way in which these gendered assumptions are measured is through Bem’s Sex Role Inventory (1974). Sandra Bem created this analytical tool in which an individual would rate
themselves on feminine, neutral, and masculine traits. Rather than consider femininity and masculinity opposites, Bem believed the two traits could coexist; one could have high femininity, high masculinity, a high score in both (considered androgynous), or in neither. Bem (1974) describes the purpose of her tool:

> It is hoped that the development of the BSRI will encourage investigators...to begin focusing on the behavioral and societal consequences of more flexible sex-role self-concepts. In a society where rigid sex-role differentiation has already outlived its utility, perhaps the androgynous person will come to define a more human standard of psychological health. (pp. 161-162)

In the following sections I will attend to the process of text selection and my methods of analysis.

**Text Selection**

The selection of texts was the first important step in this process. Recognizing that it would be impossible to include every Cinderella novelization, and wanting to focus on recent trends, it was necessary to set parameters on the novels included in the study. To begin, I looked at the seminal work in fairy tale research by Marian Roalfe Cox (1893) and chose Cinderella novelizations that had the following elements: (a) a heroine persecuted by family; (b) a supernatural helper; (c) a love interest to act as the prince; and (d) a “happily-ever-after” ending with the prince. Also, recognizing that it would be impossible to include every Cinderella novelization in print, the selection of novels was limited to those published within the last decade. Although there are several books that could have been included that were written outside of this time period, in order to truly examine the influence of YA retellings of Cinderella as a reflection of current multicultural paradigm, it was necessary to use this restriction.
In order to avoid what has been rightly termed the dangers of a single story (Adichie, 2009), special care was taken to choose novels that covered a variety of genres and settings (see Table 1). Of course, I recognized that the texts chosen might in some ways reflect biases that accompanied my white, heterosexual, cisgender positionalities, but I nevertheless attempted to include a wide range of novels featuring diverse characters, settings, cultures, and genres. For example, to ensure a certain level of diversity in text selection, novels with a variety of unique components (e.g., same-sex relationships, era- and country-specific settings) were selected. When two novels that had very similar elements (e.g. contemporary setting, sci-fi genre, LGBTQ characters) appeared, however, only one was chosen to be included in the selection. Of note, because I sought the most diverse text selection possible, one novel was chosen that fell outside of the 10-year restriction; I included *Bound* (Napoli, 2004), which takes place in ancient China, because of the ways it pays tribute to the Chinese origins of the fairy tale.

**Table 1**

*Selected Young Adult Novelizations of Cinderella*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Publication Date</th>
<th>Reason for Selection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Ash</em></td>
<td>Malinda Lo</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Same-sex relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Blood Spell</em></td>
<td>C. J. Redwine</td>
<td>2019</td>
<td>Person of color as protagonist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Bound</em></td>
<td>Donna Jo Napoli</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Ancient Chinese setting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Cinder</em></td>
<td>Marissa Meyer</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Science fiction genre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Cinder &amp; Ella</em></td>
<td>Kelly Oram</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Contemporary setting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Stepsister</em></td>
<td>Jennifer Donnelly</td>
<td>2019</td>
<td>Stepsister as protagonist</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data Analysis

My first step in analysis was to find a version of Cinderella for comparison purposes. While there are several to choose from, I ultimately decided on using Perrault’s interpretation since so many of his original elements (e.g., glass slipper, magic pumpkin, fairy godmother) are ubiquitous in retellings today (Dundes, 1988). Because his original *The Little Glass Slipper* was published in 1697 in French, I chose the award-winning translation by Marcia Brown (Perrault, 1697/1954). I then chose six contemporary YA novelizations of Cinderella, the process of which has been described in the previous section. With the texts selected, I was ready to begin my analysis.

In order to establish patterns of analysis for the YA novelizations of Cinderella, I first read through one of the novels, *The Blood Spell* by C. J. Redwine (2019), with a collaborating researcher. I had already identified the Bem Sex Role Inventory (1974) (see Appendix A) and Botelho and Rudman’s (2009) continuum of power as introductory tools for analysis, so the book was initially read with these in mind. While reading, I noted examples of traditional masculinity and femininity in the margins and recorded on a chart created for each character. Demonstrations of agency received the same treatment. (The chart for the first book, *The Blood Spell* [Redwine, 2019], is located in Appendix B.)

In order to establish trustworthiness, I engaged in multiple discussions with the collaborating researcher. After an initial reading, we discussed the traditionally gendered traits we observed in the characters, the way agency was utilized, and how the traditional masculinity, traditional femininity, and agency were related. Through our collaboration, we decided to focus our study on the following characters: the female protagonist (or the Cinderella character), her love interest, the stepmother and stepsister figures, and the fairy godmother. Each of these
characters plays a major role in Perrault’s version of the fairy tale, and each has a reinvented counterpart in the Cinderella novelizations. In addition to their presence in the contemporary novels, the characters vary in gender and social positioning, creating ample opportunities for comparison across the novels. The discussions with a collaborating researcher additionally helped to clarify and refine the direction of the study, as well as identify gaps in my initial findings. For example, in one of our first discussions, he brought up the idea that the Cinderella character may have been colluding against herself, an important point that became a pattern throughout the remaining novels. Using the first analysis as a guide, I read the remaining Cinderella novelizations using the same process. During the reading process, marginalia were recorded on both the manifestation of traditional masculinity and femininity and the enaction of agency, resistance, domination, and collusion in the main characters, and later added to the character charts (see Appendix B). After an initial reading through the novels in this manner, with notes on traditional masculinity and femininity and agency, I completed a written analysis for each book, spending time focusing on each principal character and how their demonstration of traditionally gendered traits affected their use of agency. Finally, after reading, taking notes, and completing an initial write-up of each book, I then met with two collaborating researchers to discuss my findings. Through these discussions and defending my written analyses, the ideas were refined and further developed. Thus, this process also added to the overall trustworthiness of the study.

Originally, I had planned on analyzing each book individually, but after engaging with each text, it became apparent that there were common themes across the novels (e.g., the role of the stepmother, the differences in the two stepsisters). In addition to these elements, the identifying of themes allowed me to address traditional masculinity and femininity and their
relationship with agency as a big-picture finding. This section discussing thematic findings was
once again reviewed with collaborating researchers in order to strengthen ideas and attend to
trustworthiness.

In the following chapters, I will present the findings concerning the relationship between
traditional masculinity and femininity and agency. This will occur with both the individual
novels and looking for themes across the novels as a group. I will then conclude with a summary
of the findings, implications about their usefulness for education and young adult readers, and
recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER 4

Findings

Using critical multicultural analysis with a specific focus on traditional masculinity, femininity, and agency, I analyzed six young adult Cinderella novelizations. In the following sections, five main archetypal roles are examined in each novel: Cinderella, the prince, the stepmother, the fairy godmother, and the stepsisters. Each character was analyzed for traditionally feminine, masculine, or neutral traits using both the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) (1974) and the power categories explained by Botelho and Rudman (2009). Because some of the novelizations took significant liberties with the original tale, the depth to which each character is examined varies from book to book.

Ash

Ash by Malinda Lo (2009), uses a traditional fairy tale backdrop setting, complete with enchanted forests and magic spells, to create an untraditional heroine: a lesbian Cinderella. Because both romantic leads are female, Lo’s characters provide readers with a contrast in women enacting agency in different ways. The novel Ash allows the reader to examine several characters, particularly two female leads, and see how they enact agency differently. Ash, who spends a majority of the novel either as an indentured servant to her stepmother or at the beck and call of a malevolent fairy, and Kaisa, who exemplifies compassion through her relationship with Ash and independence in her career as the king’s huntress, demonstrate how characters across the spectrum of traditional masculinity and femininity can exercise agency in unique but significant ways.
Cinderella and Her Love Interest

Ash and her love interest, Kaisa, are both traditionally feminine characters. Ash chooses to spend much of her time in the woods, interacting with animals and searching out the fairies she admires from her late mother’s fairy tales. Her forest wanderings reveal Ash to be gentle and loyal to her family; both of these characteristics appear as feminine traits under the BSRI. She interacts with people in a similar way. Even though her stepfamily mistreats her, she still shows affection towards them. In one case, when talking with her stepsister Clara, “on impulse Ash went to her stepsister and embraced her” (Lo, 2009, p. 261). Ash’s ability to show affection, especially in moments of hardship, indicate her traditional femininity.

The book Ash (Lo, 2009) is unique because readers have the opportunity to see two women as the romantic leads, allowing for more nuance in how traditionally feminine traits can be understood. Kaisa, Ash’s love interest, displays more variety in her characteristics, but still leans towards traditional femininity. Kaisa is seen exclusively wearing masculine clothing, such as breeches, and hunts for a living. However, a woman leading the king’s hunt isn’t seen as unusual, as “hunts had always been led by women” (p. 47). Because of her kingdom’s traditions, it is important to note that these two items, wearing pants and hunting for a career, may not have the same gender role implications as they do in our world. However, readers will most view these two traits as traditionally masculine.

Throughout Ash’s relationship with Kaisa, though, Kaisa comes across as traditionally female. Kaisa is thoughtful and soft-spoken throughout their interactions, both traditionally feminine traits according to Bem’s measures (1974). She provides riding clothes for Ash so she can teach her how to ride on horseback, and seemingly has a sixth sense about the best times to visit Ash so she doesn’t get in trouble with her stepfamily. Through compassion and sensitivity
to Ash’s needs, Kaisa reveals herself to be a traditionally feminine character. In another interaction after a successful season-opening hunt, Ash notices Kaisa looking at the dead stag, and that she “still stood with her back to the others. [Ash] put a hand on the huntress’s shoulder and asked, ‘Is everything as it should be?’ There were tears in Kaisa’s eyes, and they ran down her cheeks as she answered, ‘Yes.’ (Lo, 2009, p. 177). Even while acting in what is typically seen as a masculine career, Kaisa shows a gentleness and sensitivity that emphasizes her traditional femininity.

Just as these two women exhibit traditionally feminine attributes in different ways, they exercise power differently throughout the novel. Part of the reason for the difference in power between Kaisa and Ash is due to their societal positions. Kaisa is a high-ranking member of the king’s court, while Ash is the neglected stepdaughter of a conniving woman. However, both women act agentically in their own way.

Because Kaisa is not the protagonist, the reader sees fewer of her decisions. However, there are a number of instances in which it becomes obvious that she is free to act as she pleases. She makes the decision to become an apprentice to the King’s huntress, eventually rising to the revered role herself. As mentioned previously, she visits Ash quite frequently when her stepmother is away, and she extends Ash an invitation to both the opening hunt and the prince’s ball. At the ball, she takes Ash to a nearby hallway to talk, saying, “‘Come, we can leave the ball for a moment’” (Lo, 2009, p. 251). Kaisa is well aware of what she can and cannot do in these situations. She has the freedom to act as she pleases and demonstrates arguably the most amount of agency throughout the book.

Ash takes a little longer, but eventually, she too demonstrates agency. After moving to the city from her childhood home near the forest, Ash is basically enslaved by her stepmother,
who forces Ash to be the only domestic help in the house. When she first gets a free moment, though, “she took her cloak and went out the kitchen door and did not look back” (Lo, 2009, p. 62). She spends every spare minute wandering outside near the woods. Reflecting an independence indicative of a traditional masculinity, she exerts her own agency to get back to her roots. She never strays too far, though, and always returns to the domination of her stepmother.

**The Stepmother**

Lady Isobel’s character is very similar to her stepmother counterpart in the original fairy tale. She marries Ash’s father, who quickly dies after moving to Isobel’s home city. She immediately puts Ash to work, eventually letting the other servants go and leaving Ash to manage the household alone. She blames Ash’s father for her need to work, claiming that “if he had not left so many debts, you might have had a lady’s upbringing. But the best you can hope for now, Aisling, is to be a lady’s maid” (Lo, 2009, p. 80). Isobel, recognizing the comfortable life Ash could have had as the daughter of a merchant, relegates her to the role of a servant. The force she uses in her treatment of Ash comes across as traditionally masculine, as well as an attempt to reduce Ash’s agency.

While condemning her stepdaughter to servitude, Lady Isobel demonstrates great ambition in finding a worthy match for her daughters. She instructs them on how to attract a wealthy suitor, telling them to,

> Remember to be subtle. He must know that you are comfortable with the luxuries of life, and yet at the same time, you should not be too comfortable with them—after all, what will he give you if you seem to already have everything? (Lo, 2009, p. 194)

Isobel’s manipulative training of her daughters reveals her ambitious nature. Ambition is a masculine trait on the BSRI, and Lady Isobel’s demonstration of ambition leads the reader to
view Isobel as a traditionally masculine character. Her skew towards traditional masculinity, as well as the forceful treatment of her stepdaughter, create a solid connection between masculinity and the attempt to reduce Ash’s agency.

Ash has moments, though, especially towards the end of the novel, where she resists her stepmother and acts with greater agency than leaving the house for a few hours a week. Many of these instances happen in relation to pursuing a relationship with Kaisa. When Kaisa asks her to attend the season-opening hunt, Ash requests help from the fairies to help her get there, going against the express orders of her stepmother. By doing so, Ash finally resists the domination of her stepmother and acts for herself. A similar event occurs when she goes to the prince’s ball: she is forbidden to attend but is helped by otherworldly powers to see Kaisa. However, this time, she is caught by her stepmother when she returns home and is punished by having her beautiful long hair cut short. Rather than submit to this treatment, Ash “glanced up at her stepmother and said deliberately, ‘Thank you. I think it suits me’” (Lo, 2009, p. 225). This is the moment where Ash most resists her stepmother, and it comes when Ash acts with the mostly traditionally masculine traits.

**The Magical Helper**

In addition to standing up to her stepfamily, Ash also exercises resistance in defying the expectations of the powerful fairy Sidhean. Sidhean, assuming the role of the fairy godmother, plays a large part in Ash’s life. Because Sidhean is a fairy, Ash is instantly interested in him, and he seems to humor her interest by telling her stories and revealing aspects of the fairy realm to her. In addition, Sidhean provides Ash with the help to momentarily escape her stepmother. However, these interactions rarely happen out of selfless kindness. Instead, his comments reveal both strong, traditionally masculine traits as well as an intent to take away Ash’s agency. For
example, when helping her return to her mother’s grave, he tells Ash “You have no choice...I will take you there” (Lo, 2009, p. 68). He promises to help her get to the opening hunt and the prince’s ball, but only with the understanding that “you shall be mine” (p. 162). Even then, the enchanted items he grants her begin “telling her feet and legs where to move” (p. 212), greatly restricting Ash’s ability to act for herself. Rather than bestowing a gift from the kindness of his heart, then, this version of the fairy godmother only gives when expecting a return, and each of his gifts come on his terms. His demonstration of domination and force, both masculine traits according to the BSRI, are so entwined with his restriction of Ash’s agency that it creates a clear connection between traditional masculinity and domination. These interactions portray Sidhean as not the kind, generous fairy godmother from the original, but as cold and calculating, traditionally masculine and dominating.

Ash, however deferential in the beginning, eventually challenges Sidhean. In fact, her defining moment of agency comes as she defies the fairy:

Sidhean, for many years, you have been my only friend though such a friendship is by definition a queer one, for your people and mine are not meant to love one another. But you said that you have been cursed to love me, and I have realized that if the curse is strong—and if you truly love me—then you will set me free. (Lo, 2009, p. 254)

This is the moment in which Ash acts with the most agency, and it comes as she stands up to the most powerful force in her life. As she defends herself and her beliefs, a masculine trait, it leads her to agency.

Through the characterization of two prominent female characters, *Ash* (Lo, 2009) compares and contrasts both their traditionally masculine and feminine traits and how they affect their ability to act agentically. Kaisa, who exhibits many traditionally masculine traits in her
profession, demonstrates a number of traditionally feminine traits in her personal life and interactions with Ash. Meanwhile, Ash, who predominantly shows traditionally feminine traits throughout the novel, expresses traditionally masculine traits when standing up to Lady Isobel and Sidhean, the two dominating forces in her life. Overall, the novel Ash (Lo, 2009) demonstrates how characters utilizing both traditional masculinity and femininity can exercise agency in unique but significant ways.

The Blood Spell

*The Blood Spell* (2019) by C. J. Redwine answers the question: What if Cinderella had magic powers, too? This novel portrays a range of characters manifesting qualities from all categories in the BSRI, who draw heavily from both traditionally masculine and feminine traits depending on the situation. This novel reveals the circumstantial nature of traditional masculinity and femininity and how each can help enact agency in different situations, especially in the examples of both the Cinderella character and her love interest, the prince.

Cinderella

*The Blood Spell’s* (Redwine, 2019) female protagonist is Blue. She demonstrates the most variety of traits of all the Cinderella characters in the selection, at times showing traditional femininity, and traditional masculinity at others. While her ability to switch between these traits enables Blue to act with agency much of the time, her moments of traditional femininity often result in a loss of agency.

A unique traditionally feminine trait Blue embodies is her love for children. She is passionate about helping the orphan children in her village and frequently employs them with chores around her family’s apothecary, hoping it will lead them to better jobs and, in turn, better lives for themselves. At the beginning of the book, though, her concern extends beyond their
future employment: several young homeless children have mysteriously disappeared. Strangely, Blue seems to be the only one who notices or cares about the disappearance of these children. Her concern and care for these children implies traditionally feminine characteristics. Even though the quality of “loves children” has been removed in more recent revisions of the BSRI (Geldenhuys & Bosch, 2017), Blue’s concern for the children in the kingdom relate to other traditionally feminine traits: compassion, sensitivity to the needs of others, and understanding. In a sense, Blue uses her traditionally feminine traits to help others find agency for themselves.

Blue also shows great affection and gentleness towards those close to her, most notably her father and her young friend, Princess Nessa. Blue and her father run the apothecary together, and Blue notices how “sometimes when he thought she wasn’t watching, he leaned heavily against the shop’s counter at the end of the day as if being on his feet for hours on end was wearing on him” (Redwine, 2019, p. 5). Her sensitivity to his troubles and needs appear as traditionally feminine traits according to the BSRI, as does her sensitivity to Nessa, the deaf princess with whom she is friends. She communicates with Nessa using sign language, as “she’d always thought it was polite to use Nessa’s form of communication as much as possible,” (p. 21). With both of these examples coming early in the book, it sets Blue up as a traditionally feminine character from the onset.

While she demonstrates an abundance of traditionally feminine traits, Blue also exhibits several traditionally masculine traits. She essentially runs the apothecary shop with her father, and completely takes it over after his death, showing strong self-reliance and independence. Even her work with alchemy promotes her analytical side, a characteristic associated with traditional masculinity on the BSRI. These traits, combined with the traditionally feminine ones she also expresses, make Blue an example of what Bem would call an androgynous character.
This mix of masculine and feminine traits manifest themselves in Blue’s dealing with her stepmother figure, Dinah. Where before the combination of traits benefits Blue in some instances, dealing with Dinah proves to be far more difficult for her. When Dinah reveals her family is in financial trouble, Blue agrees to help Dinah. After the exchange, Dinah’s thoughts reveal that “her plan to gain Blue’s sympathy had worked” (Redwine, 2019, p. 181). Blue acts sympathetically, a traditionally feminine trait according to the BSRI, and the result is essentially forced servitude to Dinah. As she attempts to perfect her alchemy formulas in order to help Dinah financially, Blue gives away much of her agency and ends up colluding against herself.

The ultimate combination of traits comes when Blue selflessly sacrifices herself to save the kingdom from the wraith Dinah created. Through the magic passed down from her mother, she drinks poison and binds it with her blood in order to lure the monster and destroy it. In doing so, Blue demonstrates several feminine traits, such as sensitivity to others’ needs and loyalty to her family and friends, in addition to masculine characteristics, such as being analytical and taking risks. She needs both in order to vanquish the monster, demonstrating the possibility of using multiple traits to achieve agency.

The Prince

Blue isn’t the only character in the novel with a mix of traits; the prince also demonstrates a variety of characteristics on both sides of the BSRI. Blue’s prince is Kellan, whose recent passing of his father means he will soon take the throne. Kellan is a multidimensional character in that the reader sees several sides of him throughout the novel. The traits Kellan demonstrates tend to depend on whom he is interacting with at the time, showing that there is a time and a place for each of these traits.
When the reader first sees Kellan from Blue’s perspective, she finds him participating in a street fight, “as if risking his life, the betrothal, the fate of the kingdom, and the freedom of the other fighter was all a game” (Redwine, 2019, p. 70). Although Blue clearly disapproves of her annoying childhood friend taking these risks, Kellan continues to find ways to take dangerous chances. Away from the presence of others, Kellan also frequently goes to the sea to cliff dive. “There were a hundred ways it could all go wrong, and for the first time since Kellan had set foot in Balavata again, he felt wonderfully, gloriously alive” (p. 60). In these rash moments, Kellan’s traditional masculinity comes out.

However, because the third person perspective alternates between Blue and Kellan, the reader also sees how Kellan enacts masculine traits in his professional life. As he trains to become king, he frequently acts with great leadership skills in order to get the best outcome for himself, his family, and the kingdom. He starts a meeting addressing the unknown witch loose in the city by asserting, “‘It’s important that we have a strong, measured response, and equally important that our response is highly visible,’” (Redwine, 2019, p. 155). When a council member questions his plan, he responds calmly, but with authority: “To belabor the point would cost Kellan the ground he’d won, so he turned away from Martin and said, ‘We need a public response because people are panicking, and people do foolish things when they panic,’” (p. 156). This event with the council, one of several the reader sees throughout the book, demonstrates Kellan’s ability to take charge and be analytical in his new position of power. Ultimately, his plans are carried out, showing that his use of traditionally masculine traits grants him agency both as a leader and as an individual.

Although Kellan predominantly exhibits traditionally masculine qualities, he also has moments of traditional femininity, especially in dealing with his family, and later Blue. After
returning home from boarding school, he greets his younger sister with great affection: “Nessa!” His heart lightened, and the first genuine smile of the afternoon lit his face as she ran towards him. Sweeping her up in his arms, he laughed. ‘You’ve grown, little bird’” (Redwine, 2019, p. 30). Earlier, in a conversation with his mother about Nessa and her deafness, Kellan reacts loyally to her concerns: “‘Nessa isn’t weak,’ he said quietly. ‘And she is perfectly capable of ruling should something happen to me’” (p. 29). Through these interactions with and around his younger sister, Kellan demonstrates the traditionally feminine traits of loyalty and gentleness. Kellan acts differently with those close to him.

As Kellan grows to consider Blue a part of that small circle, he begins to show her his traditionally feminine side. After Blue’s father dies, with whom Kellan was also especially close, Kellan shows Blue great kindness and affection. Kellan takes her away from unkind and curious questions about her father’s death and “simply wrapped his arm around Blue and led her away” (Redwine, 2019, p. 104). Later, Blue admits “there was something warm and comforting” (p. 135) about the presence of her former irritant. Especially in Blue’s case, where she sees Kellan go from traditionally masculine to traditionally feminine qualities, it becomes apparent that Kellan can demonstrate both and determining which to use based on what’s going on around him. Out of all the characters in the study, Kellan best exemplifies how gendered traits can be situational. Kellan’s balance of both traditionally masculine and feminine traits allows him to support those around him as well as achieve his own goals, acting agentically in each situation.

Because both Kellan and Blue are complex characters with a mix of traits, their comparison is valuable to the conversation around agency and the effect of traditional masculinity and femininity. Both Blue and Kellan tend to demonstrate more traditionally masculine traits, such as being analytical and assertive, in their professional lives. Similarly, they
each also demonstrate more traditionally feminine traits, like sensitivity and gentleness, while interacting with loved ones. However, Blue, the female character, is the one who is manipulated for those feminine traits; Dinah specifically appeals to her generosity to trick Blue into helping her. When Dinah tries something similar with Kellan in a council meeting, he immediately ignores her efforts to dissuade him and gets the meeting back on track. Blue defaults to traditional femininity and sensitivity while Kellan goes to analysis, a traditionally masculine trait.

**The Stepmother**

Dinah is easily the most nefarious of all the stepmother characters of the novels in the study. While the others may have just made Cinderella miserable, Dinah seeks to unleash her blood-sucking alter ego upon the kingdom. Her pursuit of power leads Dinah to act with traditionally masculine traits almost exclusively.

Dinah is a unique stepmother character because she was never married to Blue’s father; she became Blue’s stepmother through an adoption scheme in which she killed Blue’s father. In this case, she is also the only woman to willingly take on a new daughter, but she does so only to further reach her ultimate goal of usurping the throne. Although her motives differ from the other stepmothers, her actions remain similar: she places Blue in a form of servitude and holds her position of authority over her head. Dinah also exhibits the most violent tendencies of any of the stepmother figures. At one point after her father’s death, Blue contemplates:

She’d never imagined herself in a position where someone with power over her could slap her, pinch her, and shove her against the hot stove, but she’d always thought she was the kind of girl who wouldn’t take that kind of abuse without a fight. But somehow things were more complicated than that. Dinah was bigger, stronger, and had the ironclad legal
power of Blue’s guardianship on her side. The woman could simply claim she was
disciplining her charge, or that it had been an accident, and the law would support her.

(Redwine, 2019, p. 210)

This passage directly addresses Blue’s lack of power in the situation; it demonstrates not only the
emotional and physical abuse that Blue suffers at the hand of Dinah, but how her legal know-
how places her at an advantage. The unequal power dynamic in their relationship demonstrates
domination and aggressiveness on Dinah’s part, both traditionally masculine traits.

Even when Dinah uses traditionally feminine traits, her purpose is to assert domination
over others. She adopts Blue in a show of great compassion, but that’s all it was: a show. Once in
Blue’s home, she is abusive and domineering. Her false femininity goes beyond her treatment of
Blue as well; in a council meeting with Kellan, she poses a question to the prince, “her voice
kind, as if he was too young to realize how things actually worked” (Redwine, 2019, p. 157). She
uses a gentle tone, a mark of traditional femininity, in a way to intimidate and reinforce her
superiority. Just as Blue and Kellan use traditional masculinity and femininity based on the
situation, Dinah wields femininity as a tool to manipulate others and to gain more power.

The Magical Helper

Blue’s fairy godmother, her biological grandmother in this case, is arguably the most
similar to the magical being from the original. Grand-mère, as Blue calls her, possesses magical
powers and uses common, every-day items such as mice, pumpkins, and beautiful shoes to help
Blue. However, her close familial relationship to the Cinderella character lends some additional
investment to their interactions; where the original fairy godmother stands somewhat apart from
the mortals’ drama, Grand-mère is in the thick of it as Blue’s grandmother. She treats Blue with
great kindness and gentleness, especially after her father dies. When Blue, her granddaughter and only family, needs extra affection, she is more than willing to give it.

Blue also knows that Grand-mère is fierce. Blue describes her grandmother’s voice as “soft, but there was stone underneath it…” (Redwine, 2019, p. 43). This strong foundation is seen later as Grand-mère interacts with Dinah and reveals more traditionally masculine traits. When Dinah first enters their lives, Grand-mère tells Dinah she can move into the farmhouse with Blue “over my dead body” (p. 109). While this particular confrontation doesn’t change the outcome of the situation as Dinah has the law on her side, Grand-mère asserts herself on behalf of her granddaughter. Her preference for traditional masculinity in this instance is a result of her fierce protection of Blue and the desire for her happiness and welfare. Even if it didn’t result in the preferred outcome, her purpose was to protect and support her family member.

More than any other novel in the study, the characters in The Blood Spell (Redwine, 2019) demonstrate how situational traditionally masculine and feminine traits can be. Generally speaking, when dealing with loved ones, characters prefer traditionally feminine traits, and when trying to act on their own behalf, or on behalf of others, they act with more traditionally masculine characteristics. In the case of the Cinderella character specifically, it is the combination of traits that leads to ultimate agency.

Bound

Bound (Napoli, 2004) takes the Cinderella story back to its possible ancient Chinese origins, first recorded in the Tang Dynasty, a period between 618 and 907, by Duan Chengshi (Zhang, 2009). This retelling by Donna Jo Napoli has all of the elements you would expect in a modern Cinderella retelling: a wicked stepmother, magical intervention, and a mistreated, yet resilient, heroine. Xing Xing, the main character, may appear to the modern reader as
traditionally feminine, but when placed in context of the ancient Chinese time period, Xing Xing stands out as a progressive female character.

**Cinderella**

Xing Xing begins as a typical submissive Cinderella character; she cooks and cleans for her stepmother and stepsister, constantly doing their bidding. Stepmother, who is only ever referred to by this title, frequently threatens to deny food or shelter to Xing Xing, “hoping that hunger would spur her to do her errand as quickly as she could” (Napoli, 2004, p. 64). By threatening to withhold basic needs, Xing Xing’s stepmother exerts domination over her, leaving Xing Xing in many ways powerless. At several points in the story, the third person limited point of view reveals how Xing Xing herself feels about their relationship: "Xing Xing’s life had been reduced to hardly more than a slave girl since Father’s death” (p. 22), and “[Stepmother] could get anything she wanted just by ordering Xing Xing around” (p. 123). Even Xing Xing recognizes her limited agency in the situation.

However, most of these acts of servitude are accompanied by kind, forgiving thoughts. For example, Xing Xing makes breakfast for Wei Ping, her stepsister, because she was ordered by her stepmother, but also because “[Wei Ping] felt so poorly these days that Xing Xing didn’t want to allow even that small amount of extra discomfort” (Napoli, 2004, p. 3). In another instance, she brings home a raccoon kit for Wei Ping, something to bring her entertainment while going through the painful foot-binding process. Xing Xing demonstrates compassion throughout these interactions with her stepfamily. They treat her terribly, and she continually empathizes with them.
The Stepmother and The Stepsister

The interactions between Xing Xing her stepfamily are rife with implications concerning the link between masculinity and agency. According to the BSRI, compassion and empathy are traditionally feminine traits. Combining Xing Xing’s compassionate nature and the way Stepmother and Wei Ping consistently take advantage of her, a connection can be made between acting femininely and loss of agency. Thus, as Xing Xing acts with traditionally feminine traits, she loses the ability to act for herself.

Xing Xing’s Agency

In addition to choosing to act with compassion, there are two major ways in which Xing Xing defies much of the traditional feminine roles for her time period; she takes great joy in reading and especially writing, and those skills allow her greater agency throughout her story. She also refrains from the ancient Chinese tradition of foot binding, which allows for more physical agency. With these two major diversions from her contemporary culture, Xing Xing demonstrates great agency.

Literacy. Xing Xing’s late father taught her to read, teaching her skills in “the three perfections: painting, poetry, and calligraphy” (Napoli, 2004, p. 13). Xing Xing values those skills and uses them frequently. Not everyone around Xing Xing thinks that literacy is important for women, though. When Wei Ping, Xing Xing’s stepsister, decides to discontinue her calligraphy and reading lessons, “Stepmother was relieved; an educated girl would be harder to marry off” (p. 13). Clearly, literate women were the exception to the rule at this time, and by reading and writing, Xing Xing sets herself apart from other women. Even though a modern reader may not appreciate the uniqueness in Xing Xing’s literacy, it moves her away from traditional femininity.
Xing Xing’s literacy, though, also provides her with a great deal of agency. She uses her valuable knowledge to benefit herself and her family several times throughout the story. Xing Xing trades her poems, written in beautiful calligraphy, to a neighbor for extra money. About halfway through the novel, Stepmother sends Xing Xing to a neighboring town in order to obtain a medicinal remedy for Wei Ping’s feet, infected from binding. The lang zhong, or doctor, only agrees to help Xing Xing when she demonstrated her calligraphy skills and she assisted him in relabeling his medicine bottles. When needing a return trip to her hometown, she writes a poem on the sails of the ship that gives her passage in exchange for payment. In each of these instances, Xing Xing was able to use the skills she had gained to not only to benefit her family monetarily, but to help herself get places she would not be able to go on her own.

Footbinding. In addition to the ability to read and write, Xing Xing differs from her female contemporaries in another way; while the two other female characters in the book have bound feet, or are in the process of foot binding, Xing Xing does not. Although Western audiences may see foot binding as archaic and cruel to women, it is important to view the process in context of the culture in which it occurred. Dorothy Ko (2007), who argues for a less condemning and more complex examination of the women with bound feet and the society which encouraged them, asks her readers to seek “to understand the powerful forces that made binding feet a conventional practice for them” and “to locate the woman’s agency and subjectivity” (p. 1) in the exercise. It is necessary to look at this aspect of the novel for two reasons: firstly, most of the book’s events occur because of Wei Ping’s currently bound feet and the complications that arise because of her condition. Secondly, the book is titled Bound (Napoli, 2004), reflecting Xing Xing’s restricted nature as she navigates life with her oppressive
stepmother and stepsister. The content of the book, as well as Xing Xing’s agency, deals directly with the idea of being bound and its implications for its characters.

Foot binding plays an essential role in this story. Tyler Scott Smith (2013) commented on the original Chinese tale of Ye Xian and its relationship with foot binding: “Her beauty and worth were all based on the fact that she was the only girl in the kingdom with feet small enough to fit the slipper…She is still only recognized and appreciated by the king for the size of her feet” (p. 6). Having small feet as a result of foot binding was looked upon favorably in this time period and can be considered a feminine trait. When Stepmother has two matchmakers come to visit Wei Ping, they “had taken one look at Wei Ping’s long feet and declared her not marriageable to a man of their social class” (Napoli, 2004, p. 32). Obviously, to remedy this issue of eligibility, Wei Ping’s feet must be bound.

While the unnaturally small feet may have been aesthetically appealing to certain people of the day, they also limit movement. Xing Xing watches her stepmother leave for town, noting that “her gait was unsteady as she hobbles on the heels of those small feet” (Napoli, 2004, p. 31). Wei Ping, whose feet are in the process of being bound, is completely helpless. She can move only with the help of furniture, and rides in a wheelbarrow when going to the festival. Stepmother and Wei Ping’s ability to do anything for themselves is severely hindered by their bound feet, making them dependent on others, especially Xing Xing.

Because both Stepmother and Wei Ping struggle with movement, Xing Xing is asked to do many of the household chores. She is constantly on call to clean, cook, and run errands for her family. However, Xing Xing’s unbound feet also provide her with the ability to complete tasks that her family members cannot. She can walk through the forest unhindered to retrieve food and travel easily to town to barter with the neighbors. She also travels frequently with ease to visit
her fish friend at the nearby pond, something that Stepmother does later with some difficulty. Her unbound feet allow her great mobility and allow her to accomplish tasks to help her family and to help herself. Xing Xing’s variance from traditionally feminine traits brings her agency. The addition of footbinding to this tale not only allows for a stark contrast in agency among the Chinese women, but also gives the story a distinctly Chinese touch.

The Magical Helper

Another way in which this novelization of the tale reflects its Chinese origins is the variation on the character of the fairy godmother. The magical being who helps Xing Xing is a fish she finds in a nearby pond. After visiting it several times, Xing Xing decides that the fish is the spirit of her dead mother. When swimming in the pond, “at last Xing Xing understood. Oh, she should have known all along: The beautiful fish was the reincarnation of Mother. They were together again at last,” (Napoli, 2004, p. 117). Through this rebirth of her mother’s spirit, Xing Xing finds her version of the fairy godmother.

The carp ends up being a catalyst for agency for Xing Xing. She seeks it out regularly and brings it home as a pet. She considers it her friend and confidant. Then, when Stepmother catches and eats the fish, she retrieves the bones to give them a proper burial. When she buries them near her mother’s grave, she finds a note and gifts from her mother: a beautiful jade dress and tiny slippers for her small feet. She uses these items to attend the Cave Festival without the permission of Stepmother. Eventually, the mystery surrounding the beautiful girl and her lost shoe are what sends the prince looking for her and their consequent marriage.

The Prince

The prince makes a late appearance in this iteration of Cinderella, only showing up in the last eight pages. While his presence in the story is limited, it presents Xing Xing with great
opportunity. He comes with Xing Xing’s tiny slipper and is soon disappointed when it does not fit Wei Ping or Stepmother. As she contemplates how to get his attention, Xing Xing feels that,

Everything became as clear and sharp as a sword point. Her choices boiled down to marrying the prince or wandering far and wide, saying crazy things, becoming the person Stepmother accused her of being. Without a plan and without logic, she leaped into the fire, the freedom and risk rendering her euphoric. (Napoli, 2004, p. 180)

In this moment, Xing Xing recognizes the choice placed before her and the opportunity to exercise agency. In this case, the prince acts more as a catalyst for Xing Xing’s change than a fleshed-out character or love interest. He represents the opportunity to make a choice and escape the bound life she has been living.

One could argue that his character highlights female helplessness; the only way in which any of these three women could escape poverty was marriage. As the wealthiest man in the province, the prince is the best chance for a changed life. Try as they may, the three women in the household are incapable of bettering their own lives. Stepmother insists that “Wei Ping would be married before the storeroom was empty, though, so they had no cause for fear. Wei Ping’s husband would take care of all of them” (Napoli, 2004, p. 22). She has no motivation to fill the storehouse herself because she would rather wait for a man to do it. Similarly, when the opportunity presents itself to meet the prince, she goes against the tradition of widows and the claims she made earlier in the story that she would never remarry and makes herself eligible. “I’d never marry an ordinary man. But this is different. No one would want me to give up such a chance. It’s a prince, after all. A prince” (p. 171). She continues to defend her decision by insisting: “It would be the best life for Wei Ping...It would be the best life for Xing Xing, too. For all the Wu children” (p. 171). Stepmother is unable to imagine their lives improving without
a man. However, Xing Xing has proven throughout her actions in the novel that she is capable of making the best of hard situations. Her interaction with, and eventual marriage to, the prince further reinforces her ability to make bold choices to improve her situation.

The prince may seem to be a flat character whose only role is to save Xing Xing from her situation, but he clearly values Xing Xing’s independence, brought about in part by her literacy and her nonconformity to Chinese foot binding. Upon his proposal to her, Xing Xing admits “I can read and write.” Undeterred, the prince responds “So can I.” Xing Xing continues: “My feet are not bound.” The prince replies resolutely: “I noticed” (Napoli, 2004, p. 184). Both practices which set Xing Xing apart from the traditional Chinese woman in that time have no effect on her eligibility in the eyes of the prince. In straying from the confines of traditionally female activities, Xing Xing escapes the confines of her life with her stepfamily and begins a new life as wife of the prince. Her masculine traits are what grant her freedom.

Even though Xing Xing appears to be a traditionally feminine character, her interest in reading and writing as well as her unbound feet, remove her from the realm of traditional femininity for the time period. This separation allows her to make choices that ultimately liberate her from her place of servitude and poverty.

**Cinder**

*Cinder* (2012) by Marissa Meyer is probably the most well-known of the adaptations as it spent time on the New York Times Bestseller List (Bestseller List: Children’s Chapter Books, 2012). Even though this novel takes place in the distant future, the characters demonstrate various characteristics that resonate with a contemporary audience. *Cinder* (Meyer, 2012) puts forth a variety of characters that fall in all categories of the BSRI, including a traditionally
masculine female protagonist, while putting a science fiction twist on the classic fairy tale of Cinderella.

*Cinderella*

The protagonist of this story is Cinder, a human cyborg. She has very little memory of her early life; she only knows she was adopted by a man who died shortly after returning her home to his family, and she has mechanical body parts. Cinder works as a mechanic to support her stepfamily, which some find surprising. When Prince Kai first meets her in the market, he is surprised to see the highly recommended mechanic is a woman. “They say you’re the best mechanic in New Beijing. I was expecting an old man” (Meyer, 2012, p. 10). Even though the novel takes place in the far future, after a fictional fourth World War, it is interesting to note that there is still an element of shock when a young woman is involved with engineering or science. This encounter, which occurs in the first scene of the book, points to Cinder’s tendency towards traditionally masculine traits and sets up the reader to perceive her as a traditionally masculine character. She demonstrates other traditionally masculine traits throughout the book, most consistently her self-sufficiency: she has plans to refurbish a car in order to leave her stepfamily and New Beijing, and she visits her quarantined stepsister without permission. Even in a brief comment, Cinder’s body is described as masculine: “If Cinder’s body had ever been predisposed to femininity, it had been ruined by whatever the surgeons had done to her, leaving her with a stick-straight figure. Too angular. Too boyish” (Meyer, 2012, p. 34). Even in her physical appearance, Cinder conveys traditional masculinity in her characteristics.

However, Cinder also demonstrates traditionally feminine traits as well. She shows compassion to her neighbor who contracted the deadly plague letumosis even though they have a rocky history, and when Prince Kai’s father dies, she is sympathetic to his grief and concerns
about the kingdom, telling him, “You’re going to be one of those emperors that everyone loves and admires,” (Meyer, 2012, p. 228). These specific moments show that Cinder’s actions are not purely masculine, but also represent traditionally feminine traits as well. Overall, Cinder demonstrates a variety of characteristics across the BSRI, making her a fairly androgynous character.

Cinder’s androgyny and expression of both traditionally masculine and feminine traits contribute to her enactment of agency. For example, when she visits Peony, her stepsister, in quarantine, she is drawing on both traditionally feminine and masculine traits. She uses her self-sufficiency and willingness to take a stand to get her into the building, but it is her compassion for and loyalty to her stepsister that drew her there in the first place. Similarly, she goes to the ball against Dr. Erland’s judgement in order to stop Levana. She demonstrates taking a stand against a powerful enemy, showing masculinity, but does it out of affection and loyalty for Kai, showing femininity. Cinder’s use of both traditionally masculine and feminine traits allows her to make choices that benefit her and help those around her. She represents a character who uses both sides of her personality to act agentically.

**The Prince**

*Cinder*’s prince is Prince Kai, who becomes the emperor of New Beijing after his father’s death. In many of his personal interactions, Kai comes across with traditionally feminine traits. Especially in dealing with his father, Kai demonstrates warmth and compassion. He attends to him at his deathbed, reflecting on “years’ worth of worry and anguish rolled into so few hours” (Meyer, 2012, p. 104). When he reunites with Cinder at the ball, he expresses condolences over the recent loss of her stepsister. His obvious concern and affection for his father, as well as the sympathy he gives Cinder, demonstrate traditionally feminine characteristics.
There is another side to Prince Kai. The late emperor’s death also means dealing personally with Queen Levana, the ruler of the moon who seeks to marry Prince Kai and take over his kingdom. Levana and other Lunar people have the ability to manipulate reality, so Kai uses multiple tactics to keep himself thinking for himself: “He jabbed his fingers into his palms as hard as he could, nearly yelping from the pain, but it worked. The queen’s control was disintegrated” (Meyer, 2012, p. 18). Additionally, when Cinder first catches a glimpse of him at the ball, he is dancing with Levana stoically with an “expression as unfeeling as stone as they waltzed across the marble floor” (p. 331). His well thought out reaction to Levana and her power show how analytical he can be, a traditionally masculine trait.

Along with his great caution and forethought in dealing with Levana, the situation she puts him in forces him into taking leadership responsibility right away. Readers see him meet with other major world leaders and hold his own in the discussion, especially important since his kingdom has the most to lose in negotiations with Levana and the Lunar people. Showing leadership skills is listed as a traditionally masculine trait under Bem’s (1974) sex roles, but it also is a way for Kai to act agentically and make difficult choices on behalf of his people.

In these interactions with the queen and other world leaders, Kai tries his best to assert independence. Even with constant manipulation from every side, he carefully weighs his options and tries to make the best decision for the kingdom and himself. Especially as Levana’s power and manipulation of reality has the potential to take away his ability to act for himself, his precautions are essential for his decisions. This shows a careful pursuit of agency, aided by his traditionally masculine traits of standing up for one’s beliefs and being analytical. It is only as Kai exercises these traits that he has any control over the precarious situation.
The Stepmother

Cinder’s stepmother Adri is a recognizable stepmother character. Even the title is an indication of her role; technically, Adri’s late husband adopted Cinder, but Cinder still refers to Adri as her stepmother, if not sometimes further distancing their relationships by calling Adri her legal guardian. Just like Cinderella’s stepmother, Adri is forceful. She forces Cinder to work at the family booth in the market with no pay for herself and denies her the cyborg parts she needs as she grows. She also clearly favors her own daughters over Cinder, illustrated by the dress-fitting they are engaged in and going out of their way to exclude Cinder when the reader first meets Adri and her daughters.

Adri’s character goes beyond simply forcing her legal ward to work in indentured servitude; she also sells Cinder to the program experimenting on human cyborgs in an attempt to find a cure to letumosis. Adri had made some questionable choices on behalf of Cinder before, but it is this moment where she truly deprives Cinder of the opportunity to choose for herself. She essentially condemns Cinder to death, even ensuring android guards are present to remove her from their home. All the while, Adri insists she has a right to do so, telling Cinder it’s acceptable “so long as you are under my guardianship” (Meyer, 2012, p. 67). Adri denies Cinder the opportunity to act for herself through the events of the book, exemplifying an abundance of traditionally masculine traits throughout.

The Magical Helper

The fairy godmother character is Dr. Erland, a male Lunar refugee. His many interactions with Cinder at first make him appear sympathetic: he gently explains her immunity to letumosis, dutifully keeps her cyborg secret safe from the prince, and loyally rescues her from prison when Levana imprisons her. At first, Dr. Erland seems to favor traditionally feminine traits. However,
each of these events are shaded with suspicion. Later in the novel, readers learn that the reason he implemented the cyborg volunteer program was in order to find the lost Lunar princess. This program subjected a number of innocent cyborgs, who are still human, to a lethal virus with no known cure. Dr. Erland clearly takes no joy from this process; when a middle-aged father with recent cyborg enhancements comes into the clinic, he dismisses him with a placebo. However, even with his kindness, the reader is left to assume that several other cyborgs, especially young women about the same age as the lost princess, lost their lives.

This also shades his interactions with Cinder. In their first meeting, he tells Cinder, “You are much too precious to kill” (Meyer, 2012, p. 102), essentially assigning a price to her life. He kept her identity a secret so he could continue his scheme and rescued her in hopes that she would take her place as the true queen of the Lunar people. The ethicality of his experiment and his resulting actions are left for the reader to determine, but one might argue that Dr. Erland manipulates the situation to benefit himself. Manipulation, as well as the secrecy Dr. Erland depends on, come from the neutral category of the BSRI. This shows another fairy godmother character whose traditionally masculine and neutral traits lead him to act not necessarily in support of the Cinderella character, but for their own agenda. This phenomenon will be addressed further in the findings section.

*Cinder* (Meyer, 2012) is full of characters that fall across all categories in the BSRI, representing many types of traditional masculinity and femininity. Through the examples of Cinder, Kai, and Dr. Erland, the overall trend in the book indicates that characters need to act with traditionally masculine traits, or at least lean towards masculinity, in order to accomplish their goals.
Cinder & Ella

*Cinder & Ella* (Oram, 2014) is the only novel among the six in this study with a contemporary realistic setting, providing an alternate view on the relationships seen in this story. Readers experience a supermodel stepmom, gay fashion designers as godparents, a handsome movie star starring in a fantasy film called “Cinder,” and a life-altering car accident for the Cinderella character. The accident gives Ella, our Cinderella, significant burns and scarring, creating a character with significant physical disabilities. These changes provide a fresh look at the Cinderella story and how agency and traditionally gendered traits, especially traditional masculinity, are represented in a contemporary context.

*Cinderella*

Ella, whose full name is Ellamara, receives significant burns from the car accident that killed her mother. This results in skin graft surgeries, several months of hospital recovery, and regular doctor and physical therapy appointments afterwards. Even with all of the recovery, Ella is left with significant scarring that limits her daily activities. She uses a cane to walk and only wears long sleeves in order to cover her scars.

Even with these significant modifications in her life, her primary struggle comes in dealing with other people’s perception of her abilities, especially in her interactions with her father. Instead of allowing Ella to finish her senior year in Boston, Ella explains, “he had me declared legally incompetent and forced me to come to California with him” (Oram, 2014, p. 10). He also has a habit of ignoring Ella when having conversations about her. Both her physical therapist and psychologist notice, her psychologist even making the comment to Ella’s father and her principal, “Would you both please address Ella directly?” (p. 94). Ella’s father’s refusal to take Ella’s opinions and feelings into account, and especially his legal action, limit Ella’s ability
to act for herself. Although Ella is doing her best to be as independent as possible, her father’s interference in her life greatly restricts her agency. It’s other people’s perception, not her disability, that prevents her from achieving normalcy.

Despite some physical limitations and the interference of her father and others, Ella remains independent and stands up for herself and her beliefs. When a bully at school tries to expose her scars, she doesn’t back down from him. Ella describes, “I held out my arm so he could get a really good look. “So is it true? Am I really horrifying enough to win a crown?” (Oram, 2014, p. 89). She asserts herself rather than let herself become a victim. At the end of the novel after suffering a nervous breakdown and spending weeks in a rehab center, she tells her dad and psychologist what she really needs:

I need my freedom. When I’m ready to leave here, release me from my dad’s custody. I’m an adult, but I’m not allowed to make my own decisions. Instead, someone who is practically a stranger to me is making them for me. I know he’s trying his best, but what might be best for him and his family isn’t necessarily what’s best for me. I need people to trust me. (p. 279)

Ella recognizes her lack of agency and seeks to remedy the situation. She again avoids being a victim or spectator in her own life and wants to act for herself.

In asserting her own independence so frequently, Ella displays many traditional masculine traits. Readers especially see Ella frequently being assertive and standing up for herself. According to the BSRI, being assertive and standing up for beliefs are both traditionally masculine traits. In fact, it is only because Ella shows these traditionally masculine traits that she is able to win any agency at all. To readers, it may convey the idea that in order to act with agency at all, one must utilize traditionally masculine traits. Much of Ella’s tendency to act with
traditional masculinity may be a result of her contemporary views and reflect modern society’s preference towards these attributes.

**The Prince**

Another character who is influenced by his modern setting is Ella’s love interest. The prince character in *Cinder & Ella* (Oram, 2014) is Brian Oliver, a handsome movie star who stars in the film adaption of the fantasy series “Cinder,” and with whom Ella only has an online relationship. Brian exemplifies the power that comes when utilizing traditionally masculine traits, especially in contrast to the instances in which he reacts passively.

Brian Oliver holds much of the power in his relationship with Ella. When Ella’s friend Vivian brings up the idea of Brian and Ella meeting in person for the first time, Brian refuses. The phone conversation begins with him asserting his position by declaring, “I am Ellamara’s best friend. Me. Not you, whoever you are. Me, me, me” (Oram, 2014, p. 141). This statement which implies a level of ownership, and certainly a degree of jealousy on Brian’s part, is further reinforced when he calls Ella “my woman” (p. 141). However, after his sweeping statement, he ends the conversation by saying, “My life is too insane and I don’t really have any control over it. You would get hurt, and you would end up hating me for it” (p. 162). While he says delaying the meeting is to protect Ella from the lifestyle he lives, he doesn’t offer her the choice. Brian denies Ella the opportunity to act agentically.

Somewhat ironically, even as he holds the power in his relationship with Ella, Brian feels like his own life is robbed of agency. His father, who doubles as his talent manager, pressures Brian to date his co-star, Kaylee, for publicity. Between the scheming of his father and Kaylee, Brian feels trapped. However, as soon as his first face-to-face meeting with Ella ends in disaster, he quickly ends his fake relationship and contacts his lawyer, letting her know, “my entire
management team...I want them all fired by the end of the day” (Oram, 2014, p. 270). This swift, assertive action stands out as particularly masculine. Even though he felt helpless to make his own decisions throughout the book, as soon as Brian had a good reason, he was perfectly able to change his situation. His quick implementation of masculine traits allows him to obtain the agency he assumed was being refused to him.

**The Stepmother**

In direct contrast to every other stepmother character in the study, Jennifer, Ella’s stepmom, demonstrates traditionally feminine traits. When welcoming Ella into her new home in Los Angeles, she does so cheerfully: “Welcome home, sweetie!” (Oram, 2014, p. 11) When her stepsisters give her a hard time about adjusting to her new school, Jennifer begs them to “show a little compassion” and “flashed a sympathetic smile” (p. 64). At the end of the novel, Jennifer explains that all of the misunderstandings between Ella and herself were only out of concern.

I didn’t want people to be cruel to you. You were dealing with so much already, losing your mom and having to adjust to a new family. I didn’t want you to be hurt if people stared or said mean things. I was trying to protect you. I’m sorry I hurt your feelings. (p. 300)

Each of these examples puts forth the image of not a wicked stepmother, but of a compassionate one. Jennifer’s tendency towards traditionally feminine traits represents a major departure from the stepmothers the reader may be familiar with. She is kind and friendly, if a little clueless about how to act around her stepdaughter. In acting with these traits, Jennifer represents the most traditionally feminine character in the book. This variety, while a welcome change, also sheds light on how traditional femininity enacts, or doesn’t enact power.
In another direct contrast to the other stepmothers in the study, Jennifer never exercises domination over Ellamara; instead, she assumes the role of colluder as Ellamara’s father greatly restricts Ellamara’s freedom. As Ella’s father insists on putting her in a private school with her stepsisters against Ella’s better judgement, and suggests she changes her outfit to something that won’t reveal her burn marks, Jennifer either agrees with Ella’s father or stands by silently. In acting with femininity, Jennifer loses agency herself, only reinforcing the requests of the patriarch of the family. Especially because Jennifer is the most traditionally feminine character, this reading would seem to indicate that as characters act with traditional femininity, they lose their ability to act for themselves.

*The Magical Helpers*

In another departure from the original tale, the generous godmother role is shared by three people: Vivian and her two dads, Stefan and Glen. Vivian is Ella’s first friend in Los Angeles, and she quickly becomes a loyal confidant. In true godmother fashion, she and her costume designer fathers create an outfit for Ella to wear to the fantasy convention in which she meets Brian for the first time. While their role in this iteration is smaller, their kindness to newcomer Ella demonstrates compassion, a traditionally feminine trait. This continues the trend of traditionally female fairy godmother characters helping the Cinderella type altruistically rather than for their own agenda. This trend will be discussed further in the themes section. Although Vivian interacts with Ella relatively frequently, her fathers only appear in one scene. Their skillset as costume designers, as well as their kindness and generosity to Ella, make them worthy of the role of godparents.

*Cinder & Ella* (Oram, 2014), the most contemporary of the novels in the study, has the most traditionally masculine characters, Ella and Brian especially fit. In fact, the only way in
which characters can enact agency on their own behalf is by acting with traditionally masculine traits. This further reinforces the finding that young adult fiction implies that one needs to act with masculinity in order to achieve one’s goals.

**Stepsister**

*Stepsister* (Donnelly, 2019) begins where the traditional Cinderella leaves off, but follows one of her ugly stepsisters after Cinderella leaves her stepfamily to marry the prince. This novel by Jennifer Donnelly not only has the reader consider the events of the traditional story from a different point of view, but also creates a more traditionally masculine heroine than any other version in the selection. Isabelle’s traditional masculinity, initially a source of frustration for those around her and herself, becomes an essential element in saving her community.

**The Stepsister as the Protagonist**

Isabelle, the ugly stepsister and heroine of the book, demonstrates many traditionally masculine characteristics. A flashback to Isabelle’s youth describes her: “Isabelle was strong. She was brave. She beat Felix at sword fights. She jumped her stallion, Nero, over fences everyone else was afraid of. She’d chased a wolf away from the henhouse once with only a stick” (Donnelly, 2019, p. 26). Even her actions as a young adult clearly manifest as traditionally masculine traits. She is forceful with those around her, often taking charge in situations regarding her family or those in her village, and a neighbor comments on her independence, telling her, “You don’t need anybody” (p. 249). Both of these traits are traditionally masculine according to the BSRI, making Isabelle a more traditionally masculine female character.

Isabelle’s most dominant traditionally masculine trait, though, comes from her interest in military leadership. As a child, she “pored over...her book, *An Illustrated History of the World’s*
Greatest Military Commanders...looking at the hand-colored plates depicting famous battles” (Donnelly, 2019, p. 54). When her wish is granted by the fairy queen Tanaquill, she becomes not done up and ready for a ball, but the leader of a magical army. Through her efforts, perfected through years of study, she conquers the enemy’s army and kills the tyrant in hand-to-hand combat. Her passion for soldiery, although condemned by many in the books as an unladylike pastime, provides her the opportunity to act on behalf of herself and others. In the end, her interest in military tactics saves not only Isabelle and her family, but the entire country of France.

The Love Interest

In contrast to Isabelle’s leaning towards traditionally masculine qualities, her love interest demonstrates the most traditionally feminine traits in comparison with the other male love interests. Felix, a neighbor from her childhood, is employed as a carpenter. When the reader first meets him, he is constructing a miniature wooden army. Although several years have passed since she’s seen him, Isabelle is still impressed by Felix and his gentle qualities. Isabelle feels like he understands her, that “he saw inside of her” (Donnelly, 2019, p. 132). He has no interest in the ongoing war but enlists out of loyalty to his country. As understanding and loyal are both traits on the feminine side of the BSRI, Felix comes off as a relatively traditionally feminine male character, providing a contrast with the traditionally masculine Isabelle.

Cinderella as a Secondary Character

Stepsister (Donnelly, 2019) focuses on the ugly stepsister as the heroine of the story, so Ella, or Cinderella, is relegated to a secondary character. She is everything you would expect from Cinderella: sweet, kind, patient, and forgiving. Initially, Ella also seems to have the same damsel-in-distress syndrome as the original Cinderella. She needs the prince to come and save
her from her forced servitude at the Maison Delour (the name of their property, appropriately translated into English as “house of pain”), and Isabelle rescues her from the villain at the end of the book.

Ella, while very similar to her fairytale counterpart, acts with much more agency than the original. After one encounter with an angry Isabelle, who cannot understand why Ella is so submissive, Ella confesses her reasoning behind her kindness is “‘to try to undo all of this. To make things better’” (Donnelly, 2019, p. 38). Even as she is leaving their home to start her life with the prince, “she leaned down and kissed Isabelle’s forehead, her lips like a hot brand against Isabelle’s skin. ‘Don’t hate me anymore, stepsister,’ she whispered. ‘For your own sake, not mine’” (p. 27). Although Ella was in a harmful environment, she chose kindness and compassion over revenge. Her traditional femininity, which is frequently read as a weakness in the original story, led her to act with agency, even if her agentic choice was simply to forgive her stepsister.

**Three Magic Helpers**

The role of the fairy godmother is taken over by three characters in this novel. Tanaquill, a fairy queen, is the most obvious replacement. She grants Ella her wish to attend the ball, and Isabelle goes to her for help in achieving her goal: to be beautiful. Tanaquill, however, is not the kind, maternal figure from the original story. She is “a being both dark and dangerous” (Donnelly, 2019, p. 71). When Isabelle approaches her with her request, Tanaquill agrees only conditionally, stating that “‘wishes are never simply granted. They must be earned’” (p. 73). Her price: “‘Find the lost pieces of your heart’” (p. 73). Her payment isn’t anything that would benefit a powerful fairy like herself, but rather something that will help Isabelle. Even though she is a foreboding figure, her interest lies in Isabelle’s growth and progress, implying a somewhat selfless interest in Isabelle’s success.
In addition, and in contrast, to Tanaquill, two other supernatural characters act as fairy godmother types. The events of the story are set in motion because Fate and Chance, who are anthropomorphized as a cruel old woman and a carefree young man, respectively, believe they can prove their own beliefs through whatever happens to Isabelle. Fate assumes the role of a well-meaning and kind old woman, but surreptitiously convinces the townspeople to burn down Isabelle’s house. Chance also treats Isabelle kindly, and while his motives may have been less conniving, he still participates in this wager in order to prove that he is right. He tells one of his friends that the battle is “for a soul. For a girl’s soul” (Donnelly, 2019, p. 32), but engages with his foe, Fate, as if it’s a personal grudge match. His argument is that humans should have the opportunity to make their own path, but constantly attempts to sway Isabelle to prove he is right.

In a story in which three characters can be considered the fairy godmother, the differentiation is important. Tanaquill, who retains what Bem (1974) calls neutral traits, uses her agency, and in turn her magic powers, to help Isabelle. Fate and Chance, who each demonstrate traditionally masculine traits when not acting as mortals, both want Isabelle to make choices to prove their superiority over the other; they both attempt to exercise domination over Isabelle, thereby creating a connection between traditional masculinity and the reduction of agency in others.

*Stepsister* (Donnelly, 2019) is full of examples of characters with representation of both traditional masculinity and femininity, and many characters who display more extreme characteristics than those we see in other books. Isabelle, the stepsister who takes the role of the protagonist, especially defies many expectations to exhibit traditionally masculine qualities, while her love interest, Felix, tends to be more traditionally feminine. Ella, whose traditionally feminine traits have typically made her a victim, is empowered by her kindness and forgiveness
in this adaptation. This novel, already subversive in its change of protagonist, presents the reader with a variety of traditionally masculine and feminine characters, each enacting power differently.
CHAPTER 5

Themes and Discussion

In this study, I sought to examine the ways in which traditional femininity or masculinity affect how a character utilizes power. Essentially, I wanted to know if/how a character could have traditionally feminine traits and still act with agency. In the previous chapter, the findings from each individual novel were discussed at length. While the six different novels represented several different ways gender could influence power, there were notable trends that I organized into six main themes (see Table 2). Commonalities were especially apparent across character archetypes (e.g., Cinderella, fairy godmother) throughout the books and revealed insights about gender, traditional masculinity and femininity, and agency. In the following sections, I present an in-depth discussion of these themes.

Traditional Femininity and Agency

In Brown’s 1954 translation of Perrault’ Cinderella, the eponymous character is the paragon of traditionally feminine virtues: Cinderella is kind, patient, and forgiving. However, critics have frequently pointed out that these very traits resulted in a loss of agency for Cinderella (Trousdale & McMullin, 2003; Yolen, 1988). In continuation of this idea, the general trend of the novelizations suggests that female characters who demonstrate the most traditionally feminine traits also exercise the least amount of agency. Conversely, male characters who exhibit almost identical traditionally feminine traits almost never have their agency restricted to the degree of their female counterparts. The following section discusses this contrast in male and female characters.

Blue from The Blood Spell (Redwine, 2019) provides a strong example. Blue agrees to help Dinah, after she hears Dinah arguing about her current financial situation. With sympathy
for her new state of poverty, Blue promises to help her with what she needs. From that point, Dinah takes advantage of Blue’s generosity and essentially subjugates her to forced servitude for the remainder of the novel. Blue’s decision to act with traditionally feminine traits end up taking away many choices later. Xing Xing from *Bound* (Napoli, 2004) takes Blue’s willingness to help to a new level. Xing Xing’s inner monologue throughout the novel expresses sympathy for her half-sister, Wei Ping, who treats her terribly. Even though she recognizes the unkindness of her stepmother, she still obeys her commands with little resistance. Her sympathy and willingness to help both reveal a traditionally feminine character, as well as the way in which that traditional femininity restricts her ability to act for herself.

Female characters in the selection of novels often had their agency restricted when acting with traditionally feminine traits, but the same restriction did not always apply to male characters. Both Prince Kai from *Cinder* (Meyer, 2012) and Kellan from *The Blood Spell* (Redwine, 2019) are novice leaders of their respective kingdoms. During scenes in which they are communicating with other political leaders, they project strength and boldness. Kai and Kellan convey traditionally masculine traits when acting in their role as leader. However, both also show a great deal of traditional femininity when outside of their leadership role. Kai cares for his dying father while Kellan affectionately interacts with his younger sister, Nessa. Both Kai and Kellan also show great affection, a traditionally feminine trait, in interacting with their Cinderella characters, Cinder and Blue respectively. These two characters use traditionally masculine traits in their professional endeavors, but heavily rely on traditionally feminine traits in their personal lives.

Felix from *Stepsister* (Donnelly, 2019) is another example. Felix is a successful carpenter but decides to enlist in the army to fight against an invading force. He takes a chance by
committing to the military, both a traditionally masculine trait as well as a traditionally masculine occupation. However, Felix arguably presents the most traditionally feminine character of any prince character. Felix is thoughtful, as demonstrated by the wooden replacement toes he makes for Isabelle after she cuts hers off, and he is warm, exemplified by the good relationship he has with every character in the town. Felix demonstrates an abundance of traditionally feminine traits, but is allowed to act agentically in every situation he is put in.

In general, traditionally feminine traits exhibited in these six novelizations limit the agency of female characters, especially when it comes to the Cinderella character and her interactions with her family members. However, the same demonstration of traditional femininity does not usually affect male characters. Even though the traditionally feminine traits generally manifest themselves in their personal relationships, they are still free to make agentic choices in most realms of their lives. While these novelizations in many ways provide more rounded characters and push against stereotypes that we see in the original fairy tales, it would appear that many of the issues that are addressed present a double standard as they apply to men and women. Because these are so widely read by young readers, and because they both connect us to our past, present, and future, readers—especially educators—need to be aware that there may be potential repercussions for a YA audience, possibly endorsing the idea that women cannot achieve success by meeting the criteria of a successful man.

**Masculinity and Agency**

While the novels generally indicate that a female character using traditionally feminine traits will have less agency, there are several instances in which a female character demonstrates masculine traits and is rewarded with agency. Xing Xing from *Bound* (Napoli, 2004), whose actions were addressed in the previous section about traditional femininity, is also an appropriate
subject for discussion in this section about traditional masculinity due to her unique placement in an ancient time period. Isabelle from *Stepsister* (Donnelly, 2019) is also presented as a female character with traditionally masculine traits, and both she and Xing Xing deviate from what is expected from women in their particular time periods, assert their own agency to help themselves and others.

Although Xing Xing was discussed in the femininity section, she also ends up acting with some traditionally masculine traits; because of *Bound’s* (Napoli, 2004) unique setting in ancient China, Xing Xing ends up acting as both a feminine and masculine character. Looking at Xing Xing’s literacy with a modern lens, it seems ridiculous that reading and writing would be considered masculine. However, Xing Xing’s stepmother regularly expresses contempt that her stepdaughter can read and write, believing that “an educated girl would be harder to marry off” (p. 13). However, Xing Xing uses these skills to further her situation. She does calligraphy for her neighbors to earn money, she uses her neat handwriting to organize the doctor’s medicinal herbs, thereby earning his trust, and when it comes time for her to travel home, she pays her way by writing poems on the sails of the ship. These masculine traits provide Xing Xing with more agency to accomplish her goals than anything we see the stepmother attempt.

Isabelle from *Stepsister* (Donnelly, 2019) is the most traditionally masculine of all the Cinderella characters. As a young girl, she was more interested in horseback riding and sword fighting than becoming a proper young woman, and even as she tried to develop to ladylike skills she thinks are expected of her, she tends to revert to her more natural masculine reactions. However, it is during these masculine reactions that Isabelle demonstrates the most resistance and agency. When a thief comes to steal the destitute family’s last chickens, Isabelle stands up to him with a sword, demanding “You’re going to put my hens down and leave. That’s how it’s
going to be” (p. 86). At the end of the book, her inclination towards masculinity is rewarded as she is magically gifted a small army to lead and a general’s uniform, complete with men’s breeches.

Her worn dress was gone. She was wearing leather britches, a tunic of chain mail, and a gleaming silver breastplate. In her hands she held a finely made helmet. The weight of her armor, and the drag of her sword at her hip, were sweet to her. She felt taller, stronger, as if she were no longer made of blood, bones, and tender flesh, but iron and steel. (p. 325)

With these supplies, she marches against the evil General Volkmar and defeats him in one-on-one combat, saving the country and her family. Her masculine traits no longer need be suppressed, and she is free to act in whatever way she chooses.

There’s a secondary plot woven within Isabelle’s story where Chance and Fate, here personified as an old crone and a charming young man, are fighting for her soul. Throughout the book, Chance tries to prove that Isabelle holds her life’s path in her own hands, while Fate tries to steal back Isabelle’s life map and show that she controls what will happen. This rivalry notably ends immediately after Isabelle becomes a masculine military leader. Tanaquill, an ancient fairy, declares to Fate, “Isabelle’s life will no longer be mapped out by you...Her life is a wide-open landscape now, and if she survives the day, she will make her own path through it” (Donnelly, 2019, p. 328). It is only after Isabelle becomes the most traditionally masculine version of herself that she is granted true agency to act for herself. Even the two characters that represent Chance and Fate imply meaning about power. Chance, the ability to take risks and choose one’s own path, is a care-free and charming man. Fate, or having one’s life decided for you, is a woman. Men choose, but women submit.
Overall, the trend of these novels seems to indicate that if you are a man, you can act with a mix of traditionally feminine and traditionally masculine traits and still act agentically. Female characters, however, have their agency restricted when they act with traditionally feminine traits. These implicit themes could have detrimental effects on the readers of young adult literature, both male and female. Thus, it behooves teachers who are potentially incorporating these into classroom use to plan for and carry out critical conversations in which adolescent readers are given opportunities to problematize and discuss these issues. Previous research (Thein, et al., 2011) has shown that adolescent students are unwilling and/or unable to engage in critical conversations without the assistance of a teacher; therefore, educators should be encouraged to include difficult critical texts with their students to help lead them into those conversations.

**Beauty as a Source of Power for Women**

In Perrault’s (1697/1954) *Cinderella*, the main character is described as “one hundred times more beautiful than her sisters” (p. 2), even though she is forced to dress in rags. From the first pages of the story, her beauty is compared with that of her stepsisters, placing them in competition with one another. When Cinderella arrives at the ball, the whole ballroom is silenced, “so entranced was everyone with the singular beauty of the newcomer” (p. 12). Cinderella’s beauty is specifically mentioned throughout as one of her assets and sets the trend of beauty as a source of power. Throughout the novelizations of Cinderella, the theme of beauty allowing women more agency pops up frequently and allows readers the chance to see it affect many characters in a variety of situations.

*Ash* (Lo, 2009) is one novel in which beauty, or lack thereof, plays a part in a woman’s success. In *Ash*, stepsister Ana condescendingly remarks that her sister Clara “stood at the wall for half the evening. It is a pity she is just not as beautiful as I am” (p. 108). In a world where
Ana is seeking power and status through marriage, she feels that she has an advantage over her sister because she is more beautiful. Later, when Ash returns from the ball she was forbidden to attend, Lady Isobel cuts the jewels from her hair, leaving it short and ragged. “There—see how much better you look now that those jewels are gone? You were always too plain to wear anything so grand. You should have never tried to rise above your station” (p. 224). The stepmother clearly subscribes to this idea that beauty is power. Her actions and comments imply that without the beautiful jewels and without her beautiful hair, Ash has no right to attempt to rise above her station. Because she is plain, she deserves the dehumanizing treatment she is receiving. The act of cutting her hair in the process of removing the jewels further takes away Ash’s power; if she does not meet western society’s traditional ideals of femininity and beauty, she is powerless.

In some cases, what constitutes beauty varies. In *Bound* (Napoli, 2004), Xing Xing doesn’t need to bind her feet because they are already small, her culture’s idea of beauty. Her sister Wie Ping, though, does not have naturally small feet. In order to achieve her culture’s idea of beauty, she suffers not only physically, dealing with blood, bandages, and infection, but also spends the remainder of the book dependent on others to get around. When Wei Ping and Stepmother go to the festival, Wei Pin rides in a wheelbarrow. However, even when completely helpless, she believes that her small feet will provide her with a rich husband. “I’ll plant my new silk slippers on the ground, and sit there as still as the Buddha. Maybe a man with a belly as large as the Buddha’s will notice me’ Wei Ping giggled” (p. 152). Wei Ping and Stepmother are less concerned about her ability to act for herself than her beauty’s potential to improve their social and economic status. And even though Xing Xing spends much of the book seeking for agency through her own means, especially through education and skill, it is her mother’s old dress and
slippers, which she can only fit into because of her predisposition to small feet, that leads her to meet and eventually marry the prince. Her natural beauty (in this case, small feet), improved her status and gave her the power she needed to leave her abusive situation.

This theme was most blatant, although also most contested, in the novel *Stepsister* (Donnelly, 2019). Because the novel is from the ugly stepsister’s point of view, beauty (or the lack thereof) and its effect on how a character sees and is seen by the world becomes a central theme. The protagonist is introduced in two sentences: “Her name was Isabelle. She was not pretty” (p. 9). By stating the character’s plainness outright, the author sets up a central conflict for the story, as well as letting the reader understand the character’s insecurities. Isabelle’s identity as an ugly girl, established for the reader from the beginning of her story, has been embedded in her identity from a young age. In a memory, Isabelle, her sister Octavia, and her stepsister Ella are playing in the yard when two men approach. Upon seeing Ella, the Cinderella figure in this version, the men give her treats for being “so sweet and pleasant” (p. 25). When Isabelle, who has just come down from climbing a tree, also asks for a treat, the man replies, “‘Why would I give such a nice treat to such a nasty little monkey with grubby hands and leaves in her hair?’” (p. 25). The men compare Isabelle and her preferred activities to those of an animal, planting this idea that she is subhuman. When leaving, the two men remark that Ella’s beauty and charm will “‘make a splendid wife one day,’” while wild Isabelle and her sister “‘can always become nuns or governesses or whatever it is that ugly girls do’” (p. 26). Again, these comments reinforce Isabelle’s notion that girls who aren’t pretty aren’t worth as much as those who are.

Isabelle becomes convinced that her worth is dependent on her beauty. After telling Isabelle that a girl’s only hope at a good life is a good marriage, her mother taunts her by saying,
“‘You are ugly, Isabelle. Dull. Lumpy as a dumpling. I could not even convince the schoolmaster’s knock-kneed clod of a son to marry you’” (Donnelly, 2019, p. 10), which is the final push to convince Isabelle to cut off her toes in an attempt to fit in the glass slipper. Her lack of beauty is also reinforced by other characters. Throughout her daily activities, she is constantly referred to as “an ugly stepsister.” Not only does the term “ugly” become part of her identity, it seemingly gives others permission to treat her badly. She has cabbage and eggs thrown at her, and her house is even burned down. Throughout these experiences, Isabelle seems to accept defeat and understand they come as a result of her ugliness. Isabelle’s lack of beauty, and her acceptance of beauty’s power, leave her powerless. In fact, many of the events of the novel are set in motion as Isabelle makes a wish to become beautiful.

Isabelle gains confidence and agency throughout the novel, learning that women are worth more than how beautiful they are. When Chance and his troupe put on a performance spotlighting powerful women in history, Isabelle sees for the first time that a woman can be worth more than her outward appearance and begins to value her own inner strength. As the conflict of the novel approaches the climax, Isabelle realizes that her wish is not to be beautiful. “‘I wish to raise an army against Volkmar and the grand duke. I wish to save my family, friends, and my country’” (Donnelly, 2019, p. 320). Isabelle recognizes that her strength lies in her abilities as a tactician and student of war leaders. Ultimately, she realizes beauty is not what will make her happy but accepting herself and her interests will. This acceptance eventually leads to victory for her country, leading the people around her to accept her as well.

Each of these examples acknowledges the desirability of beauty and the upward mobility it can provide. However, two of them seem to perpetuate this idea while one refutes it. Both Ash and Xing Xing feel confident in their natural beauty and are rewarded by it, but Isabelle has to
find her worth elsewhere. This representation of beauty may be problematic for some readers. If appearance is something you can’t change, can someone truly act agentically? And even more specifically, how will these ideas affect impressionable adolescent readers? As stated previously, Cinderella novelizations may present some new and progressive ideas, but the fairy-tale idealism of a beautiful protagonist leaves a few of these novels feeling antiquated and less progressive than originally thought.

**Race in Cinderella**

Many of the 21st century re-imaginings of Cinderella directly address the topic of race. While Perrault’s (1697/1954) original is devoid of any mention of race (though it is generally accepted that the European Cinderella is white) three of these novelizations include it as a specific plot point. Race is generally used to make a character, or group of characters, an “other,” creating additional tensions than those readers are presented with in the original. Moreover, the inclusion of minoritized characters in Cinderella novelizations unveils another important layer when considering the issues surrounding power, domination, and agency.

For example, in *Cinder & Ella* (Oram, 2014), Ella Rodriguez, the female protagonist, is of mixed cultural and ethnic heritage. Her Chilean mother and white American father separated when she was young, and her mother raised her near her abuela and taught her many of their Chilean traditions. When she moves to Los Angeles to live with her father after the accident, her Latina background becomes one more issue she must grapple with. Although no one outrightly discriminates against Ella because of her race, her unique physical features set her apart from the members of her new family, even her biological father. This acts as one of many barriers between them and the old life she’s trying desperately to hold on to. However, she later uses her cultural and ethnic heritage to help connect to her stepmother and stepsisters, who she has
struggled with from the beginning of the novel. “‘Mama taught me how to make her enchiladas suizas when I was twelve. If you’d like to have them for dinner, I can make them’” (Oram, 2014, p. 150). In this case, Ella uses her cultural background to connect with the people around her. As she develops a relationship with the people with whom she lives, she has a chance to explain herself more clearly and have more doors opened for her; in turn, this increases her agency. Her Latina background makes her an “other” in her new world, but never takes away her agency.

In *Cinder* (Meyer, 2012), on the other hand, race does affect agency. This novel portrays race in the most sci-fi way possible by having the “other” group be from the moon. Not only are they from a foreign land, but they look different and even have the ability to change their appearance, a process called “glamor.” In addition to their otherness, Lunar people have left their homeland for the Earth and become refugees. These exiles are distrusted by both those on Earth and those from Luna, the moon kingdom, and it becomes a point of contention for those in power.

The most prominent examples of this are Cinder and Dr. Erland, both of whom turn out to be refugees. When discussing their shared background, Dr. Erland says, “‘I understand the prejudices. In many ways, they’re understandable, even justified, given Earth’s history with Luna. But it does not mean we are all greedy, self-serving devils’” (Meyer, 2012, p. 242). He explains how he attempts to overcome the Lunar part of himself by refraining from “glamoring” those around him, and the negative effect it has on him: “‘My mental stability, my psychological health, my very senses are failing me because I refuse to manipulate the thoughts and feelings of those around me’” (p. 242). In denying himself a fundamental part of who he is, Dr. Erland experiences severe psychological issues. He attempts to conceal his race but suffers because of it.
Cinder and her reaction to Dr. Erland and other events surrounding the Lunars act as an entry point for the reader. Cinder doesn’t have to try as hard to conceal her true identity as a surgery in her childhood prevents her from accidentally revealing herself, but she does show the reader how her society feels about the Lunar people.

*The Blood Spell* (Redwine, 2019) probably has the most subtle racial overtones, but also the most effect on power and agency. Blue’s race is never specifically mentioned, but hinted at with her physical descriptions, making it a subtle reference to race. However, Blue has interactions with other characters that lead me to believe that their race became a significant part of how others view them and attempt to take agency from them. While the reader only gets hints of the racial background of the characters, its effects resonate throughout the story. When introducing Blue, the narrator describes her as having “her mother’s dark brown skin and eyes” (p. 4) with a “pink headscarf around her short black curls” (p. 3). Her antagonist, though, is clearly white. In their first encounter in the market, Blue notes Dinah’s “pale skin” (p. 9). Additionally, Dinah’s brown hair (p. 47) contrasts Blue, Grand-mère, and Kellan’s black hair. Immediately, we have a contrast between the races of the two character, and the power struggle that follows is somewhat affected by it.

Although her skin color never appears to directly influence her power, it is a white woman that limits the agency of a black woman throughout the entire book. It is a white woman who threatens to lock a black woman in the cellar if she doesn’t do her bidding, and a white woman who physically assaults a black woman in the back of her own shop. If the races of these two characters had not been mentioned, these events could merely be read as Dinah exercising dominance over Blue; however, because we know Dinah is white and Blue is black, it adds a new layer of meaning to these exchanges. Even if race isn’t an issue in this fictional kingdom,
readers will bring their own knowledge and experience to the text. Ultimately, even when it's mentioned in passing, race plays a part in how power is enacted and imposed upon others.

The setting of these three novels affect to what extent race plays a part in the protagonist’s ability to act agentically. Two of these texts, *The Blood Spell* (Redwine, 2019) and *Cinder* (Meyer, 2012) take place in a fictionalized setting, clearly apart from our own world. These settings show that even in fiction, these societies have undertones of prejudice and discrimination based on race. By placing such a provocative topic in a fictional setting, readers grapple with the implications in a somewhat safe, removed way, which nevertheless holds a mirror up to reflect the very real issues of our world (Young et al., 2020). Interestingly, it is the novel with a contemporary realistic setting most like the reader’s that race becomes essentially a non-issue. Although Ella already has several conflicts to deal with, including disability and classism, the lack of focus on race is perhaps a missed opportunity to comment on the racial influence on power.

Although the purposes of my analysis were to primarily focus on gender, not race, these specific examples of power were too important not to mention. The novelizations present different takes on how characters can be influenced and affected by race, whether it’s total domination in the case of Blue, psychological damage from Dr. Erland, or a relative inconvenience as seen from Ella. However differently these novels portray race, it is essential that these racial tensions, whether mentioned in passing or a central theme of the novel, are addressed. Even in fictionalized settings, it seems that the issue of race can never truly be divorced from power, and teachers who take advantage of critical analysis of fiction in class have the opportunity to "critique power structures and why and how they exist, create classroom that
address inequity explicitly, and understand that teaching and learning are social practices mediated by language and shifting social and historical context” (Glenn, 2012, pp. 327-328).

**Masculine Stepmothers and Domination**

One of the key relationships in Perrault’s (1697/1954) Cinderella story is between Cinderella and her stepmother. The domination and cruelty seen in the original story are perpetuated in even more detail in these Cinderella novelizations. The stepmother character continues to use what power she has to ensure that Cinderella does not have the opportunity to act for herself. In removing Cinderella’s agency, the stepmother character almost exclusively uses traditionally masculine traits, creating a link between domination and traditional masculinity in female characters.

Without much variation, each of the stepmother characters treats their stepdaughter with cruelty and domination. Lady Isobel from *Ash* (Lo, 2009) locks Aisling in a cellar after Aisling argues back, Xing Xing’s stepmother from *Bound* (Napoli, 2004) sends her on a dangerous journey with a high chance of being taken advantage of by other travelers, and Adri from *Cinder* (Meyer, 2012) sends Cinder to certain death as a test subject for a deadly disease. In each of these instances, the stepmother goes beyond simply being mean. These women effectively remove their stepdaughter’s agency in order to promote their own comfort or well-being. To accomplish their goals, they use traditional masculine traits: they are aggressive, analytical, and forceful. These brief examples exemplify the link between domination and traditional masculinity in female characters that is present across these novels.

Dinah from *The Blood Spell* (Redwine, 2019) takes the ruthlessness exhibited by the other stepmother characters and adds another layer of malevolence. Her interactions with Blue, the Cinderella character, are marked with violence:
She’d never imagined herself in a position where someone with power over her could slap her, pinch her, and shove her against the hot stove, but she’d always thought she was the kind of girl who wouldn’t take that kind of abuse without a fight. But somehow things were more complicated than that. Dinah was bigger, stronger, and had the ironclad legal power of Blue’s guardianship on her side. The woman could simply claim she was disciplining her charge, or that it had been an accident, and the law would support her. (p. 210)

This passage demonstrates not only the emotional and physical abuse that Blue suffers at the hand of Dinah, but how Dinah’s legal know-how places her at an advantage. The power dynamic between the two, Dinah’s domination and Blue’s self-inflicted collusion, becomes apparent in this episode, as does Dinah's preference towards traditionally masculine traits. Although each stepmother character shows it at some point, Dinah presents the best example of domination leading to the enactment of traditionally masculine traits.

It’s telling that in each of these iterations of Cinderella, which changed settings, character names, family relationships, and even sexual orientations, not one switched the gender of Cinderella or the stepmother. It may be because the dynamic of one woman exercising domination over another is foundational to the story of Cinderella and several other fairy tales. The relationship’s dynamic may also reflect the current trends in female relationships. The term “mean girls” has gained notoriety in recent years to describe the relational aggression among adolescent females, but Cheryl Dellasega (2007) wrote a book about the same relational aggression among adult women. She addressed several theories about why women bully other women, including the need to protect offspring, the need to be more physically attractive to attract a mate, and women’s inclination to pursue relationships. All of these theories boil down to
her suggestion that “an undercurrent of competition may underlie female relationships, manifested in covert forms of aggression such as undermining, manipulation, and betrayal” (p. 13).

The theories Dellasega (2007) describes contribute to the original stepmother’s negative reaction to Cinderella. As noted in the previous section, Perrault (1697/1954) describes Cinderella as far more beautiful than her sisters. Not only does this threaten the stepmother’s perception of her family’s beauty, but it makes her adversarial towards Cinderella, almost as if her daughters are in competition with their stepsister. Here, her maternal instincts come out.

Each of the stepmothers in the novelization demonstrated a familiar phenomenon: the feminine moments they portrayed came from dealing with their biological daughters. Stepmother from Bound (Napoli, 2004) shows gentle kindness to Wei Ping, Adri from Cinder (Meyer, 2012) convinces herself to send Cinder to certain death in order to protect her children from the plague, and even nefarious Dinah from The Blood Spell (Redwine, 2019) becomes emotional when talking about the well-being of her biological daughters. Each of these examples demonstrates a softer side to the character the reader expects to be the antagonist. Their maternal instincts, which the BSRI identifies as traditionally feminine, lead them to act with domination and other traditionally masculine traits when dealing with members outside of their family.

Each of these examples of the stepmother character is decidedly traditionally masculine. Their actions suggest assertiveness, aggression, willingness to take risks, ambition, and forcefulness, all traditionally masculine traits in the BSRI. In relation to their traditional masculinity, they use these traits to oppress and control their Cinderella characters, creating a correlation between traditional masculinity and domination. In noting a trend in which women in power tend to be cast as antagonists when utilizing traditionally masculine traits, it made me
reflect on my role as a female teacher and my experiences with students in comparison with my male coworkers. Are such representations of traditionally masculine women as “the bad guy” harmful in young adult interactions with female teachers, parents, or other authority figures? Furthermore, in a country where we have yet to elect a female president, what characteristics will one need to embody in order to win over an electorate that perhaps wants someone who is both strong and capable, especially if what defines strength and capability seems to shift based on one’s gender? As a new generation approaches an age where they determine how to interact with others, it is vital that educators and younger readers alike consider these ideas that literature may be passing on to impressionable audiences.

**Stepsisters: The Dichotomy of Femininity and Masculinity Uncovered**

A key relationship in these Cinderella stories, and one worth examining, is that of Cinderella and her stepsisters. Perrault’s (1697/1954) depiction of the two stepsisters almost presents them as equally terrible, passingly remarking that the younger sister “was not quite so rude as the elder” (p. 4). However, these novelizations show a different trend: one of the stepsisters is antagonistic, and the other shows sympathy to the Cinderella character, if not an outright ally. Unsurprisingly, these sisters also tend to exhibit almost exclusively masculine or feminine characteristics.

The “bad stepsister” tends to exhibit the traditional masculine qualities of assertive, forceful, and dominant. They are often competitive and ambitious, especially when it comes to finding a husband, like Ana in *Ash* (Lo, 2009), or catching the attention of the prince, like Jacinthe in *The Blood Spell* (Redwine, 2019). It is likely, probable even, that this is a learned behavior. According to Dellasega (2007), “women who grew up in aggressive and violent situations or who learned to interact with others in particular ways as children are more likely to
use those same behaviors to relate to others throughout life” (p.12). As these women watch their mother treat Cinderella with contempt, they are more likely to also treat their stepsister badly.

The “good stepsister,” on the other hand, tends to display more variety in their treatment of Cinderella. Halette, the younger stepsister from *The Blood Spell* (Redwine, 2019), generously brings Blue dinner one night, and their ensuing conversation allows them to find common ground and understanding. “‘You know, you aren’t the only one who lost everything.’ Halette’s voice cracked… ‘I lost my father too. And my home. And my life in my quarter with my friends’” (p. 168). The protagonist and her stepsister from *Ash* (Lo, 2009) have several friendly conversations as she helps her undress at night, and Ash considers Clara “the closest thing she had to an ally in the house” (p. 196). In another example, Peony, Cinder’s stepsister, tells her that her mother “should have made [a dress] for you too. It’s not fair”’ (Meyer, 2012, p. 34). Even though Cinder is not concerned about going to the ball, Peony recognizes the double standard being set forth for the three daughters in the family. During each of Cinderella’s interactions with these stepsisters, the stepsister character demonstrates traditionally feminine qualities: eager to soothe hurt feelings, sympathetic, understanding, and gentle.

While the difference between the two sisters is noticeable throughout, they both still play the role of colluders for the majority of the book. Halette from *The Blood Spell* (Redwine, 2019) may show kindness to Blue, but does nothing to alleviate her suffering at the hands of her mother. Clara from *Ash* (Lo, 2009) may not speak as unkindly as Ana, but all their conversations take place as Ash serves her. And while *Cinder’s* (Meyer, 2012) Peony and Cinder had a mutually loving relationship, Peony still expects her mechanic stepsister to repair her items for her without any expression of gratitude. While these female characters with largely traditionally feminine traits act with more kindness, that kindness does not lead them to treat the Cinderella
character as an equal or grant her more agency. Ultimately, the nicer stepsister still participates in collusion against the Cinderella character. Similar to the Cinderella character, acting with traditionally feminine traits does not equate to acting with agency.

The stepsisters from *Cinder & Ella* (Oram, 2014) follow this trend with more nuance. Both Anastasia and Juliette start as typical high school “mean girls,” but when Juliette begins warming up to Ellamara, she begins standing up to others in her defense, even if that means standing up to Anastasia, her biological sister. Not only is willingness to take a stand a traditionally masculine trait, it also shows her acting with agency to protect another person. She and Ellamara become close later in the book, and Juliette even picking out Ellamara’s birthday gift and attempting to help her connect with her online love interest. Ellamara remarks:

> I was shocked. Juliette wasn’t just trying to indulge one of my biggest passions—or hers—with this gift; she was doing so much more than that. She was trying to give me my best friend. It was one of the most thoughtful things anyone had ever done for me. (p. 196)

Juliette goes from a colluder to Ellamara’s ally and does it by using a combination of traditionally masculine and feminine traits. She shows understanding in getting Ella the perfect birthday gift and helping her fit in, but also stands up for her and acts aggressively towards those who seek to hurt her. While the other “good” stepsisters remain fairly one-note, Juliette becomes a dynamic character in both her exercise of power and her demonstration of both traditional femininity and masculinity.

In addition to ways in which the stepsisters exercise power, the ways in which they manifest traditional masculinity and femininity shows an interesting trend. Each of the “bad” stepsisters acts with masculinity, without exception. While there’s a little more variety among
the “good” stepsister, they tend to lean towards femininity. Part of the reason for this stereotypical behavior may be the back seat most of these characters play in their novels; the stepsisters mostly act as secondary characters and are not well developed. However, it may also reveal a subconscious bias towards feminine women; the stepsister the reader relates to is the one with traditionally feminine traits. Even Juliette from *Cinder & Ella* (Oram, 2014), who was far more developed in her novel and portrays a mix of qualities, goes from showing masculine traits to being more traditionally feminine towards the end of the novel.

In these novelizations of Cinderella, the stepsisters act as secondary characters, but still reveal much about traditionally gendered traits. While both stepsisters generally participate in collusion against the Cinderella character, the stepsister who is less kind to Cinderella demonstrates traditionally masculine traits, and the stepsister who is more sensitive to Cinderella’s plight is more traditionally feminine. This trend seems to imply that, at least in secondary characters, traditional feminine females are better, or at least more virtuous, than those that exhibit traditionally masculine traits. Even though the Cinderella character is treated with more nuance, authors reward female behavior in females while condemning those who dare to be masculine. While the division between the stepsisters was straightforward with little variation, some nuance can be found in the dichotomy between the two sisters; designating one stepsister as Cinderella’s ally promotes the idea that women can have congenial relationships with one another, replacing the original Cinderella’s rivalry with her stepsister to a more sympathetic one. Hopefully this trend will lead to young women thwarting Dellasega’s (2007) “mean girl” in favor of more harmonious relationships moving forward.
Fairy Godmothers and Ulterior Motives

A unique character in the original Cinderella fairytale is the fairy godmother. Perrault (1697/1954) explains that “Cinderella’s godmother was really a fairy” (p. 9) and only requests that Cinderella, “just be a good girl...I’ll see that you go” (p. 10). Before letting her go, the godmother gives Cinderella the charge “Do not stay a moment after midnight. If you do, your coach will turn back into a pumpkin, your horses into mice, your footmen into lizards and your riches into rags,” (p. 14). She makes one more appearance at the end, turning Cinderella’s rags into a beautiful gown fit for a princess. Her role in the story is to help Cinderella achieve her wish of attending the ball. She demonstrates exclusively feminine traits in doing so, showing compassion and sympathy for her young goddaughter.

In Chapter 4, significant time was spent looking at the fairy godmother figures from each novel and how their traditionally masculine or feminine traits influence how they enact, or don’t enact, agency. However, an interesting trend emerged in examining the difference between male and female fairy godmother characters and their motivation for helping the Cinderella character. Overall, female characters acted in the best interest of the protagonist while the male godmother characters usually had an ulterior motive. While there are exceptions to this finding, as well as nuance within, the trend indicates that traditionally feminine characters acted selflessly while those with traditionally masculine traits acted on their own behalf.

Fairy Godmothers

Many of the fairy godmothers have a vested interest in the Cinderella character because of their direct relation. Grand-mère from The Blood Spell (Redwine, 2019), for example, is Blue’s biological grandmother. Their early interactions in the book reveal their close-knit family relationship and, in this case, it makes sense that Grand-mère would want to help her
granddaughter. Throughout the book, Grand-mère, although bold in her beliefs, only wants what is best for Blue. After Blue’s father dies, she fights to gain custody of Blue over Dinah’s questionable legal claim and offers her home as a refuge when Dinah’s manipulation becomes too much for Blue. She is the one who helps Blue get ready for the ball and prepare to defeat Dinah’s evil alter ego. As discussed in *The Blood Spell* (Redwine, 2019) section, Grand-mère demonstrates a mix of traditionally masculine and feminine qualities. However, one constant is her desire to support her granddaughter, making her an example of a female fairy godmother character whose actions come from selflessness.

Another example of familial and feminine help is Xing Xing’s deceased mother from *Bound* (Napoli, 2004). When Xing Xing buries the bones of the magical fish, whom she believes to be a reincarnation of her mother, Xing Xing finds a letter. The letter, written by her mother, exudes love for Xing Xing, addressed to “Dear Xing Xing, My Sparkling One, My Darling,” and closing with the promise, “My spirit will always be with you” (p. 149). The letter details where Xing Xing can find her dowry (a beautiful dress, pearls, and tiny shoes), and to use them in any way that will benefit her, whether it be putting them to use or selling them. Even beyond the grave, Xing Xing’s mother wants what is best for her, demonstrating understanding about the situation Xing Xing might find herself in. In Xing Xing’s mother, the reader finds another traditionally feminine character who has the protagonist’s best interests in mind.

Tanaquill from *Stepsister* (Donnelly, 2019) has no relation to the protagonist, but still acts without thought for herself. As an ancient fairy, the dealings of mortals hardly concern her; it doesn’t affect her if Ella makes it to the royal ball, or that Isabelle wishes she were beautiful. Therefore, her assistance can only be perceived as generosity. She makes Isabelle work for it, demanding that she “find the lost pieces of [her] heart” (p. 73), knowing it will lead her to reunite
with loved ones and find her own, unique path. Tanaquill only desires Isabelle’s improvement and happiness. Her role as a traditionally female character leads her to act selflessly.

While these female characters demonstrate varying degrees of generosity in helping the Cinderella character, each still acts with altruism. Their goal is to help the Cinderella character achieve her goal with little to no thought for themselves. In contrast to these selfless female characters, nearly all male characters who fill the magical helper role has an ulterior motive.

**Fairy Godfathers**

Dr. Erland from the science fiction novel *Cinder* (Meyer, 2012) comes across as extremely helpful and sincere when Cinder first meets him. However, his true intentions are revealed later in the story. He kindly explains the process to her, but only after he discovers her importance to his revolutionary ideas. He graciously helps her hide her cyborg secret from Prince Kai, but only to keep his own identity as a Lunar refugee hidden as well. And when he eventually helps Cinder escape the prison into which the Lunar queen has thrown her, he does so to inform her of her true identity as the lost Lunar princess and encourage her to escape. Dr. Erland helps Cinder throughout the novel, but once the reader learns of his Lunar origins, his kindness towards her seems to have selfish motives. While his actions are generous, he only acts to pursue his own goals.

Sidhean from *Ash* (Lo, 2009) presents a far more sinister example. When he presents Ash with clothing to help her attend the hunt, he tells her “‘there is a price for everything, Aisling…You shall be mine….you must agree to it freely; if you do not, then I will not grant your wish’” (p. 162). The subtle manipulation seen from Dr. Erland has no place here; Sidhean’s blunt demands reveal his motivation to help Ash only if she will give up her agency for him. He fulfills the fairy godmother archetype but does so only to benefit himself.
In these specific examples of fairy godmother archetypes, the female characters seek to help their Cinderella character. Xing Xing’s mother leaves her daughter physical items, Grand-mère provides Blue with physical and emotional support, and Tanaquill assists Isabelle in developing herself and finding her own unique voice. The male fairy godmother characters, Dr. Erland and Sidhean, only help their Cinderella characters in order to progress their own agendas, even if Dr. Erland is less transparent about his intentions. This trend of selfless godmothers and selfish godfathers may represent a preference in trusting women over men, especially those in a position to help.

By examining themes that appear across multiple novels, there are several ideas that appear frequently. The stepmother figure almost always demonstrates traditionally masculine traits and exerts domination over the Cinderella character. The stepsisters vary in their demonstration of traits, but the unkind sister always is traditionally masculine, and the kinder sister is traditionally feminine. The gender of the magical helper affects their intentions towards helping Cinderella, as the female characters seek to help Cinderella and the male characters seek to help themselves. Overall, female characters who demonstrate traditionally feminine traits have a lack of agency while those who are traditionally masculine tend to make decisions for themselves and others. Male characters can exhibit both traditionally masculine and feminine traits and still exercise agency.

These themes found across multiple popular YA Cinderella novelizations, present implications to young readers—from the restriction of agency in traditionally feminine females to the advantages of attractive individuals to the dichotomy of good feminine stepsisters and bad masculine stepsisters. It is therefore vital that educators, librarians, and others who recommend these and other YA novels to adolescent readers, are aware of and wrestle with their underlying
messages. Thus, on one level, this means that we must ask ourselves, “What do these texts teach us about what it means to be a young man or woman in a modern society?” More than merely identifying the messages, however, we must also thoughtfully engage in reading with and against the text (Botelho & Rudman, 2009), thereby asking important follow-up questions such as, “Do I accept these messages with open arms, or do I choose to wrestle with the messages in order to act for myself rather than be acted upon?”

Overall, the analysis of these novels provides several conclusions about traditional gendered traits and how the possession of certain traits influences how agency is enacted. In general, they present the idea that while traditionally masculine traits can help a character progress in achieving their goals and acting agentically, characters who act with traditional femininity, especially female characters, often have their agency removed or are unable to act for themselves. This analysis uncovers the relationship between gender, traditional masculinity and femininity, and power. In the next section, further discussion concerning these ideas will be presented, in addition to how it relates to the current literature, limitations of the study, and future recommendations for research.
CHAPTER 6

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between traditional masculinity and femininity and agency in young adult novelization of Cinderella. I began this qualitative study in large part because of the representation of female characters I was seeing across various forms of media. I saw characters, both male and female, who avoided acting with traditionally feminine traits and preferred to utilize traditionally masculine traits. I wondered if this was an observable trend in YA literature and if it was possible for characters to act agentically and achieve their goals when using both traditionally masculine and feminine traits. I hoped that I would find a wide variety of characters, both male and female, that could provide examples to adolescent readers to act agentically while using a range of traditionally masculine and feminine traits. Because re-imaginations of fairy tales have surged in popularity in recent years, along with their typically feminine but feeble female protagonists, I made novelizations of Cinderella the subject of my study.

Analysis Reviewed

In my analysis, I identified uses of power using Botelho and Rudman’s (2009) critical multicultural analysis as a theoretical and methodological framework. Using these lenses allowed me to identify “how power is exercised, circulated, negotiated, and reconstructed” (p. 33). In addition, I used the Bem Sex Role Inventory (1974) to identify traditionally gendered traits as they appeared in the characters’ actions. Admittedly, the usefulness of the Bem Sex Role Inventory has at times been debated since its creation 44 years ago. However, numerous studies in its support convinced me to use it as the tool to determine the traditional masculinity or femininity of a character. Ultimately, the Bem Sex Role Inventory proved its usefulness
throughout the study as it provided a way to measure the traditional masculinity and femininity of the characters.

The analysis revealed important trends regarding agency and traditional masculinity and femininity. Going into the analysis, I wondered what types of demonstrations of traditionally feminine and masculine characteristics would surface from both male and female characters. The general trend revealed that when a female character demonstrated traditionally feminine traits, she typically lost some agency. The same trend, however, did not apply to male characters, who could act with traditionally feminine traits with little to no repercussions concerning agency. Both male and female characters gained agency when acting with traditionally masculine traits, though.

I drew other important conclusions during my analysis, especially involving specific secondary characters. The stepmother characters most often acted with domination, and without fail exhibited traditionally masculine traits. Similarly, the stepsister who treated the Cinderella character badly also acted in traditionally masculine ways. The kinder stepsister, however, preferred traditionally femininity. Because these were generally secondary characters, the authors relied more heavily on a black-and-white approach: feminine women are good, masculine women are bad.

Similarly, the genders of the fairy godmother character heavily influenced their motivation. Each of the female characters playing the fairy godmother acted altruistically with only a desire to help their Cinderella. Male characters, however, provided assistance, but only to advance their own agendas. Again, there is little nuance here as these are only secondary characters, but these novels collectively praise female characters while casting suspicion on male
ones. This preference implies that these retold fairy tales overcorrect, perhaps empowering female characters perhaps at the expense of the men.

I would argue that each of these authors set out to write a feminist fairy tale, defined by Kuykendal and Sturm (2007) as “stories in which the main character is empowered regardless of gender” (p. 40). Each of the Cinderella characters make a stand for what they believe in and several save themselves rather than waiting for the prince to do it, directly responding to Perrault’s original, somewhat helpless, protagonist. But what do we make of these stories when characters, both male and female, enact these traditionally gendered traits? Moreover, what positive and negative effects can these representations have on YA readers?

These novels are products of their time and intended audience; adolescent readers, both male and female, should be conscious of the power dynamics surrounding gender. Growing up in a #MeToo era has made many middle school and high school age students aware of the inequality between sexes. As the primary audience for these novels, young adult readers are susceptible to the messages regarding gender, implicit or explicit, within books like these. If they see that female characters acting with traditional masculinity are the only ones heard or the only ones accomplishing their goals, they may conclude that only traditionally masculine girls can act agentically.

These novels that task themselves with re-imagining classic fairy tales for a young adult audience have an unique undertaking: Zipes (2013) argues that fairy tales convey a “naïve morality” (p. 125) while Kohl (2007) believes that literature for children and young adults provide readers with an idea of “social and moral behavior” (pp. 4-5). The intersection between young adult literature and fairy tales would suggest that these novelizations of Cinderella are in a unique position to present moral lessons to readers. If this is indeed the case, it is important to
ensure adolescent readers receive messages that encourage them to act agentically, regardless of
gender, race, or class.

It’s important to note that all of these issues, whether they relate to gender, race, or sexual
orientation, are present in these fictional worlds. Aisling from *Ash* (Lo, 2009) deals with
homosexuality against a traditional fairy tale backdrop, Blue from *The Blood Spell* (Redwine,
2019) deals with race in her fictional kingdom, and *Cinder* (Meyer, 2012) still struggles with
being a female in a world far in the future. By including these tough topics in a fictional world,
the author creates a space to confront these issues without needing to experience them
personally. Adolescent readers benefit from seeing these issues through the pages of a book; they
can wrestle with the ideas and conflict they present with less personal investment and damage.
By doing so, they can not only relate these issues to their own lives, but also develop empathy
for others who may be experiencing something similar.

In order to promote diversity in children’s and young adult literature, Botelho and
Rudman (2009) and others promote the idea of thinking of texts as windows, mirrors, and sliding
glass doors. Engaging in critical multicultural analysis allows for the examination of this
concept. In this study, my hope was to find examples of both male and female characters
demonstrating a wide variety of traditionally masculine and feminine traits in order to achieve
agency. Adolescent readers, male or female, should be able to see themselves represented in the
texts they read, and it’s important for young women to know there’s not one right way to be a
strong female character.

Educators are essential in this effort. Educators have the responsibility to provide
students with literature from a variety of worldviews. Gone are the days of exclusively reading
the works of white, male authors, though as indicated, new voices at times fall victim to similar
tendencies. In this small selection of novels, issues of gender, race, sexual orientation, and class appear, challenging the reader to interpret these ideas in new ways. Educators can facilitate this type of interpretation and engagement by choosing a variety of texts to read with their students. In addition to in-class reading, classroom and school libraries can house, and even promote, literature that recognizes and celebrates these voices. Educators can create opportunities for “teaching literature and constructing curriculum and spaces to take up issues of diversity and social injustice by problematizing children’s literature” (Botelho & Rudman, 2009, p. xv).

Looking Forward

My examination of Cinderella novelizations for a young adult audience revealed the manifestation of power that occurs in the demonstration of traditional masculinity and femininity. The general trend seems to indicate that while male characters are free to use both traditionally masculine and feminine traits freely, female characters are more restricted; those who primarily employ traditionally feminine traits often have their agency restricted while those who act in traditionally masculine ways are often seen as the antagonist. The continuation of such a study could be useful to future researchers and educators as they attempt to provide adolescent readers with examples of characters who act with agency while demonstrating characteristics across the spectrum of traditional masculinity and femininity.

There are several other novelizations of Cinderella that are ripe for examination. Some, like Ella Enchanted by Gail Carson Levine (1997), fell outside of the chosen publication date, but still provide a different view on gender and its effects on agency. Analyzing books from outside of the chosen date range may provide interesting insights to the perception of traditional masculinity and femininity over time. Other Cinderella novelizations, like Geekerella by Ashley Poston (2017) or Mechanica by Betsy Cornwell (2015), had similar settings to books within the
chosen set and were excluded from the study to avoid redundancy. A direct comparison to books with similar settings may also provide further understanding about traditional masculinity and femininity affecting agency. Further study of Cinderella novelization aimed towards an adolescent audience, including new releases over the next several years, can offer more nuance to the findings here.

In addition to analyzing the Cinderella story, several other fairy tales have been adapted for a young adult audience that could act as subjects of further analysis. Both The Blood Spell by C. J. Redwine (2019) and Cinder by Marissa Meyer (2012) are only one installment in a series of fairy tale novelizations. Examining each of these books in context with their accompanying novelizations may prove insightful. Other stand-alone novels cover fairy tales such as Snow White, Rapunzel, Puss in Boots, and more. Examining novels like this, especially those with a male protagonist, may shed light on traditional masculinity and femininity and their effects on agency.

This critical multicultural analysis with an emphasis on traditional masculinity and femininity does not have to be limited to fairy tale novelizations. Other young adult genres, especially realistic fiction due to its grappling with contemporary themes, may help to determine the current effect of a character’s traditional gendered traits on their agency. Further analysis of traditional masculinity and femininity in young adult literature can help researchers see what messages adolescent readers are seeing in books meant for them; as not all adolescent readers choose to read fairy tale novelizations, a variety of subgenres within young adult literature will provide insight into the literature for this age group.

Classroom or individual reader application would be the next logical step to take. Educators could actively choose texts to read in class that represent different voices. A study of
curriculum that actively chooses voices that diverge from the straight, white male view may prove insightful. As young readers come to see characters that look like them in the texts that they read, their worldview becomes legitimized and they can find ways to exercise agency in their own situations.

Going beyond simply observing students interacting with a larger variety of protagonists, explicitly teaching students the skill of recognizing power would provide further insight on the pedagogy of power. Students could complete an age-appropriate version of this study, in which they compare a novelization of their choice to the original tale, note the power used or not used, and examine the story through a critical multicultural lens, whether it be gender, race, sexual orientation, class, or another lens. A study involving adolescent readers could help researchers understand the effect explicitly teaching critical multicultural theory has on students.

If gender truly “is a socially and biological bound identity” (Botelho & Rudman, 2009, p. 221), what does our current literature, and specifically young adult literature, reflect about our society? Additionally, because these books are aimed at adolescent audiences, what possible messages might the current population of young adult readers be receiving about gender? On one level, the findings of this study indicate that characters in Cinderella novelizations who exhibit traditionally feminine traits typically have less agency, especially if the character is female. Rather than write such stories off as “bad” texts and leave it at that, it is important to note the complicated ways they collectively and respectively grapple with gender. For educators, then, it is of the utmost importance that we make thoughtful decisions about the texts we read with and recommend to our students because of the explicit and implicit messages certain stories can convey. The study of traditional masculinity and femininity and its influence on power and agency in young adult literature can push us towards positive change. As readers of young adult
literature seek to understand the power dynamics presented in the novels we read, and as we look to include a variety of characters who act with agency, we can be a part of this positive change.
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APPENDIX A

Modified Bem Sex Role Inventory

Table A1

*Modified Bem Sex Role Inventory*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feminine Traits</th>
<th>Neutral Traits</th>
<th>Masculine Traits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yielding</td>
<td>Helpful</td>
<td>Self-reliant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheerful</td>
<td>Moody</td>
<td>Defends beliefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shy</td>
<td>Conscientious</td>
<td>Independent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affectionate</td>
<td>Theatrical</td>
<td>Athletic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loyal</td>
<td>Happy</td>
<td>Assertive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sympathetic</td>
<td>Unpredictable</td>
<td>Forceful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensitive to needs of others</td>
<td>Reliable</td>
<td>Analytical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding</td>
<td>Jealous</td>
<td>Leadership ability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compassionate</td>
<td>Secretive</td>
<td>Willing to take risks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eager to soothe hurt feelings</td>
<td>Sincere</td>
<td>Self-sufficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soft-spoken</td>
<td>Conceited</td>
<td>Dominant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warm</td>
<td>Likeable</td>
<td>Aggressive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tender</td>
<td>Adaptable</td>
<td>Competitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gentle</td>
<td>Tactful</td>
<td>Ambitious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likes children</td>
<td>Conventional</td>
<td>Individualistic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX B

Sample Character Analysis Chart for The Blood Spell (Redwine, 2019)

Table B1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feminine Traits</th>
<th>Neutral Traits</th>
<th>Masculine Traits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Blue</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1a. “Hiring ten-year old Anna had been more a decision of the heart…” p. 5</td>
<td>1a. “careful not to let the mud that had dried on them the night before get on Papa’s clean floors” p. 39</td>
<td>1a. “She’d taken matters into her own hands.” p. 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Sensitive to needs of others</td>
<td>2. Sincere</td>
<td>2. Willing to take risks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2a. Blue describes father p. 5</td>
<td>2a. “She would always speak her mind plainly” p. 84</td>
<td>2a. Trying to pass off gold in the market. p. 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2b. “She’d always thought it was polite to use Nessa’s form of communication as much as possible.” p. 21</td>
<td>2c. “You always knew exactly where you stood” p. 119</td>
<td>2b. Ingesting the poison for the wraith p. 379</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3a. Papa and Blue at lunch p. 18</td>
<td>3a. Analyzing results of alchemy p. 16</td>
<td>3a. Analyzing results of alchemy p. 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4a. “Blue obeyed” p. 19</td>
<td>4a. “I can deliver them to the butler myself.”” p. 34</td>
<td>4a. “I can deliver them to the butler myself.”” p. 34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Compassionate</td>
<td>5. Defends own beliefs</td>
<td>5. Defends own beliefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5a. “The poverty and desperation of the children who were conveniently forgotten by the city’s wealthy until they needed a job done, however, did [worry Blue]” p. 23</td>
<td>5a. “I can’t help Ana…and somebody has to. I have to.”” p. 44</td>
<td>5a. “I can’t help Ana…and somebody has to. I have to.”” p. 44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5b. Plans to open children’s shelter p. 65</td>
<td>5b. Plans to open children’s shelter p. 65</td>
<td>5b. Plans to open children’s shelter p. 65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5c. “I’m very sorry your lost your father and the life you knew…”” p. 168</td>
<td>5c. “I’m very sorry your lost your father and the life you knew…”” p. 168</td>
<td>5c. “I’m very sorry your lost your father and the life you knew…”” p. 168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6b. “I’m not your servant”” p. 239</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1b. “There had been something wild, dangerous in Dinah’s mood…” p. 209</td>
<td>1b. “There had been something wild, dangerous in Dinah’s mood…” p. 209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>p. 80</td>
<td>2b. “He didn’t deserve the power of the throne. He’s sacrificed nothing to gain it.” p. 49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2c. “Dinah’s back was to the wall, but she wasn’t giving up.” p. 76</td>
<td>2c. “Dinah’s back was to the wall, but she wasn’t giving up.” p. 76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Willing to take risks</td>
<td>3. Willing to take risks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3a. “Now all her hard work was paying off.” p. 48</td>
<td>4. Self-reliant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Self-reliant</td>
<td>5. Assertive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kellan</td>
<td>1. Loyal</td>
<td>1. Tactful</td>
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<tr>
<td>1a. “Nessa isn’t weak,” p. 29</td>
<td>1a. “If he played the game well, it would never come to that.” p. 30</td>
<td>1a. “Anyone who came for his sister was going to have to go through him first.” p. 30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1b. “He saw Nessa’s face…” p. 61</td>
<td>2. Tender</td>
<td>2. Analytical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2a. Greeting Nessa p. 30</td>
<td>2a. “He’d have to pull up out of the dive fast…” p. 60</td>
<td>2a. “He’s had to pull up out of the dive fast…” p. 60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Sensitive to needs of others</td>
<td>3a. “Nessa would talk in her own time…he’d always understood her.” p. 30</td>
<td>3. Sympathetic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3a. “Nessa would talk in her own time…he’d always understood her.” p. 30</td>
<td>3b. “Or maybe people find me charming because I am charming.”” p. 35</td>
<td>3. Secretive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3b. “Kellan simply wrapped her arms around Blue and led her away.” p. 104</td>
<td>3a. “But we have to keep this quiet.” p. 33</td>
<td>3c. “Don’t tell her anything.”” p. 75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4a. “The rush of affection that warmed him was a surprise… ‘You look beautiful today…”” p. 85</td>
<td>3c. “Don’t tell her anything.”” p. 75</td>
<td>4a. “He winked at the other fighter…” p. 71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5a. “…he quickly cast about for something courteous and sympathetic to say.” p. 117</td>
<td>5a. “He’d quickly learned that flattering the mothers was an essential weapon in her arsenal.” p. 82</td>
<td>5b. “His voice sounded warm and comforting about Kellan’s presence.” p. 135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6a. “…there was something warm and comforting about Kellan’s presence.” p 135</td>
<td>6a. “The prince smiled back-a real, from-the heart smile…” p. 83</td>
<td>6a. “And you shouldn’t stay alone at night.”” p. 89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Friendly</td>
<td>6b. “Still…I’d like to hear it.”” p. 122</td>
<td>6b. “Still…I’d like to hear it.”” p. 122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7a. “His voice sounded warm and friendly…” p. 134</td>
<td>6c. “I need to make sure you stay safe. This isn’t a negotiation, Blue.”” p. 150</td>
<td>6c. “I need to make sure you stay safe. This isn’t a negotiation, Blue.”” p. 150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Leadership ability</td>
<td>6d. “Did you just refer to me as ‘boy?’”” p. 156</td>
<td>7. Leadership ability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7a. “She hadn’t realized how easily leadership sat on his shoulders.” p. 148</td>
<td>7a. “She hadn’t realized how easily leadership sat on his shoulders.” p. 148</td>
<td>7a. “She hadn’t realized how easily leadership sat on his shoulders.” p. 148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character</td>
<td>1. Sympathetic</td>
<td>2. Sensitive to needs of others</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hallette</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1a. “…she’d started quietly handling a few of the household tasks…”</td>
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<td>2b. “…I saved some dinner for you.””</td>
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<td>None found</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2. Competitive</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2a. “…Must you always choose between us”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2a. “…Grand-mère gently pushed her towards her room.”</td>
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<td>2b. “…I saved some dinner for you.””</td>
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<td>2. Gentle</td>
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<td>Jacinthe</td>
<td>None found</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grand-mère</td>
<td>None found</td>
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