

# Portrayal of Gender in Fairytales

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## **Abstract**

Fairytales are widely famous and loved by different age groups. Good fairytales have the ability to transcend the readers to the exact time and space the author has in mind, ignite their imagination and interest, by using magic, characters imposing super-natural powers, and address universal human emotions which all people can relate with. This influential literature sometimes contains gender stereotypes which label the abilities and roles of each gender and create a notion of what is right and suitable for them. In my paper, I will address some critical issues present in old and famous fairytales, talk about the importance of fairy tales, and their use in psychology. Moving on, I will focus on four fairytales; two traditional ones, and two of the rewritings of those tales in a contemporary manner by Angela Carter. Later I will show the analysis of a survey I have conducted with the citizens of Armenia regarding the portrayal of women in fairy tales, and their preferences of types of fairytales to rear their children with.

## **Introduction**

"Once upon a time" is a phrase which people all over the world associate with the beginning of fairytales. This four-letter word serves as an entrance into the world of imagination and wonder which is sometimes full of biases and different sorts of stereotypes. These seemingly simple stories hold a great power in molding the brains of the little ones, since besides the fact that it captivates and mesmerizes the child into the magical world full of heroes, princesses, witches, and talking animals, it also contains concepts about universal human emotions, life and death, passage of time, family issues, and etc., which move the curiosity of the child and allow him/her to find answers to his inner questions.

Most of the famous fairytales which are read to children worldwide are full of gender stereotyping; they show women submissive to men, they place no importance on intelligence and only focus on beauty as being an important characteristic that women should possess in order to marry a 'prince charming' and thus lead a happily-ever-after-life. This raises the question of, if fairytales do have an enormous effect on the subconscious minds of the readers (Betlheim,1976), then the messages found in those stories, must have a direct relationship with the way each gender is seen and treated in the society. Fairytales play an important role in children's lives since they gain an insight about the world, the society and how it operates, what is considered to be normal and abnormal, and even set standards of happiness and beauty.

By using two famous 'traditional' fairytales: "*Little Red Riding Hood*" by Charles Perrault, and "*Beauty and the Beast*" by Jeanne-Marie Beaumont, and two contemporary ones "*The Tiger's Bride*" and "*The Werewolf*" by Angela Carter, I will analyze and later compare/contrast the type of messages transmitted by each tale regarding the female gender. I will show how women in these two original versions are seen as helpless, weak, not too smart, however very beautiful beings, relative to the contemporary ones, where the emphasis is placed on qualities like being strong, wise, and smart and not just having a beautiful appearance. Moving on, by conducting anonymous surveys online, I will try to understand the preferences of the Armenian society regarding types of fairytales and portrayal of women in it. Later in my paper, I will explain and discuss more clearly how I plan to find this out.

### **Importance of fairytales in psychology**

Fairytales are commonly read to children as a bedtime story and entertain them with magic princes, princesses, castles, dragons, and of course happily-ever-afters. It is clear why different age groups so broadly love them; they transfer the readers to a magical realm where anything is possible, bad people get punished, good people eventually have good fortune, and love overcomes all.

Sigmund Freud is considered to be the father of psychoanalytic thinking, but still, most of the psychologists who have talked about fairytales regard themselves to be students of Carl Jung whose theories differed from those of Freud. Carl Jung believed that not everything found in the

personality of a child is stemmed from his/her sex drive. However, he agreed with the existence of id, ego, and superego, as being three critical components of personality. He also believed that there is a collective unconsciousness which is the universally shared knowledge on an unconscious level. This is why Jung thought that fairytales held colossal effect on the psyche of the readers since they are universal and spread universal norms and beliefs. (Von Franz, 1975)

According to Bettelheim, in fairytales problems about life are portrayed to guide and assist the child in his/her development process. The child needs to be given guidelines on how to deal with unjust situations, hardships, and obstacles that he might encounter in adulthood. Fairytales state the existing dilemmas very accurately and briefly, in a way that the child is able to detect and understand the issue which is not right clearly. The characters are portrayed as either bad or good, there is no in the middle, and that is why it is easier for the child to pick sides and differentiate between right and wrong actions. I feel that it is very important to allow the child also to have a knowledge about the cruelties and the injustices that are present in our society since someday the child is going to enter into the real world and it is important to not only see things in rose-colored glasses, but through all the colors present in real life.

Children in young age idealize their mothers and believe that she can only possess good qualities, and when the mother yells at her child or does something which conflicts the child's understanding of 'good,' the actions start conflicting with the child's needs. Fairytales address these needs by splitting the mother in more than one person. That is, by including stepmothers, who are wicked and bad, and fairy godmothers, who are nice and kind. Through this way, the fairytale maintains the vision the child has of his/her mother, as loving, kind, nice, and good while making up another character showing the evil side of the mother. (Bettelheim, 1976).

Moreover, using this method the child learns to evaluate himself as well. The unconscious of the

child may hold dark or evil drives which the child will not be able to understand, these negative drives are called 'shadow,' and they become in conflict with the obedient, kind, nice, and friendly person the child feels that he should be. Fairytales also create multiple characters for the hero who mirrors him, but in a negative manner, that is it becomes the 'shadow'; this allows the child to deal with and accept his negative drives, without he himself, feeling like a bad person or an evil person. (Von Franz, 1975).

For example, in the story of The Three Little Pigs, the two pigs prefer to have a good time and build shabby houses, while the third pig spends all his time by creating a strong house and does not have time to play. When the wolf comes, he destroys the two houses and is unable to destroy the third one. He falls down the chimney and becomes dinner for the third pig. (Halliwell, 1886) Bettelheim explains that through this type of tale the child learns that through hard work and diligence he is able to lead a happy life; the child's good drives are able to relate with those of the third pig, while the negative drives are able to be associated with those of the two lazy pigs and the wolf, and thus the child starts to understand that those bad drives can lead to danger and should not be exercised. (Bettelheim, 1976)

Fairytales can also be used as tools that aid in psychological therapy. Ucko used tales in group counseling sessions for women who had been abused by their partners; he trained counselors to use tales that contained storylines where the women there were abused, beaten, hurt, or mistreated by their husbands, father, or brothers. He believed that through reading these kinds of tales to these abused women, and then asking questions about the females portrayed in those tales, and trying to find alternatives for their actions, these women themselves become able to reflect on their own actions; associate some wrong patterns in themselves which are also present in the women found in those tales, and thus alter or modify them. (Ucko 1991)

Fairytales have also been used in dream analysis. Dieckman stated that large numbers of his clients were having dreams which mimicked the motifs of the client's beloved fairytales from childhood. Interestingly enough in his therapy sessions, he realized that there was actually a similarity between some pattern of events in the client's real life, and the tale's character's lives. Later on, by trying to understand and delve deeper into the client's reason to be clung to the story so much, he was able to heal many psychological disturbances. (Dieckman, 1986)

Fairytales have a massive impact on the psychology of the person, not only by affecting on the formation of certain beliefs, notion, norms, and understanding, but also helping to treat many psychological conflicts present both in children and adults as well.

### **Importance of Fairytales**

Fairy tales have been viewed as an important genre of storytelling throughout the ages, and they still play a notable part in children's lives. The universal ones are of greater importance since they transmit the same values and beliefs on a much larger scale, that is-- world-wide. They are translated into different languages and include slight variations to fit the specific society and their customs; however, the overall theme and message are still the same. They serve greatly in depicting the general human basis; they are "the international language of all mankind—of all ages and all races and culture." Through fairy tales, general concepts about the human kind are transmitted, and people even living on opposite poles can relate to each other through these tales. (Franz, 1971) So I believe that if certain types of similar messages are transmitted to different nations, then they tend to be seen and taken as universal truths.

Moreover, the Austrian child-psychologist Bruno Bettelheim finds folk fairy tales to be of enormous value when it comes to the raising of children. In his book, *The Uses of Enchantment* (1987), he analyzes their importance in comprehending the child development and the problems that they face during this phase of their lives. He goes on explaining how good fairytales hold power to guide the child through their psychological issues associated with maturing. Although some tales have violence, misfortunes, and evil in them, the happy endings give a sort of satisfaction and hope for the readers that good acts will eventually be recognized and appreciated. Another important factor is that the good and the evil are clearly separated, and the child can project and associate him/herself with the good hero/ine and find or even create some similarities between him/herself and this hero.

What is troublesome is the fact that most of the famous fairytales portray women as very weak, naïve and docile beings. They usually are very flat characters who rarely take any actions; their beauty plays an enormous role in mesmerizing the prince charming, marrying them, and living happily-ever-after. Many feminists feel that fairytales preserve traditional gender stereotypes which put women in subordinate roles, like helpless, dependence and being subservient housewives (Segel, 1983). And if fairytales do have the power to mold the child's brain and encrypt certain messages, then these kinds of tales spread the belief that women are and should be weaker. To further support my statement, it will help to take into account Lieberman's claim that the best-known tales show mostly women in a fragile and naïve position. They are portrayed wholly stripped of their agencies waiting for men to save them, and thus they serve as means through which the indoctrination of women to a passive existence is encouraged alongside with the motivation of male dominance.(Lieberman, 1972)

We have come to learn that these fairytales hold great power on shaping the minds of their readers, and according to Bettelheim fairytales are of extreme importance when it comes to child-raising since they send important messages to the preconscious, conscious, and unconscious mind on whatever level they are functioning at that specific time when the tale is being read. Because these stories talk about universal problems, they speak directly to the budding ego of the child and help in its development. “The form and structure” of the tales allow images to be formed in the psyche of the child which give him/her the ability to construct his/her daydreams and deal with different situations in life. (Bettelheim, 1976) These seemingly innocent children's stories hold great power in them; having the influence to transmit certain notions about each gender, beauty standards, and the idea of how ‘happiness’ looks like. They are able to embed the minds of the readers with stereotyping and false notions about ideas, and genders in particular which are not necessarily true but rather invented, and this indeed can be very troublesome.

There are several other critiques who have also claimed in accordance with my statement, In an article published by Mikkola M, he brought the example of Kate Millett, an American feminist, writer, and educator, who said that gender differences have “essentially cultural, rather than biological bases” that result from differential treatment (Millet,1971,p. 28). For her, gender is “the sum total of the parents’, the peers’, and the culture’s notions of what is appropriate to each gender by way of temperament, character, interests, status, worth, gesture, and expression” (Millett 1971, p.31). These notions which are being engraved in the minds of parents, peers, and the culture comes from all the information which are provided to them throughout their lives, be it in form of paintings, music, movies, or literature and specially fairytales, since it is usually read to fragile minds who are at the beginning of a stage where they are trying to search for

answers, and make sense of their inside and outside worlds. Following Millet's theory, we can see that women are taught to act submissive to men, they are taught to act docile and be weak, and not necessarily born that way. So why spread weak, naïve, docile, victim-like behaviors when we can do the opposite? Why allow people to be governed by false and negative behaviors when we can send more positive and healthy ideas and images of behaviors?

This false mentality turns into behavior as children mature; they start using the information provided by their parents, friends, school, and the literature which they are exposed to, in order to form theories on how each gender is supposed to behave. The characters depicted in children's stories help them to determine what it really means to behave like a male or a female in terms of, traits, or occupation within a child's culture, and thus our society is formed with labelled understandings of each gender.

This is certainly very dangerous since as Fine has stated, from very early age children attempt to categorize the world around them and one of the most basic ways that they are able to categorize people is by gender. As they reach preschool age, children begin to develop their sense of self in relation to others. Fine reveals that "even before they reach school, children can go well beyond the surface of gender associations and make inferences about nothing less than male and female inner nature itself" (Fine, 2010). Gender recognition in early childhood is of great importance, and the way each gender is portrayed in these fairytales have a significant effect on the formation of the child's perspective about the gender. Seeing and hearing a constant pattern of females being naïve and feeble, being in constant need of a male figure to protect them and save them from the miseries of their lives, letting men take control, and limiting female's role in the household create false standards and unrealistic perceptions about each gender. They create a

society full of falsely weakened females, and males who are always forced to seem and feel powerful.

Taking the above mentioned into account, we can conclude that there is the ability to change the gender perception which is predominant in our society by merely changing the messages present in tales which are veiled under the name of heroes and princesses in interesting fairy tales. There is the capability to teach new roles, ones where men and women are equals regarding abilities, power, and intelligence. Through tales, we can teach that there is nothing wrong in feeling powerless, or sad sometimes, as long as you don't let the negative emotions take control of your whole life and make you evil. Both females and males can feel helpless and hopeless sometimes and can be in need of each other to complete and rescue each other. We can shift the values which have been sent throughout ages and show that males and females are on equal social standing, and the differences we have are beautiful, and on equal ranks, each difference is unique and of equal importance.

### **Analysis of fairytales**

In my research paper, I will focus on four fairytales; two popular traditional ones, and two contemporary ones re-written by a feminist author, Angela Carter.

The story of Red Riding Hood is widely famous worldwide and although it has over-gone some slight changes and been translated into various languages. The plot of the story, however, has not been varied; the color of the heroine's clothes, the main character being very naïve and trusting the wolf, and the story ending by getting eaten up by the big wolf, all have stayed the same.

I realized that in almost all the traditional fairytales there are some basic patterns which have been repeated and emphasized about each gender and that I believe this is very worrying since it starts to label and limit the capabilities of each gender. The female character has almost always been portrayed as having an extremely beautiful appearance, accompanied with a weak personality, naïve mind, and a fragile soul. They are shown inferior to men in their physical abilities and rely solely on male power to save them and provide them with happiness.

In Perrault's version of the Red Riding Hood, starting from the very first sentence we are introduced that little Red was "the prettiest creature who was ever seen", she wore red cape which suited her so much, and her mother and grandmother loved her dearly. The color red has various connotations to it; paradoxically enough Perrault's heroine, whom he calls "good woman", is dressed in a color which during the 17th century when this story was written, was considered a color of sin and only women who held bad reputations used to wear the red color. A paradox rises among the heroine's depiction in red and her given characteristics of being naïve innocent and good. Nevertheless, the color red is also symbolism for a girl who is maturing, turning into a woman and getting her menstrual cycle. (Erich Fromm,1955)

Moving on, paying close attention to the vocabulary used, we can see that Red Riding Hood is shown as very innocent and ignorant little girl; she has been described as a "poor girl" who was tricked by the big bad wolf. She trusts the stranger, tells him the purpose of her journey, the place of her final destination, and creates trouble not only for herself but for her grandmother as well. The grandmother who naturally should have been wiser and have had more experiences with the "bad" and the "dangerous" is tricked and manipulated no less than the little girl and is eaten up by the wolf. This once again shows how women have been depicted as creatures that lack the ability to think and analyze rationally, they are easily fooled and deceived and are more

likely to fall in danger, thus need to be guided and advised by smarter people. Moving on, when Red reaches to her grandmother's house although suspecting from her changed voice that something is not quite right, still enters the house. She sees that her grandmother's appearance has also changed and she has been acting a little weird; she begins to ask questions like "Grandmother, what big eyes you have?", and she gets replies like, "all the better to see with my child." Instead of relying on her own logic, intuition, and her own thinking abilities, Red relies on the words she hears and believing in everything she hears she eventually gets eaten up by the big bad wolf. Although the central message of this tale is to warn girls, especially attractive ones, to not trust wolves, which is symbolism for bad boys/strangers, nevertheless it spreads the notion that females are relatively dumber, more naïve, foolish, feeble, and lack common sense. Women are placed on a victim-like level, and in need of male-power to break out of it.

According to the psychological analysis I have mentioned before, it can be concluded that young girls being read this story will associate themselves with the female heroine, seek for constant rescue outside of themselves, and view males as relatively more powerful and dangerous as well.

The Little Red Riding Hood has been re-written in a twisted manner, by a contemporary feminist author Angela Carter, who has also translated a collection of Charles Perrault's fairytales. She was an English novelist most famous for her feminist, magical realism, and picaresque work.

Although her works are regarded as too "dark" and contain terms which are not suitable for children, however, fairytales originally were created to reflect upon mores, norms, and habits and serve as civilizing agents at the same time. They were not intended for children since they contained negative images, dark themes, and cruel scenarios, they showed what it meant to have beautiful appearance and be heroic, and demonstrated how to attain "royal" status with the help of good fortune and attractiveness. Moreover, many readers and listeners used fairytales to

psychologically escape from their current 'harsh' realities and find hope in the magical realms. (Zipes,2013). So, in my opinion, no tale can be regarded as 'dark' or 'not suitable' for children as long as they are able to ignite the imagination and provide answers to the child's growing curiosity about the world, both inside and outside of him/herself.

Carter has titled her story as *The Werewolf*, and it starts with a description of the cold damp town and the superstitious mentality of the townspeople. Carter, in her story by her strong descriptive language, is able to transcend the readers to the exact time and place she had in mind. She portrays Red as a fearless and strong woman who is capable of defending herself. Her mother tells her: "take your father's hunting knife; you know how to use it." (Carter, 127) This shows how the mother trusts in the abilities of her daughter to be able to defend herself and instead of advising her not to talk to strangers, she provides her with tools to be able to defend herself in case of danger. Clearly, the distinction between Perrault's Red and Carter's is a polar opposite; Red does not need outer protection or rescue, but rather has the innate strength to rely on herself and her own power. Furthermore, when Red is encountered with the wolf "she seizes her knife and turns on the beast, and with her father's knife slashes off its right paw" (Carter, 127), this line is very descriptive in showing the fearlessness and heroic move of the heroine in defending herself and cutting the hand who was trying to cause her harm and danger. Red is able to take control of the situation and thus Carter aims to show female empowerment. Moreover, Carter has combined the grandmother's character with that of the wolf "But it was no longer a wolf's paw. It was a hand... she knew it for her grandmother's hand" (Carter, 135) she finds out that her grandmother was the wolf in disguise, and in my opinion Carter by this was trying to point out that women can be as dangerous as men, and not only depict 'bad', 'evil', and 'dangerous' as a label which is put on only men. In her story she shows that regardless of all the negative news

Red is encountered with, she is able to once again become her own savior and live happily ever after without a man. Red lives perfectly fine and happy in her own company, this is shown by the last line: “now the child lived in the grandmother’s house; she prospered.” (Carter, 139)

Moving on to Jeanne-Marie Beaumont’s *Beauty and the Beast*, the author was French and had more not so conventional views about genders, in relation to those of her time (18th century). During her times, “couverture” was a law which women abided to, and as Anne Mellor says it meant that “all women were legally ‘covered over’ or absorbed into the body of their husbands, father, brothers, or sons. She might yet still retain...reason, but she is as a statue, effectively silenced and unable to act for herself.” (Mellor,1792)

Although *Beauty and the Beast*, was one of the first fairytales to introduce a relatively ‘changed’ female roles, it still holds emphasis on the importance of beauty for females, their self-sacrifice or victim-like behavior regarded as something normal, being powerless against taking actions in their own hands, limitation of female freedom, and of course ‘couverture’.

Once again the story opens with the fascinating appearance of the heroine, who was so beautiful that she was called “Belle” or “Beauty” by everybody she knew. Contrary to other traditional tales, in this story, we do have an emphasis on her love of reading books, her good nature, kind heart, and polite manners. “She spent the greatest part of her time in reading good books”, “Beauty outshone her sisters in her person as well as her mind, and admired her humility and industry, but above all her humility and patience”, but nevertheless the author states that Beauty’s favorite chapter in the book is when the heroine meets the prince: “Ohh, isn’t this amazing. It’s my favorite part because, you’ll see, here’s where she meets Prince Charming.”, This suggests that even though she definitely is different than most heroines represented in

traditional fairytales, but still wishes to find a prince charming and marry him. This also changes the concept of her reading books, since it fits in to Janice Radway's argument of romance reading genre, which she defines as an escape from everyday life for females and as an "effort to construct a fantasy-world where she is attended, as the heroine is, by a man who reassures her of her special status and unique identity" (Radway, 69-71). This can be applied to Beauty's type of reading since she seems to read not for the purpose of self- education but instead having the aim of escapism from her current reality.

When Beauty finds out that her father is sentenced to death by the Beast, decides to trade herself and become his slave/prisoner. A huge theme present in this story is slavery; Beauty becomes beasts slave, and trades her own freedom for her father's well-being, she is forced to leave her home and live with a monster that she fears at first. This again puts women in the victim-like frame, devoting themselves wholly and putting male happiness ahead of their own. This behavior is regarded and viewed as something normal, and even rewarding since she eventually is rewarded by marriage and a happily-ever-after. Moreover throughout the story, we are told that her sisters are often jealous of her, make fun of her, and treat her badly, still, Beauty does nothing to change that behavior. She accepts them and continues to act graciously, kindly, and gives them love and attention. Women are taught that this kind of behavior is positive and once again Beauty is praised and rewarded in the end by good fortune, so the jealous and ill-behaved sisters are the 'shadow' of the child, while Beauty is the positive drive. Readers try to associate and mimic the heroine and try to become like her, and avoid personalities like the two sisters.

An idea which seems to be setting the tone of the whole story is put into question taking into account Ana Bradley's argument of Stockholm syndrome governing the tale. Bradley is a historical romance writer and she believes that these kinds of famous old fairytales carry certain

messages which should not be translated into our modern day lives. Beauty falls in love with her captor and this introduces the concept of Stockholm syndrome, where the victim falls in love with the person who performed the act of kidnapping. So this raises the question of whether or not Beauty was truly in love with the personality and character of the Beast, or was actually under the Stockholm syndrome effect. Nevertheless after all the negative emotions and actions directed towards the heroine, both coming from her surroundings and her own self, she once again is able to escape all those, and the tale ends on a happy note; the heroine marries the Beast that now has turned into prince charming, and they live happily ever after.

Angela Carter has once again re-written this tale, under the title *The Tiger's Bride*, where she has challenged the famous stereotypes of each gender. The story opens up with a very bold statement: "My father lost me to the Beast at cards" this sentence is like a wake-up call, a cruel way to shake the readers and try to address them, in exaggerated and very harsh form, how women have always been oppressed and treated as objects. The heroine at the beginning of the story is displayed in a powerless and weak social standing, however, we come to realize that she breaks out of that state –by her own inner strength, and breaks out of the chains that society has created. The heroine is an active character who is always in the mode of changing for the better, becoming stronger and wiser throughout the story.

What makes this tale one of Carter's best works is her use of binary oppositions: tame and wild, innocence and experience, body and soul, and finally beauty and beast. She has perfectly accomplished in placing them together, and showing how they can coexist within the same gender, and thus breaking some beliefs regarding genders in the minds of the readers. We are seen that even though the heroine possesses innocence, she also is 'experience'; this can be seen when she gives her father a white rose "smeared with blood". The white rose stands for her

“virginity” and “innocence”, while purposefully tearing her hand and making blood stains over it, denotes defloration and experience. “My tear-be slobbered father wants a rose to show that I forgive him. When I break off a steam, I prick my finger and so he gets his rose all smeared with blood.” (Carter,8)

This suggests that the heroine is not naïve but rather very smart and witty, she is able to convey her ideas by using metaphors. There are also many other lines which show how women are objectified like: “My master's sole desire is to see the pretty young lady unclothed, nude without her dress”, which means that the main purpose of the male here is to have physical intercourse with her, and is not interested in love, but we have a twist in her story when the heroine defends herself and refuses his request. She tells him that she will only show him her ankle and then immediately go to the church to be cleansed afterward. Our heroine is very sarcastic and she is able to hurt the beast’s feelings and even make him cry, she says: “How pleased I was to see I struck the beast to the heart”. The word “struck” suggests physical harm, but in this plot, she attacks him emotionally and hurts his feelings. We can see a change in role and again the binary oppositions; the Beast being rough, strong, and manly, is quickly hurt and harmed by the heroine’s cynical attitude, while the Beauty being feminine and soft on the outside, has a sharp and witty mind.

Moreover, the heroine breaks the understanding of “her skin as her sole capital” rejects the diamond earrings which were gifted to her and throws them on the floor. Beauty continues to reject him until the Beast removes his “human mask” and unclothes himself by showing the real him, which is a tiger. It is only then that the heroine of her own will wears the earrings, undresses herself, and approaching him she realizes that he is more scared of her than she is of him. “He went still as stone. He was far more frightened of me than I was of him”.(Carter) Again roles are

changed, by giving the female more power than the male, and showing how both genders are capable of feeling vulnerable and weak sometimes. Eventually, instead of the Beast changing into a charming prince, it is the heroine who is metamorphosed into a tiger. “And each stroke of his tongue ripped off skin after successive skin, all the skins of a life in the world, and left behind a nascent patina of shining hairs. My earrings turned back to water and trickled down my shoulders; I shrugged the drops off my beautiful fur.”(Carter) The heroine is reborn and transformed into a tigress; she is no longer an object to be bartered and although she feels pain while shredding off her skin, but her true strong nature comes to the surface. The ending emphasizes empowerment of women, claiming that all are tigresses in disguise; they have innate strength and power which needs to be dug.

This tale does not sugarcoat or cover the reality that many live in today, on the contrary in a harsh form it is presented to the readers and shown that women even though are in an oppressed standing, do hold power to break through of it and own their strengths. Carter aims to show that both the lock and the key are in our own hands and gender plays no role in this.

There are several critics who see Carter’s work as very important and capable of breaking some famous gender stereotypes. “As a writer, Carter is usually associated with fantasy, the Gothic, the bizarre, the fairy tale, burlesque, the mythical, magical and metaphorical, all of which transport us away from historical actuality into a primarily symbolic literary space” (Joannou, 2007, 111-2). In most of Carter’s stories her main power is in her ability to use the language in a strong manner, her aim is to extract the hidden content which is formulated on the traditional misogynist attitude. Sara Mills in her book, “Feminist Stylistics” aimed to “read against the grain” by using the power of language and twist the traditional discourse upside down. Mills stated that “a great deal of western literature is concerned with a description of women’s

experience, by men” (Mills, 1995, 53) and the fairy tales are the most important ones among those literary works. She critiqued that Carter’s *The Bloody Chamber* looks as a challenge to the earlier descriptions about the female experience, and shows the experience from the female perspective as opposed to the male-dominant philosophy which was governing in the previous fairy tales. Various feminists find fairy tales to be male fantasies on sexist discourses, as they serve to encourage or implying the oppression of female prejudice. That is why re-narrating the fairy tales through female-dominant language and ideology, instead of male, is a noteworthy way to make reorganization in language and it’s the stereotyping impact it has on society.

On the contrary, there also have been various feminist debates which were intensified in the late 1970s and 1980s and had influenced Carter’s work significantly. Many feminists agreed that pornography “reflected a sort of distilled essence of the entrenched binaries of patriarchal gender relations, the conflict revolved around the extent to which pornographic representations could be appropriated” (Benson, 37) and many feminist saw pornography as purely the eroticization of male power and complete weakness of the female character. In the stories of *The Bloody Chamber*, they have seen sexual violence, sexual gratification, erotic desires, sadism, and pornography, which work negatively in achieving the feminist objectives, which is to show women empowered and equal to men.

Other critics like Robert Clark and Patricia Dunker, saw Carter’s widespread feminist works as too vague, they felt that she was just rewriting the tales again caught in the restraints of their original structures, and she was unable to escape from the conventional gender roles altogether. (Clark, 39).

It is reasonable to have negative alongside positive criticisms about any good writing since it challenges and points upon topics which are controversial and hard to have the same opinions about. Each individual should read, analyze, and understand for him/herself whether or not Carter's work can be regarded as literature which spreads fair ideas about each gender, and can be stories suitable to rear children with or not. To find answers to that question I have conducted survey with the citizens of Armenia and asked several questions which allow me to get an insight of the new and old generation's views regarding different types of fairytales.

### **Survey and Analysis**

I wanted to understand whether or not Armenians, both parents and soon-to-be parents, are aware of these types of messages hidden in the fairytales they read/ will read someday to their children, and I was very much interested to find out which version of fairytales they would prefer to rear their children's with, that is, more feministic fairytales where women are seen as stronger and smarter, or the original versions where they are depicted as very weak and more naïve. I asked overall of 7 questions; first I started with general questions like the age of the respondents, their gender, and place of birth. Later I asked the more in-depth questions like, whether or not they were aware of hidden stereotypes in tales, their preference of traditional or contemporary tales, and finally their preference of tales where women are seen as weaker and more naïve, or tales where women are depicted as smarter and stronger.

First I wanted to understand the most important question which is whether people were aware that there are gender distinctions in some famous traditional tales, then I wanted to see that having that knowledge in mind, would they prefer traditional or contemporary tales?. Moving on

I wanted to directly ask and see if people preferred tales which positioned women on a stronger standing or a weaker one.

To be able to understand the prevailing mindset I divided my target audience among the old and new generation. The old generation age ranging from 36-50, while the new generation age ranging from 20-35, and then analyzed the results to see how each generation thinks about the questions asked.

After collecting 116 responses, I furthered my analysis by calculating the percentage of females of each question asked and the percentage of males, in order to be able to expose how each gender thinks regarding this issue as well. And finally I divided the analysis even further to understand how younger vs older women thought, and how younger vs older men thought regarding the gender portrayal in fairytales.

My analysis allowed me to discover not only the mindset of each generation but also the mindset of each gender regarding the questions asked about fairytales and their preferences of the portrayal of women in these tales. It also helped me understand whether or not age played any role in affecting the mindsets of genders.

To start with I will first talk about the overall results and then go into details. So, 50.4% of those who took my survey were from the older generation (age ranging 36-50), while 48.7% were from the new generation (age ranging 20-35). 53.8% were males while 46.2% were females, and all of them were Armenians.

## How old are you? / Ձեր տարիքը

117 responses

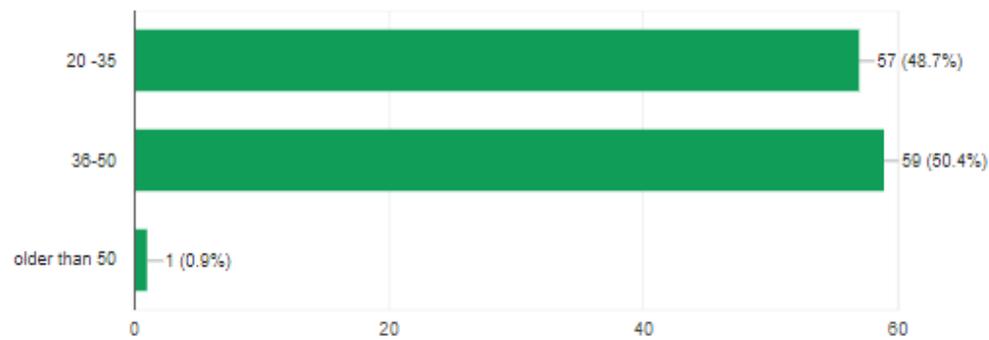


Figure 1: Age of Respondents

## Gender / Սեռ

117 responses

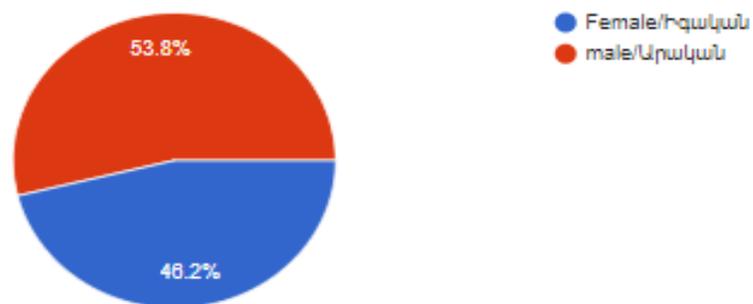


Figure 2: Gender of Respondents

From the older generation, 62% (37 people) of the survey takers were males, and only 37% (22 people) were females, while from the new generation 43% (25 people) were males, and 56% (32 people) were females.

We can deduce that females of the new generation are already more active and involved than females of the older generation. Even though the survey was done on Facebook, we had more male responders than females from the older generation.

I did a statistics of my own to find out from the overall survey, how each generation and each gender thinks since the analysis provided by google docs was that of the overall results, both generation and both genders mixed.

I believe the first and very important aspect of solving any issue is to accept the fact that there is an issue in the first place. So my first question was whether or not people were aware of the hidden stereotypes present in some famous traditional fairytales.

From the old generation (36-50), 50% were aware and 50% were not. In the new generation (20-35), the results were more encouraging, 70.17% were aware of these hidden stereotypes and only 29.82% were not.

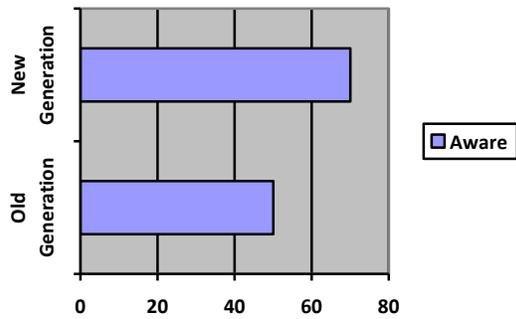


Figure 3: Aware of Hidden Stereotypes

After posing the question of awareness, I wanted to understand if people believe these types of gender-stereotyped messages do or do not have an effect on the way women are seen and perceived in our society.

Again from the older generation, a higher percentage of people (66.10%) believed that it did not have an effect and only a small amount of (33.89%) thought that it has an effect. While from the new generation the higher percentage of people (64.91%) believed that it does have an effect on how women are seen and perceived in our society, and only a small amount (33.3%) believed that it did not.

We can see the huge difference of thinking among the old and new generation regarding this question; the new generation tends to believe more in the effect of literature and its power to transmit and plant certain ideas in the minds of the readers.

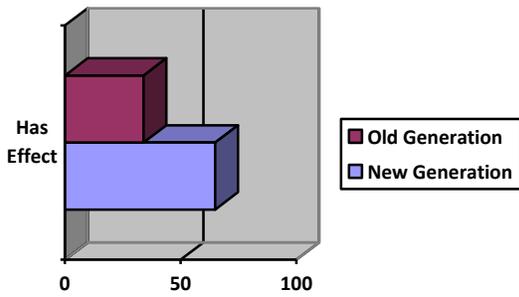


Figure 4: Effect of Tales on How Women are Seen and Treated in Society

After asking this question I wanted to understand being aware and having an understanding of the effect it can have on the perception of society, would people prefer to rear their children with traditional tales or contemporary ones?

The results were very surprising and paradoxical to the previous questions. 94.91% of the old generation wanted traditional tales, 3.4% contemporary, and only 1.6% wanted to rear their children with both traditional and contemporary.

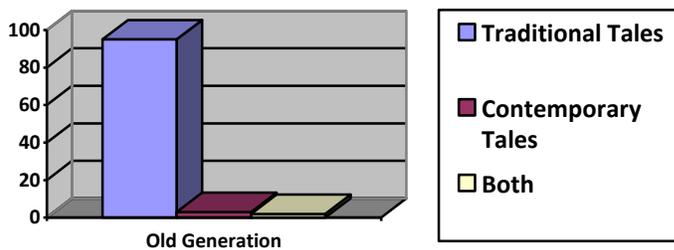


Figure 5: Preference of Tales in Old Generation

In the new generation, the results again were in favor of the traditional tales instead of contemporary ones. 45.61% voted traditional, 28.07% contemporary and 26.31% preferred to rear their children with both tales.

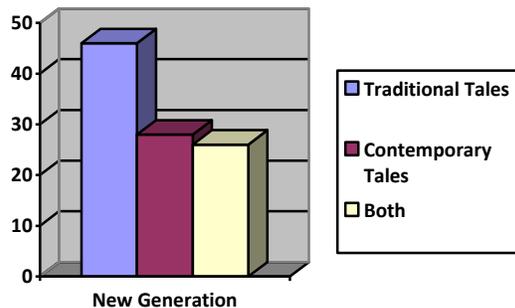


Figure 6: Preference of Tales in New Generation

This raised the question of what people understand when hearing the word “traditional”. If a higher percentage of people were aware of the hidden stereotypes present in traditional tales, and a higher percentage of them believed that these tales do have an effect on our society’s perception towards females, then why would they continue to rear their children with such stories? I came to the belief that many misunderstood the word “traditional tales”.

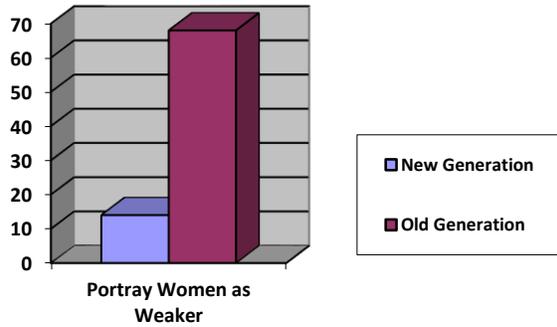
So I conducted interviews with 10 people, 5 from the older generation and 5 from the new generation, and asked an open-ended question of how they define “traditional tales”.

Most (8/10) of them said that for them traditional tales meant tales where conventions regarding values and norms are kept and did not associate it with “traditional gender-roles” what-so-ever.

And only 2 out of 10 said that for them traditional tales also mean in terms of gender roles.

Finally, to clearly understand how our society would like to see women depicted in these tales, in my online survey I asked the question of which type of tales would they read to their children, tales where women are portrayed as weak and naïve characters? Or tales where women are portrayed as much stronger and smarter?

Again the results were in correlation with the previous 1st and 2nd questions. From the older generation, a higher percentage (67.7%) preferred tales where women were seen as weaker and more naïve and only (27.53%) preferred tales where women were stronger, small percentage of the respondents had answered “I’m not sure”.



. Figure 7: Preference of Women as Weaker

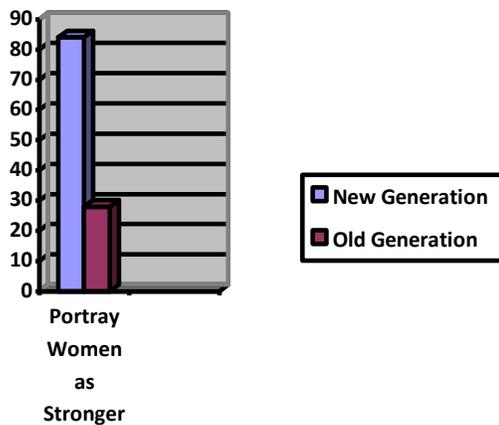


Figure 8: Preference of Women as Stronger

On the contrary, the results of the new generation were very encouraging. 84.21% preferred tales where women were seen as stronger and smarter, and only a small amount of 14.07% wanted to rear their kids with tales where females were seen as the opposite, there was a smaller percentage who had answered “both”, or “I’m not sure”

So I came to the understanding that among the new and the old generations, again there is a huge gap in regards to gender issues. Our generation encourages and stands by the empowerment of women, they want to see change and are working towards it, and I am sure that the coming generation will even be more in favor of empowering and valuing women.

Moving on I wanted to understand the preference of each gender regarding this same questions. I saw that more females (74%) than males (48%), from both generations together, were aware of the hidden stereotypes found in traditional tales.

More females (61.11%) than males (38.7%) believed that fairytales have an effect on the perception of society.

However again I saw that regarding the issue of whether they would prefer traditional or contemporary, higher percentages were voted for the traditional tales; males 79.03%, females 61.11%, and only 12.9% males, 18.51% females voted for contemporary tales.

Furthermore, to my last master question; of course, more females 59.25% voted for preferring to rear their children with tales where females were depicted as stronger and smarter, and for the males, it was 40.32%.

It was really sad to see that 59.67% of males preferred to read tales where we see women as weak and naïve, while in case of women this percentage was of course much less (20.27%).

Here is a sheet I created showing the questions, and the percentage of responses of both generations and genders.

Generation	Aware	Not Aware	Have effect	Dont Have effect	Traditional	Contemporary	Both	Strong	Weak
OLD	50%	50%	33.89%	66.10%	94.91%	3.40%	16.00%	27.53%	67.70%
NEW	70.17%	29.82%	64.91%	33.33%	45.61%	28.07%	26.31%	84.21%	14.07%
Males	48%	51.60%	38.07%	61.29%	79.03%	12.90%	8.06%	59.67%	40.32%
Females	74%	25.90%	61.11%	37.03%	61.11%	18.51%	20.37%	20.37%	59.25%

We can deduce that in case of males from both generations, a larger percentage were unaware of the hidden stereotypes, did not believe of its effect, preferred the old traditional tales over contemporary ones, and wanted to read tales showing women weaker and more naïve.

In my last part of survey analysis, I wanted to see the difference of mentality among women of different generation, and men of different generations, so I did “New Generation Females VS Old Generation Females”, and “New Generation Males VS Old Generation Males.”

Overall, there were 54 females from both generations who took the survey; 32 (59.25%) from the new generation and 22 from the old generation (40.74%).

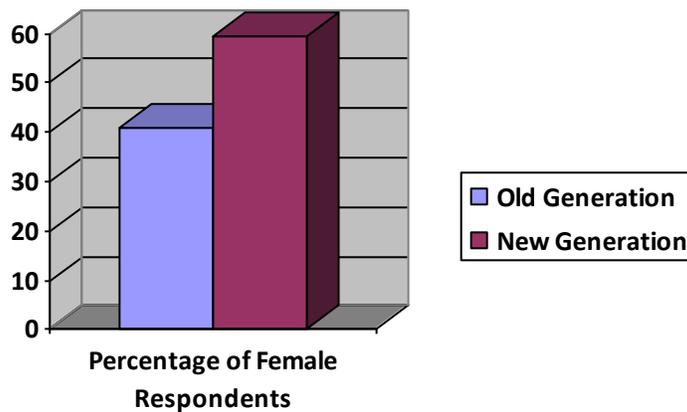


Figure 9: Female Respondents from Old and New Generations

From the new generation more females 44.44% were aware of the hidden stereotypes than those of the older generation, where only 29.62% were aware.

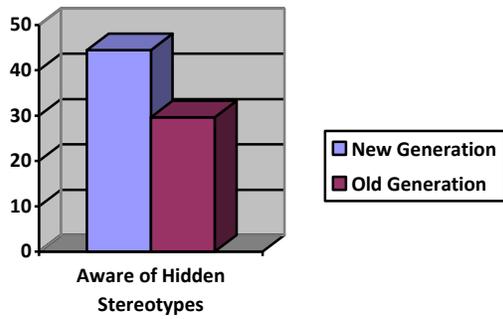


Figure 10: Awareness of Women from Both Generations of the Hidden Stereotypes in Tales

For the second question, again more females from the new generation 40.74% believed that fairytales do have an effect on the way women are seen and perceived in society, while in the older generation this percentage was much lower, it was only 20.37%.

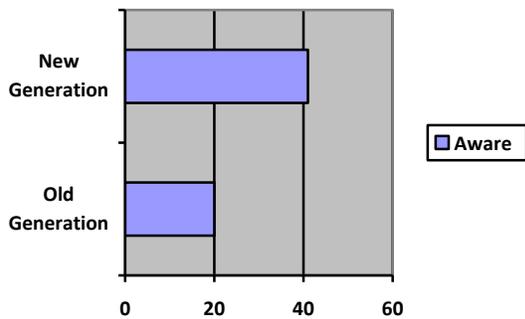


Figure 11: Belief that Tales Have Effect on How Women are Seen and Treated in Society

For the question of preferring traditional or contemporary tales, in the new generation 24% wanted traditional tales, 16.7% wanted contemporary, and 18.57% preferred to use both tales to rear their children with.

In the older generation, the percentage was higher regarding the preference of traditional tales, it was 37%. Only small percentage of 1.85% women wanted contemporary tales, and 1.85% preferred the usage of both tales.

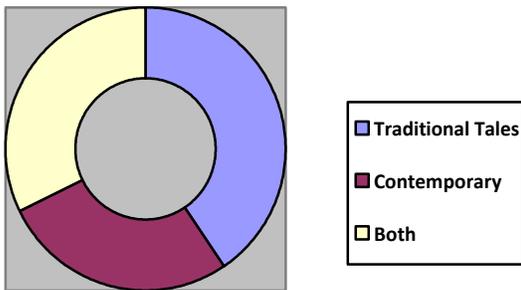


Figure 12: Preference of Tales by the New Generation

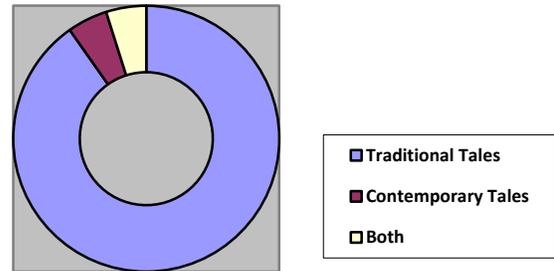


Figure 13: Preference of Tales by the Old Generation

To the final most important question, more females from the new generation (53.70%) voted for preferring tales where women are seen as stronger and smarter, while in the older generation it was 24.07% of women.

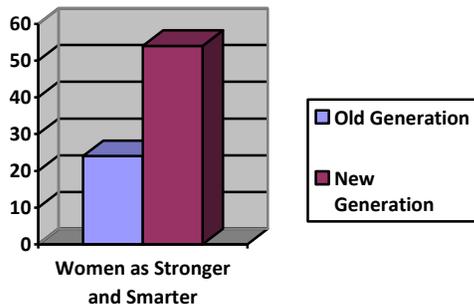


Figure 14: Preference of Tales Where Women are Stronger and Smarter

From the overall respondents there were 62 males; 25 people (40.32%) from the new generation and 37 from the old generation (59.6%).

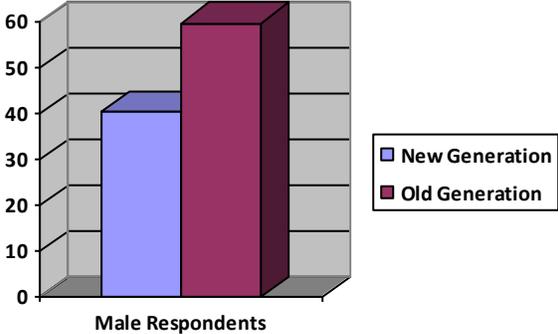


Figure 15: Percentage of Male Respondents from New and Old Generations

From the new generation more males (25.8%) were aware of the hidden stereotypes present in traditional tales, than that of the older generation (22.5%).

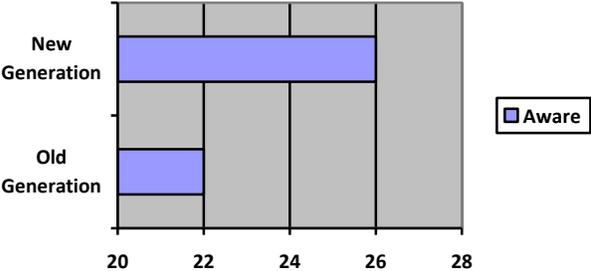


Figure 16: Awareness of hidden Stereotypes by Each Generation

More males from the new generation, 24.5% believed that tales had effect on how women were seen and perceived than males of the older generation, where only 14.5% believed so.

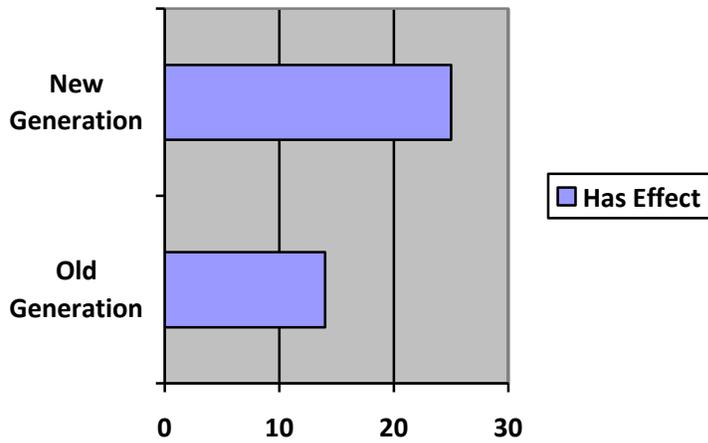


Figure 17: Tales Do have an Effect on How Women are Seen and Treated in Society

From the new generation, 20.9% preferred traditional tales, 11.6% contemporary, and 8.6% both.

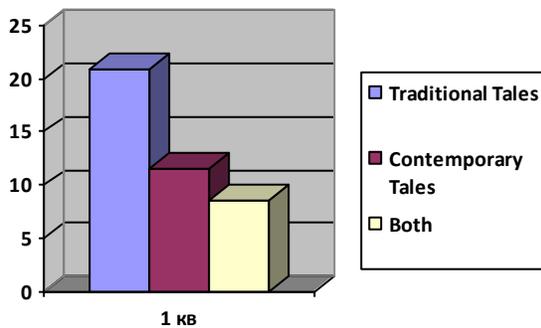


Figure 18: Preference of the New Generation of the Kind of Tales to Rear Children With

From the older generation, 58% preferred traditional tales, and only 1.6% contemporary.

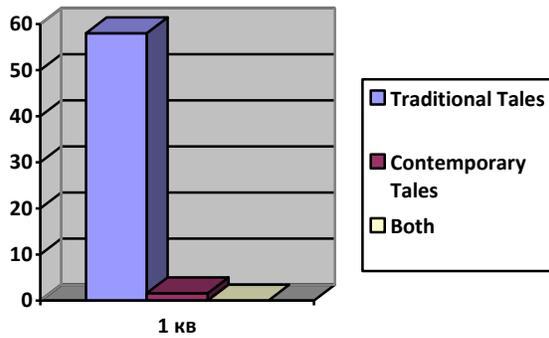


Figure 19: preference of the New Generation of the Kind of Tales to Rear Children With

And finally for the last question, more males from the new generation 30.6% preferred to see women as stronger and smarter

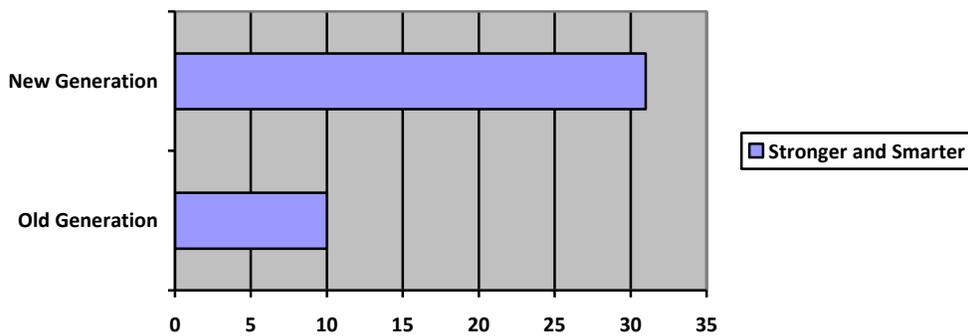


Figure 20: Preference of Women as Stronger and Smarter by Each Generation

Only 9.6% from the new generation wanted tales where women were weaker, while from the older generation the percentage was much greater, it was 50% !.

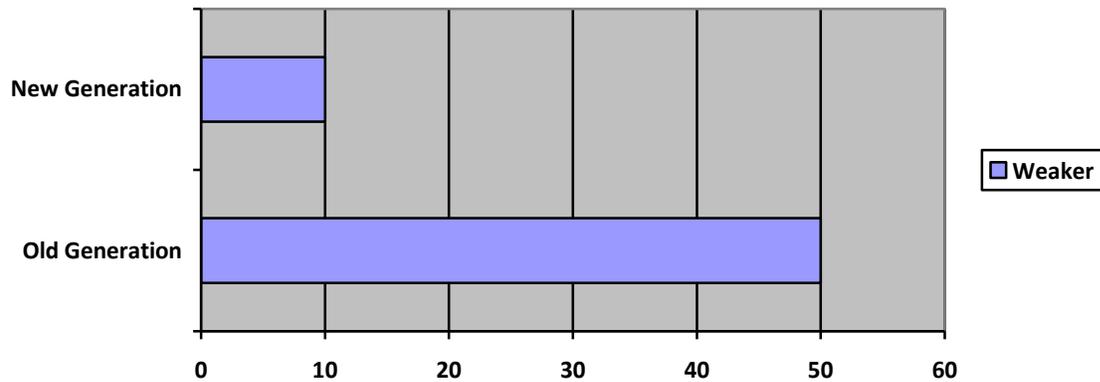


Figure 21: Preference of Women as Weaker by Each Generation

From this section of my survey analysis, it can be concluded that both males and females from the new generation were more aware of the hidden stereotypes than that of the older generation, and they were more convinced of its effect on how women are seen and perceived in society. The new generation, although again not to a great extent, but had a higher preference in reading contemporary or both traditional and contemporary tales to their children, and to the final question again more males and females from the new generation wanted to read their children tales where women were seen as stronger and smarter. It was mostly the older generation that wanted to see women weaker and more naïve, and see males as stronger and smarter.

To understand more thoroughly it would have been more effective to have respondents from Armenian villages and various districts as well, to find out how the Armenian society really thinks. However, due to time and resource limitations I was only able to reach people who are active on social media, and it would be unfair to make conclusions about the overall Armenian society based on this results only. For a more accurate result, it would have been better to conduct face-to-face surveys, or even interviews, and widen the range of respondents by including citizens from all over Armenia. Moreover, it would have also served better if I had expanded my study of fairytales and included more traditional famous tales like Cinderella, The Snow White, The Arabian Nights, Pinocchio, etc., and more contemporary tales and feminist revisions and not limit my study by Angela Carter only. This way I would gain a deeper insight into the hidden stereotypes present in tales, and draw comparisons/differences with the feminist revisions. This would serve into creating an analysis which would be more accurate and suitable to identify our country with. However I do believe that through my surveys I was able to reach out and understand the different mentalities present in the new and the older generation, I was able to draw out conclusions about their preferences regarding the perception of women's image and role in our society.

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