

Depiction of Patriarchal Society in Disney's Cinderella

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Abstract

Purpose: The objective of this study is to examine the patriarchal society of Disney's Cinderella using patriarchal analysis. Cinderella is a well know adaptation of the fairytale. Although seemingly a harmless cartoon about princess, it actually has a harmful representation of a patriarchal society.

Methodology/approach: Descriptive qualitative and library research methods were used to analyze and describe the quotations and transcripts based on the Kate Millet theory of sexual politics.

Results/findings: From the research, two signs of patriarchal society are depicted: (1) the ideological sign where every male character in the movie thinks of women as something to be subjugated at and to be married to continue the family line. (2) Psychological signs where the female character including Cinderella is accepting their traditional role as home maker and not making any effort to escape the patriarchy

Limitations: This study depicted many signs of patriarchal society in the film, but this discussion is limited only into two clear signs of patriarchal society

Contribution: Hopefully, this analysis can contribute to the field of film, literary studies, and sociological perspectives.

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1. Pendahuluan

Literature is a powerful medium for storytelling and self-expression that has the ability to shape our understanding of the world and the people around us. It can provide us with insight into different cultures and perspectives and can also serve as a means of exploring and understanding complex issues and emotions. (Wall, 2003) said that literature is a vital record of what men have witnessed in existence, what they have experienced of it that is of the most instantaneous and everlasting curiosity for all of us.

Children's literature is a particular subset of literature that is specifically designed for young readers and often focuses on themes of growth, discovery, and imagination. According to Yu Chang (2007), children's literature is defined as literature that is intended to help children understand and empathize with the world views and experiences of others, including other children. Children's literature is an essential form of communication that helps children develop language, literacy, and critical thinking skills. It can also shape children's values, beliefs, and world understanding.

Fairy tales are one example of children's literature. Fairy tales have a long history and have been a special form of storytelling for centuries. These tales often feature magical elements, enchanted creatures, heroines, and heroes who must overcome significant challenges. Fairy tales have also been used to teach moral lessons and instil cultural values in children. One of the most enduring and well-known examples of fairy tales is the fairy tale "Cinderella," which has been adapted and reinterpreted numerous times, including in Disney's 1950 animated film adaptation. While generations of children have enjoyed the story of Cinderella, some critics have argued that it promotes harmful patriarchal values and reinforces gender stereotypes. In particular, the portrayal of the stepmother as a patriarchal figure who oppresses Cinderella and seeks to prevent her from achieving her dreams has been controversial (Parsons, 2021).

In the Disney film, the stepmother is depicted as a harsh, cruel, and manipulative woman who is determined to prevent Cinderella from attending the royal ball and finding true love. She is shown as jealous and envious of Cinderella's beauty and goodness, and she goes to great lengths to keep Cinderella from achieving her dreams. The stepmother is also depicted as physically abusive, hitting Cinderella and tearing up her dresses.

This portrayal of the stepmother as a patriarchal figure who oppresses Cinderella and seeks to prevent her from achieving her dreams is problematic for several reasons. It reinforces harmful gender stereotypes and promotes the idea that women are naturally competitive, manipulative, and capable of cruelty and abuse toward one another. It also reinforces the idea that women's worth and value are based on their appearance and ability to attract men rather than on their intelligence, talents, and inner qualities.

However, it is too simple to call the stepmother agent of patriarchy just because of her actions. (Millet, 1970a), in her book, *Sexual Politics*, mentioned that for the longest time in history, any interaction between the two sexes could be defined as politics. She explained in her book that this interaction also resulted in individuals or groups that tend to hold these political structures to keep the oppression continuing, thus maintaining the patriarchy. This led to the explanation of the stepmother's action, how her action is the result of the structural patriarchy in the sexual politics that hold power in her era.

There are several reasons why Disney's Cinderella is chosen as an object for this study. The first reason is the popularity and cultural significance. Disney's Cinderella is one of the most well-known and beloved fairy tales, and it has been adapted and reinterpreted numerous times in various media. Disney's Cinderella is the most famous and popular of all of the adaptations it had. Its popularity and cultural significance make it an ideal case study for exploring how gender roles and relationships are depicted and how they may shape societal attitudes toward women and men.

Second is the themes of power and oppression. The story of Disney's Cinderella centers around themes of power and oppression, with the stepmother serving as a symbol of the patriarchy and Cinderella as a victim of abuse and exploitation. These themes make Disney's Cinderella a helpful lens through which to examine how gender roles and relationships are constructed and how they may perpetuate or challenge systems of power and privilege.

Third, the potential for alternative readings. While Disney's Cinderella has traditionally been interpreted in a particular way, it is also possible to read the story in alternative ways that challenge and subvert traditional gender roles. Examining Disney's Cinderella from a feminist or queer perspective allows for exploring the potential for resistance and change within oppressive systems.

Considering the cultural and historical context in which the story was initially written and how it has been adapted and reinterpreted over time, it is also interesting to see how Disney's Cinderella story is the result of the patriarchal society the movie had for its background. This study will shift the discussion from the wickedness of the stepmother to what are the social consequences and pressure that leads the stepmother to do the action she did in the movie and how it connects to the bigger picture of patriarchy and sexual politics.

2. Tinjauan pustaka dan pengembangan hipotesis

There is already some previous study that also use the same theory to analyse many patriarchal politics in the story they analysed. For this paper, the writer uses the theory of the patriarchal system from Kate (Millet, 1970a). This theory is then used to analyse Disney's Cinderella story to find the deep-seated patriarchal hierarchy within the story's background.

The first study is Sara Immaculata Terra Istinara's *Radical Feminism Reflected Through the Resistance of Woman Characters in American Horror Story* (Schubart, 2018). This study examines the element of radical feminism reflected in the woman characters of the said movie. The result of this study is that the patriarchal practice that the female characters experience is the act of women's subordination. The

subordination includes the view of women as sexualized objects and the absence of choice for women. The writer also discovered three primary radical feminist resistances to creating a sexual revolution in the series: education, politics, and employment.

The second study is from Arini Vika Sari and Wiyatmi Wiyatmi's Sexual Politics in *Fiksimini*: Analysis of Feminist Critical Discourse (2021). The study aims to describe the sexual politics in *Fiksimini*. The study is a qualitative descriptive study that uses the @fiksimini account on Twitter as the data source from January to February 2020. The writers found that *Fiksimini* contains six types of sexual politics, namely sexual slavery, women's domestic work, control of women, sexual abuse, rape, projecting women, and negotiations conducted by female characters in the story. The female characters in the *Fiksimini* writers' stories continue to be depicted as subhuman women under the control of the patriarchy. Another study about discourse on gender equality in the family in the film *Nanti Kita Cerita Tentang Hari Ini* by (Naurah & Siregar, 2023) found that there is gender inequality in the family caused by the domination of power and the authoritarian role of the head of the family in each other family members related to patriarchal culture.

To understand sexual politics and its impact on the patriarchy, one must understand how patriarchy comes into power. In her book *Sexual Politics* (Millett, 1970a), Kate Millett examines the intersection of gender, power, and sexuality. She asserts that patriarchy, a social system in which men hold power and privilege over women, is deeply rooted in sexual politics. Millett argues that masculinity and femininity are culturally constructed and that the gender binary has been used to justify male dominance and female subordination.

Millett asserts that patriarchy is maintained through various forms of sexual oppression, including objectification and degradation of women's bodies, violence against women, and control over women's reproductive rights. She also discusses how patriarchy is reinforced through literature, art, and media, as well as through institutions such as the family, the church, and the state.

Millett employed eight criteria to assess the likelihood of patriarchy in a given society or context.

1) Ideological

Millett argues that the ideology upheld by the government must be adhered to or imposed by society. She asserts that Sexual Politics has become the government's ideology through the socialization of both sexes into patriarchal politics regarding temperament, role, and status. In this context, temperament refers to the gendered aspects of personality, with men possessing traits such as aggression, intelligence, force, and efficacy and women being expected to be passive, ignorant, obedient, virtuous, and ineffectual. This gender stereotype is linked to sex roles, which dictates that women should engage in domestic work and bear children while men pursue achievement, interest, and ambition (Millett, 1970a). The status factor pertains to the superior status of men, who are granted authority over women. Millett believes that this factor leads to men exhibiting behaviours of dominance.

2) Biological

It is commonly held that biological differences between the sexes are responsible for the existence of patriarchal culture. However, Millett asserts that masculine and feminine personality traits have no connection to nature or biology. As such, the idea that male physical strength grants them superiority in political matters is invalid. Factors such as class or status should be considered instead. The reliance on male physical strength as a justification for the continuation of the patriarchal system is unconvincing. Robert J. Stoller distinguishes between the terms gender and sex. He believes that gender identity is a deeply ingrained and long-lasting aspect of an individual's being, with gender referring to the psychological or cultural construction of identity (Millett, 1970b). In contrast, sex pertains to natural or biological characteristics.

3) Sociallogical

According to Millett, the family is the primary institution of patriarchy. The family plays a vital role in larger societies, such as in society or a state, as it helps its members adapt and also assists the patriarchal state in governing its citizens through the heads of families. For many centuries, the patriarchal family has strongly emphasized legitimacy to ensure that reproduction and the

socialization of children occur within its boundaries. This makes it difficult to see the oppressive nature of the patriarchal family culture. Malinowski suggests that this is due to the "principle of legitimacy," which dictates that "no child should be brought into the world without a man" (Millett, 1970b). This principle reinforces the idea that men are the dominant figures in the family, demonstrating the pervasiveness and fundamental nature of patriarchy in all societies and its impact on family members.

4) Class

The extent to which class or ethnic mores influence patriarchy is primarily determined by the degree to which male supremacy is accepted and upheld. Millett observes that within patriarchal classes, double standards enable men to benefit from their superior social and economic resources, leading them to pit women against each other as rivals (Millett, 1970a). Among women, additional secondary status characteristics, such as attractiveness and age, create competition among them. Millett contends that the sexual status of women can obscure the reality of their caste-like status within the patriarchy, leading people to misunderstand the true nature of their position.

5) Economic and Educational

According to Millett, the most effective form of patriarchal government is its economic control over women. Historically, patriarchy has allowed women only basic literacy while denying them further education. Education and the economy are closely intertwined in modern societies, making the level and nature of higher education for women particularly significant. While modern patriarchies have recently opened all levels of education to women, the type and quality of education differ by gender. Millett contends that patriarchy creates a disparity in personality traits between the sexes, with men being assigned to study science and technology, professions, business, and engineering. Control of these fields is a matter of political power.

6) Force

appears to be a process that does not require violent implementation. However, Millett believes that under other total ideologies (such as racism and colonialism), control in a patriarchal society would have to be imposed through force. Without the use of force, a patriarchal society would be unable to function. Most patriarchies have institutionalized force through their legal systems, resulting in the deprivation of women's control over their bodies and the occurrence of illegal abortions (Millett, 1970). Patriarchal power also relies on a type of sexual violence, most notably manifested in the act of rape. Millett notes that the emotional response to patriarchal violence against women is sometimes ambiguous.

7) Anthropological

Patriarchal ideas about women serve political purposes and are evident in anthropology, religion, and literature. These ideas, created by men to suit their needs, stem from a fear of women's "otherness" and assume that patriarchy has already been established and that men are the ideal human form. Women are seen as not fitting into this ideal or as "other." Many myths stigmatize women, such as the belief that a woman's sexual functions are unclean, which can be found across various societies (Millett, 1970). Patriarchal religion and ethics frequently associate women with sex and assign the burden of the stigma attached to sex solely to women. At the same time, men's identity is kept separate from their sexuality.

8) Psychological

The internalization of patriarchal ideology results from women's efforts to survive the system. Status, temperament, and role are all value systems with psychological implications for both sexes (Millett, 1970). The family plays a significant role in instilling values in its members within the patriarchal system, as does religion and tradition. The universality and endurance of patriarchy make it a potent psychological weapon, such as a woman's desire to be reified, which commonly makes her more submissive to the system (Millett, 1970).

3. Metode penelitian

The popularity of films as an object in literary studies has strengthened since the massive adaptation of literary works into films, for example novels or short stories (Balázs, 1970). In several decades, a series of films that have been commercially successful and have received academic appreciation are the result of the transformation of literary works, especially novels. In the history of Hollywood cinema, for example, almost all screenplays for films and TV series originate from novel transformations. The Old

Man and The Sea by Ernest Hemingway, Gone with The Wind by Margaret Mitchel, The God Father I, II, III by Mario Puzo, The Lord of the Rings by Tolkien, Game of Thrones by G.G. Martins, Dan Brown's Davinci Code, and J.K.'s Harry Potter. Rowling is an example of novels that have been adapted into films. On a national scale, the adaptation of literary works into films has also been popular since the 1970s. A series of films (and soap operas) are the result of transformations from literary works (novels), including, *Siti Nurbaya*, *Tenggelamnya Kapal Van Der Wijck* by HAMKA, *Si Doel Anak Betawi*, *Lupus*, *Ayat-Ayat Cinta*, or *Laskar Pelangi* (Rasiah, 2019).

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, it is impossible to neglect film as a semi-textual genre both influenced by and exerting influence on literature and literary criticism. Film is predetermined by literary techniques; conversely, literary practice developed particular features under the impact of film (Klarer, 2004). Varied literary perspectives then can be applied to see what lies beneath a film (Klevan & Clayton, 2011).

The present study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to examine the portrayal of patriarchy in Disney's Cinderella (1950). Flick (2022) notes that qualitative research utilizes documents (such as text, images, film, or music) or other representations of the experiences of an individual or group. These documents may pertain to biographical events, histories, or every day or professional practices. The writer may analyse every aspect of knowledge and account within the story. The notes suggests that a qualitative approach can be used to analyse documents (such as text, images, film, or music) in the context of real-life events or fiction. The data collection sources and forms do not lend themselves to numerical measurement. To gather data, the writer uses the transcripts of the movie because of the limitation of the medium the study conducted. The film then to be analysed to find the likelihood of a patriarchal society in the story using (Millett, 1970a) theory of Sexual Politics. Millett's, Sexual Politics, announces her view of 'patriarchy' as pervasive and demands 'a systematic overview – as a political institution'. Patriarchy subordinates the female to the male or treats the female as an inferior male, and this power is exerted, directly or indirectly, in civil and domestic life to constrain women (Selden, Widdowson, and Brooker, 2005). She is considered a liberal feminist amongst the second wave feminist movement (Tyson, 2023).

4. Hasil dan pembahasan

The writer discovers two signs of the likelihood of patriarchy after analysing Disney's Cinderella (1950)

4.1 Ideological

In Disney's Cinderella, there is an ideological belief that figure of a woman is to be seen as a mother. In the daily context, it is customary to believe this, as many people until this day still holds this traditional value, and they are happy with what they believe. However, this view becomes problematic because almost every male character in the movie sees the other gender as either a subject to marry or a subject to become a mother. This is a reflection of the Ideological signs of patriarchy, meanings that the male characters only see the women as a subject, a thing to be subjugated, or a thing to gain.

This view can be seen even in the intro of the movie, as in the following quotation:

"[...] Although he was a kind and devoted father, and gave his beloved child every luxury and comfort, yet he felt she needed a mother's care. And then he married again, choosing for his second wife, a woman of good family with two daughters just Cinderella's age, by name, Anastasia and Drizella."

The line suggests that Cinderella's father believes that his daughter needs a mother's care, which could be seen as a sign of patriarchy because it suggests that the father believes that a mother's role is essential in raising a child and that a father alone is insufficient. It also suggests that the father has chosen a wife based on her family and the fact that she has daughters the same age as Cinderella, which could be seen as prioritizing the interests of his new family over those of Cinderella.

The father does not seem to choose his new spouse based on her intellect, not for her chemistry with him, but solely because she is a mother, and Cinderella needs a new mother. The ideological belief that the woman's worth is their worth of being a mother is a patriarchal sign, showing the father's view that he only sees women as 'something' to take care of his children.

The ideological belief also seems prevalent throughout every male character in Disney's Cinderella. The prince's father, the King also seems to have the same belief. Of course, there is an argument to be made that he might have had a different line of thinking because of his position on the monarchy. However, his dialogue with his grand duke is very telling of his ideological belief:

"[...] King: I am patient! (throws an inkwell) But I'm not getting any younger, you know. I want to see my grandchildren before I go.

Grand Duke: (approaches the King) I understand, Sire.

King: No. No, you don't know what it means to see your only child grow farther, farther, and farther away from you. (grows mournful) I'm... I'm lonely in this desolate old palace. I... I want to hear the pitter-patter of little feet again. (starts sobbing)"

This dialogue between the King and the Grand Duke shows that the King has reached his old age and wants his son to marry a woman so he can retire and enjoy his old age in the palace. On the surface level, this dialogue seems innocent. An old man wanted his son to be settled and started to learn to replace him as a King. However, peeling off the surface, we can see the same ideological belief that Cinderella's father has.

Reading throughout the line, it can be seen that the King wants the prince to marry and have children so the King can see his grandchildren before he dies. The part about marriage and grandchildren is significant. The King believes that the primary purpose of marriage is to produce children and that the prince's primary role is to continue the family line. He does not talk about any criteria his son needs to have for his spouse, nor any requirements for her. Just make sure his son gets married, so he can start playing with his grandchildren.

The King's view could be seen as patriarchal in that he seems to only value women for their ability to bear children and produce grandchildren for him. This suggests that he sees women primarily as baby factories rather than as individuals with their own desires, goals, and agency. This is a highly patriarchal view of women.

This perspective is rooted in traditional patriarchal beliefs about gender roles, which often dictate that women's primary purpose is to bear and raise children. At the same time, men, wealthy white men, are responsible for providing for and protecting their families. By viewing women only in terms of their reproductive capabilities, the King is objectifying and devaluing them rather than treating them as equal partners and individuals.

This patriarchal belief continues toward the movie's end when the King decreed every single maiden in the kingdom to try their foot on an unknown glass slipper. The King and the Prince believed that whoever fit the glass would become the prince's spouse and the land's future Queen. The prince believed that someone with such beauty as Cinderella also had the same beautiful heart. His patriarchal view is so strong that he wants to bet the kingdom's future on the person he barely met for some hours. This view can be observed in the following decree by the King:

"[...] The sole and express purpose of said quest is as follows to wit; that every single maiden in our beloved kingdom shall try upon her foot this aforementioned slipper of glass, and should one be found, whose foot shall properly fit said slipper, such maiden will be acclaimed the subject of this search and the one and only true love of his Royal Highness, our noble Prince. And said Royal Highness will humbly request the hand of said maiden in marriage to rule with him over all the land as Royal Princess and future Queen"

Why the decree to find a queen based on the glass slipper could be seen as highly patriarchal is that it suggests that the King and Prince are using a woman's physical appearance and ability to fit into a specific size of the shoe as the sole criteria for determining her worth and suitability as a potential wife and Queen. There is no talk about her intelligence, background, character, or other qualities. Her beauty is all that matter. The prince, like the King, shares the same ideological value that prioritizes physical attractiveness and compliance with gender norms over other characteristics. His decree reinforces the idea that men have the right to dictate the terms of a woman's worth and to choose a partner based on their desires and preferences rather than recognizing women as autonomous individuals with agency and the right to choose their own partners.

4.2 Psychological

With many of the male characters in Disney's Cinderella having the same ideological view of traditional patriarchy, it is not a wonder if the women in the same stories accept their fate to be subjugated by oppression. Faced with patriarchal oppression, women sometimes relegated their purpose to becoming part of it. This internalized oppression is one of the psychological signs of patriarchy, meaning it has been so bad that accepting the status quo is the only way for a woman to be happy. We can see this played out when the King gives out a decree for a royal ball to find the eligible maiden:

"[...] Stepmother: And, by royal command, every eligible maiden is to attend.
 Drizella: Why, that's us!
 Anastasia: And I'm so eligible!
 Cinderella: Why, that means I can go as well!
 Drizella: Ha! Her, dancing with the prince!
 Anastasia: (Mocking Cinderella) I'd be honored, Your Highness. Would you mind holding my broom? (the stepsisters dance mockingly)
 Cinderella: Well, why not? After all, I'm yet a member of the family. And it says, "by royal command, every eligible maiden is to attend."
 Stepmother: Yes, then it does so. Well, I see no reason why you can't go... if you get all your work done. "

Reading the lines at face value, it can be seen that the sisters and mother mock Cinderella because she is dirty and inferior to them. However, reading between the lines, we can see how all the women in Cinderella are happy and excited to be invited to the royal ball and potentially marry the prince, implying that they believe this is a valuable and desirable goal. This could be seen as an example of internalized patriarchy because it suggests that the female characters have internalized societal beliefs about gender roles and the importance of marriage and childbirth and are using these beliefs to validate their own worth and happiness.

Not only do we see this internalized patriarchy in the stepsisters and the stepmother, but we can also see this view on Cinderella. From the movie's start, Cinderella dreams about a better life, opportunities, and a happy marriage. She has this internalized view and does not make an effort to learn new things, accepting subjugation by her stepmother.

"[...] Girl: Yes, I know it's a lovely morning, but...it was a lovely dream as well. (the birds chirp inquisitively)
 Girl: What kind of a dream? Uh-uh. Can't warn. Because if you warn a wish, it won't come true and after all.... (sings) A dream is a wish your heart makes, if you're fast asleep.
 (more birds fly in)
 Girl: (singing) In dreams, you will lose your heartaches. Whatever you wish for, you keep. Have faith in your dreams and someday.
 (Mice start to awaken as well)
 Girl: (singing) Your rainbow will be coming grinning through, no matter how your heart is grieving. If you keep on believing, the dream that you wish will come true.
 (suddenly, a clock chime strikingly)"

Cinderella keeps dreaming and dreaming about her wish, but she never tries to break from her own circumstances, as her internalized patriarchy is stopping her from doing so. She internalizes and adopts societal beliefs about gender roles and the inferiority of women, mainly herself, and applies these beliefs to themselves. It is manifested as self-doubt, self-hatred, or the acceptance and perpetuation of harmful gender stereotypes and expectations. She believed that someone would save her someday. This mentality is proven when the fairy godmother finally fulfils her dreams, and she instantly falls in love with the prince. Seeing him as the one who will save her from her circumstances:

"[...] Cinderella and Prince: (singing) The key to all heaven is mine.

Cinderella: (singing) My heart has wings, mm-mm-mm-mm. And I can fly.

Cinderella and Prince: (singing) I'll touch every star in the heavens, then this is the miracle that I've been dreaming of.

Cinderella: (singing) Mm-mm-mm.

Prince: (singing) Mm-mm-mm.

Cinderella and Prince: (singing) Then this is loooooOOOOVE!!!! (As the two are about to kiss, the clock strikes midnight) "

Cinderella's desire to escape her circumstances and find happiness through her relationship with the prince could be seen as an example of internalized patriarchy because it suggests that she has internalized societal beliefs about the importance of marriage and childbirth and the value of women as partners and mothers. By valuing her own worth and happiness based on these beliefs, she is reinforcing and perpetuating these harmful ideas rather than challenging and rejecting them. She only sees her beliefs as the right ones and never contends with them.

5. Kesimpulan

Disney's Cinderella is a classic tale that generations of children and adults alike have enjoyed. However, upon closer examination, it becomes apparent that the story contains some patriarchal views reflected in the male characters' view of women and the internalized patriarchy of the female characters.

The male characters in the story, including the Prince and the King, often prioritize traditional gender roles and the continuation of the family line and view women primarily in terms of their physical attractiveness and ability to bear children. This reinforces the idea that men have the right to control and regulate women's bodies and fertility and perpetuates the power imbalances and discrimination often inherent in patriarchal systems.

The female characters in the story, the stepsisters and stepmother, including Cinderella herself, also exhibit internalized patriarchy, as they internalize and adopt societal beliefs about gender roles and the inferiority of women and apply these beliefs to themselves and others. This manifest in self-doubt, self-hatred, and the acceptance and perpetuation of harmful gender stereotypes and expectations.

While Disney's Cinderella is a beloved classic, it is essential to recognize and critique the patriarchal views reflected in the male characters' view of women and the internalized patriarchy of the female characters. By acknowledging and challenging these harmful beliefs, people can work towards creating a more equitable and inclusive society for all.

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