



find expression in various theories, such as psycho-social and developmental theories (Erikson, Bandura and Freud) and feminist theories (Butler and Millet) that discuss the distribution of the gender roles.

The findings of this research show that, through fairy tales, children are exposed to the conflicts at the centre of psychoanalytical theories, such as sibling rivalry, Oedipus/Electra conflicts and the reality principle versus the pleasure principle. Children experience these conflicts at the age of compulsory kindergarten. The results show that those conflicts very frequently appear against a background of gender issues and have a great deal of influence on the formation of gender identity in children. Children identify with the characters and events, experience the conflict and, in this way, learn how to deal with their own conflicts. According to psychoanalytical theory, the fairy tale helps to solve conflicts that have to do with sexual identity.

The classical fairy tales reflect the “initiative vs. guilt” conflict dealt with by Erikson’s psycho-social theory, and which children aged 4 to 6 have to face. The classical fairy tales support the norm, according to which the initiative is a male characteristic by rewarding the hero who has taken the initiative. When a female hero takes the initiative she is usually punished. So the fairy tale contributes to the development of initiative as a variable that helps to define gender identity.

In addition the heroes of fairy tales provide “role models” for children, and are the central issue of the social-cognitive learning theory suggested by Bandura. Concerning this matter the findings of this research show that the fairy tale contributes to child development by enabling him or her to identify with socially accepted gender roles. In this context it is also important to bring to mind the claim of the feminist thinker Judith Butler (2001), according to which gender behavior is always a consequence of imitation. So the children imitate the desirable social behavior by comprehending the reinforcement or punishment that the heroes in the fairy tales get from their surroundings. Bandura’s theory also points out that the fairy tale contributes to the improvement of self-efficacy of the children and their self-regulation. Feminist theories criticize classical fairy tales and show that many of them divide the types of behavior according to clear, blatant and inflexible gender (male, female) categories. They also point out that in modern fairy tales there is a division into gender roles, but it is more flexible.

This research shows that in the modern fairy tales some changes in *the roles of men and women* have indeed been made. The modern fairy tales break the stereotype of the classical division into gender roles, according to which the male hero is brave, strong and has the initiative; in contrast they also represent the female characters as strong, stubborn, wise and active. And, more than that, they enable the female characters to take on male gender roles, such as going out to fight the dragon, going out fishing, riding on horses and taking care of them. Those shifts are encouraged and become legitimized in the framework of modern fairy tales, and this enables children to have a

