

**SOCIALIZED MASOCHISM AS EXPERIENCED THROUGH THE
“BEAUTY AND THE BEAST” FAIRY TALE: A
PHENOMENOLOGICAL HERMENEUTIC STUDY**

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Abstract

Using Paul Ricoeur’s four levels of hermeneutic inquiry, this dissertation explored how the “Beauty and the Beast” fairy tale functions as an instrument through which individuals could learn socialized masochistic behaviors. Socialized masochism is defined as a set of learned behaviors that encourage individuals to engage in activities that are initially painful, difficult or challenging because people are taught to believe that the end result of these behavioral patterns will be rewarding or pleasurable. Fairy tales in general, and the Beauty and the Beast fairy tale in particular, provide examples of socialized masochistic behavior that the audience is encouraged to emulate if they want to achieve a better, happier life. Exploring the link between the “Beauty and the Beast” fairy tale and socialized masochistic behaviors will encourage a discourse allowing people to reassess their behavior patterns. Through this discourse individuals could achieve higher levels of self-awareness that will enable them to better understand the conscious and unconscious socialized masochistic forces that influence their behavior patterns. With higher levels of awareness and understanding of socialized masochism, people would be more empowered to conduct behaviors based on priorities at the individual-level rather than at the societal-level (although the individual- and societal-levels could be same). An underlying assumption of this dissertation is that performing

socialized masochistic behaviors does not always lead individuals down pathways that best address the individuals' needs for personal and professional development.

Keywords: socialized masochism, Paul Ricoeur, phenomenological hermeneutics, fairy tale, "Beauty and the Beast"

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CHAPTER ONE

This cross-disciplinary, theoretical study aimed to increase consciousness of socialized masochism and to offer a new and different way to interpret and understand the "Beauty and the Beast" fairy tale. This study also explored how a reader's experience of "Beauty and the Beast" could influence the choices made throughout the reader's lifespan. The incorporation of theoretical aspects from the fields of sociology, philosophy, and psychology enabled the researcher to develop alternative hermeneutic methods in the application of Ricoeur's phenomenological hermeneutic approach.

As a set of learned behaviors, socialized masochism encourages individuals to engage in activities that initially prove painful, difficult, or challenging because there exists an expectation that rewarding or pleasurable results will follow. My research interest in socialized masochism developed from two seemingly simple observations. First, I had a curiosity about why some individuals managed to successfully overcome difficult situations when other individuals in similar situations experienced failure. If presented with similar challenges, why did some people appear energized and ready to take on the world when other people became anxious and withdrawn? Second, I had observed that in my life the conscious selection of difficult or challenging experiences (e.g., pursuit of higher education, selection of career opportunities, and efforts at self-understanding) had generally resulted in rewarding and pleasurable outcomes that had helped me to improve my life situations.

As a tradition of theory and research, critical theory focuses on the alleviation of suffering through the critique of sources of oppression. By using critical theory throughout the research process, this study explored how new ways of seeing or understanding could empower individuals to improve their lives. Critical theory gains its strength from the multiple approaches

that it uses to critique social constructs and social systems. Theoretical perspectives that influenced the early development of critical theory include elements of Marxism, psychoanalysis, sociology, hermeneutics and phenomenology.

As the name implies, phenomenological hermeneutics incorporates elements of hermeneutic and phenomenological research methods. Hermeneutics emphasizes that understanding and interpretation occur within the context of a particular culture or historical moment. Phenomenology describes the experience of consciousness. Phenomenological hermeneutics focuses on the understanding that emerges during the process of experiencing consciousness. Paul Ricoeur's approach to phenomenological hermeneutic methods incorporated theoretical concepts developed by Jürgen Habermas and Georg Gadamer.

A proponent of critical theory, Habermas' interpretive approach incorporated interpretive methods such as literary analysis, structuralism, and hermeneutics. Habermas' interpretive approach highlighted the need for human beings to understand not only the sources of their own behavior, but also the role that social institutions played in maintaining that behavior. Better understanding of the relationship between individuals and society could enable individuals to escape from the social constraints that hold them captive. Gadamer's interpretive approach proved less focused on emancipation and more focused on the tight grip that history held over an individual. Gadamer believed that we could never truly escape history because values continuously impregnate and generate social theory. Ricoeur incorporated aspects of Gadamer and Habermas in his phenomenological hermeneutic methods. Ricoeur acknowledged the influence of social values on our ability to understand while also recognizing that our ability to understand could help us to restructure our relationships within socially defined constraints.

Through the process of socialization, individuals acquire the knowledge, values, and language skills needed to exist within the constraints of their social environment. The socialization process occurs across an individual's lifespan, but the effects of socialization prove strongest during childhood. Fairy tales function as effective instruments for instilling social values and expected social norms that will guide the behaviors and thoughts of children. The attitudes, beliefs, and values learned by children through their exposure to socializing agents like fairy tales generally find expression through the actions of these children as they develop into mature adults. This study used phenomenological hermeneutic methods to uncover and explore deeper and new meanings that emerged for me as researcher when I engaged with the text of Madame Leprince de Beaumont's 1783 English edition of "Beauty and the Beast".

Fairy tales like "Beauty and the Beast" play an important role in the socialization process because they provide "symbolic commentaries on the mores and customs of a particular society and classes and groups within these societies and how their actions and relations could lead to success and happiness." (Zipes, 2000a, p. xxi) This study presupposed that how one has learned, interpreted, and applied socialized masochistic behaviors would affect the ability of an individual to grow and develop across one's lifespan. If individuals better understood the socialized masochistic themes interwoven into their daily lives, then individuals could develop a better understanding of why they had performed certain actions or held certain beliefs and values.