
**FROM ASHES TO BALLGOWNS: ATTACHMENT STYLES AND
COPING STRATEGIES IN CINDERELLA’S JOURNEY TO RESILIENCE**

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Article Received: 12/01/2025

Article Accepted: 14/02/2025

Published Online: 15/02/2025

DOI:10.47311/IJOES.2025.7.02.165

Abstract:

Cinderella’s story extends beyond its fairy-tale charm, revealing deep themes of trauma, resilience, and recovery. This study explores her emotional struggles, coping mechanisms, and eventual empowerment, offering broader insights into survival and identity. The author, Charles Perrault is a French lawyer and a researcher with a background in literature and psychology, specializing in the analysis of folklore and its psychological dimensions. His works focus on trauma narratives and character development in classic tales. “Cinderella”, who is forced into servitude by her cruel stepmother and stepsisters, lives through grief, emotional abuse and neglect. The tale is one of the most enduring and beloved stories in folklore, told in various forms across cultures. Cinderella as the downtrodden heroine achieves happiness and status through kindness and grace. However, beneath the glittering transformation, lies a deeper psychological exploration of trauma, emotional wounds, and resilience. Cinderella’s experiences of neglect, abuse, and loss highlight the psychological scars she endures throughout the narrative, influencing her identity, self-worth, and behaviour. This research paper explores these psychological scars that shape her emotional journey to her eventual triumph focusing on how she revives the broader implications on trauma, survival, and healing.

Through a critical analysis of Cinderella's character development, the study examines the long-term effects of trauma on mental health, coping mechanisms, and relationships. By investigating the intersections of trauma, identity, and empowerment, also aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the psychological complexities underlying this timeless fairy tale.

Key Words: Cinderella, Psychological Scar, Trauma, Step-mother and Step-sisters, Abuse, Neglect, Marginalization, Coping Strategies, Attachment Theory

Introduction:

This research article focuses on Charles Perrault's Cinderella's fairytale. The tale consists of elements such as the pumpkin, fairy godmother, and glass slippers. This tale was published in 1697 in his collection “Tales of Mother Goose”. Cinderella is a kind-hearted

girl who, after losing her mother, is enslaved by her step - mother Tremaine and step - sisters, Anastasia and Drizella who are arrogant and quarrelsome. Despite enduring abuse and neglect, she remains hopeful. When the king host a royal bal her stepfamily leaves her behind, but a fairy godmother magically transforms her into a beautiful young woman dressed as a princess, and a pumpkin into a chariot so she can attend the ball. At the ball, Cinderella captivates the prince, but she must leave before midnight, as she will regain her identity of her old self. As Cinderella rushes away, she accidentally drops one of her glass slippers, leaving it behind, and the Prince is left alone, wondering about the mysterious woman whose foot fits the delicate shoe. The prince searches for her using the slipper, and when it fits Cinderella, he marries her, rescuing her from her life of misery and elevating her to royalty. At the core of Cinderella's story is the abuse she suffers at the hands of her stepmother and stepsisters. She used to wake up before everyone in the house could and lit the fire. Cinderella used to get cinders and ashes all over her body and clothes from the fire. Although her stepsisters and stepmother called her Cinderella because she always had cinders on her garments, where Ella is said to be her true name. They made her run on errands for them. The wicked people in the house always loved watching the poor girl suffer. She was an unpaid maid who did all the cooking, sewing, cleaning and all other household chores.

Stripped of her rightful status and forced into a life of subjugation, Cinderella experiences emotional neglect and devaluation. The constant belittling, rejection, and isolation from her family are classic examples of emotional abuse, which can leave deep psychological scars. Cinderella's forced subservience and isolation may result in feelings of unworthiness, inferiority, and powerlessness. The emotional scars from this kind of neglect often manifest as low self-esteem, a lack of confidence, or difficulty in trusting others.

Loss of a Parent is an unresolved grief and a major psychological distress for Cinderella. Because she is frequently shown in fairy tales as a cherished daughter who suffers the loss of her mother, leaving her open to her stepmother's harshness. The stepfamily's continued abuse of the victim could exacerbate the unresolved grief and emotional suffering that resulted from this early loss experience. Cinderella's sadness is shown in her continued emotional connection to her deceased mother, who she frequently turns to for comfort or comfort, in some versions of the story in remembrance of her mother. Early-life loss of a loved one can leave a person psychologically scarred and emotionally insecure, especially if the loss is followed by abuse.

Cinderella is mistreated by the stepfamily in a social as well as personal sense. By preventing her from attending significant social gatherings like the royal ball, they essentially shut her out of society. This social exclusion is a reflection of actual marginalization and ostracism, which can cause severe psychological damage. Cinderella's isolation is a symbol for not having access to social interactions and chances. She is originally refused admission to the event, symbolising riches, power, and community. The marginalization may also be a reflection of systems of inequality in society, when the powerful purposefully keep others at the margins. Such psychological effects of marginalization can include feelings of

insignificance or invisibility, which serve to reinforce the perception that one is unworthy of acknowledgment or belonging.

Cinderella's relationship with her own identity and self-worth is another area where her psychological wounds are evident. Cinderella's true identity is kept a secret under the pretence of service throughout the entire narrative. She is relegated to the position of servant in her own house and no longer acknowledged as the daughter of a nobleman. This psychological struggle stems from the discrepancy between her subjective self-concept and how others see her. Cinderella believes in her own worth, despite being treated poorly by others. Psychologically, this reflects a broader theme of conditional acceptance and the idea that Cinderella is only worthy of love and recognition once she has been transformed into someone society deems valuable. This dynamic reinforces the psychological scars of living in a world where worth is based on external validation, leaving Cinderella vulnerable to the idea that her true self, as a servant or commoner, is unworthy of love.

The present research applied is **Attachment Theory**, which was created by John Bowlby and further elaborated by Mary Ainsworth, provides a fitting explanation for Cinderella's psychological scars. This idea focuses on how a person's early relationships with caretakers influence their emotional and psychological growth, especially in terms of interpersonal relationships, trust, and self-worth. Cinderella's life is forever altered by the loss of her mother at a young age. This pivotal event sets off a chain reaction of emotional struggles, including attachment issues and a deep-seated sense of unworthiness. As she navigates her challenging circumstances, Cinderella grapples with feelings of isolation and low self-esteem, all while facing the cruel mistreatment of her stepmother. Despite these obstacles, Cinderella's inner strength and determination shine through. Her unwavering hope for a better future and her resilience in the face of adversity serve as a testament to the human spirit's capacity for survival and growth. The societal pressures that Cinderella faces also serve as a commentary on the conditional nature of self-worth. Her experiences highlight the ways in which external validation can impact one's sense of identity and self-value. Throughout her journey, Cinderella employs a range of coping mechanisms, including escapism and passive endurance. While these strategies may provide temporary relief, they also underscore the complexity of Cinderella's emotional landscape. Ultimately, Cinderella's story serves as a powerful reminder of the human capacity for hope, resilience, and transformation. Despite the challenges she faces, Cinderella remains a beacon of hope, inspiring generations with her courage and determination.

In summary, *Cinderella* is more than just a straightforward fable about a girl's miraculous metamorphosis. It's a tale of survival, perseverance, and severe psychological anguish. Her identity, self-worth, and relationships are shaped by the psychological wounds left by the neglect, emotional abuse, and social marginalization she endures. Cinderella's journey to happiness at the end implies healing, but beneath the surface are emotional scars from devaluation, desertion, and conditional acceptance. Her narrative highlights the enduring consequences of trauma, the strength of resilience, and the difficult path toward self-worth in the face of protracted misfortune. Cinderella's journey is a testament to the

power of resilience, proving that true strength lies not in finding romance, but in overcoming adversity and staying hopeful in the face of challenge.

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Citation:

Ms Maria Bizantia Corera “From Ashes To Ballgowns: Attachment Styles And Coping Strategies In Cinderella’s Journey To Resilience”*International Journal of English and Studies (IJOES)*, vol. 7, no. 2, 2025, pp. 162-165. DOI: 10.47311/IJOES.2025.7.02.165.