

The crown prince and the frog-prince: characterisations in the identity construction of firstborn males

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I explore the identity construction and narrative self of firstborn males at the hand of metaphors contained in the well-known fairytale of the "Frog King". In many societies around the world, the oldest male offspring — the firstborn, lastborn, or single child — confronts a host of legacies, privileges and social structures that lead him to adopt a particular characterisation of self. Using a non-empirical philosophical design, narrative analysis, and a fairytale as metaphoric framework, I analysed the narratives of two firstborn males explicating images of the crown prince and the frog-prince as metaphors for socially organised frameworks of meaning that define categories and specify what constitutes being a firstborn male. I searched for conceptual linkages between the crown prince, the frog-prince and the dominant discourse of patriarchy in identity construction, proposing that his enmeshment in social stereotypes precludes explorations of a multi-faceted, differentiated self and an integrated adaptation to life's challenges.

Keywords: crown prince; fairytale metaphor; firstborn male; frog-prince; male identity; patriarchy; pseudo-identity

In ancient times people esteemed able-bodied men who could protect their families and livelihoods against nature and beasts. Notwithstanding economical and political progress — from monarchy to democracy, agrarian to technocratic, battlefield to so-called peaceful negotiations or from emphasis on physical and manual labour to mental enterprise — male privileging has prevailed. It is within such a social, cultural and historical context that people generate subjectivity and meaning (Sorell & Montgomery, 2001), and, for the firstborn male child, this subjectivity and meaning emerge through compelling experiences derived primarily from the patriarchal discourse. Institutionalised structures bestow upon the firstborn male a gendered subjectivity and an identity scripted by the rules of his place in the birth order and in his maleness. Fairytales also play a formative role in the identity formation of the young child and provide a useful metaphor for the identity formation process of, for example, firstborn males.

Although identity construction is a topic much studied in psychology (e.g. Berzonsky, 2005; Fadjukoff, Pulkinnen, & Kokko, 2005; Kroger, 2000; Sorell & Montgomery, 2001; Redman, 2005), there has been little specific exploration of the identity formation processes of firstborn males in patriarchal societies. This paper is focused on the construction and re-construction of the firstborn male identity and potential characterisations of self in their narratives of self. The firstborn male is not necessarily the firstborn child among the siblings in his family, but he is always the first (or even only) male child born to the family. A social constructionist perspective and narrative approach provide the theoretical framework for exploring how daily interactions between people co-create embodied subjectivity and positioning of firstborn males. Social constructionists argue, for example, that a variety of crosscutting elements, as well as historical, cultural and contextual space and time (Augustine, 2002), complicate the construction and reconstruction of identity.

Research regarding identity construction varies according to the ontological and epistemological approach adopted by the researcher. For the most part researchers agree that identity emerges through participation in socio-historical contexts and by constructing self-definitions that vary as they grow and age (Kroger, 2000; Redman, 2005). Identity construction relate to continuing development in self-definition and self-evaluation, and commitment to a particular self-image, psychosocial

attributes and cognitive style. Cultural ideals, mores, and practices serve as significant contributors and create a continuous “interplay between psychological development and cultural context [that] continues after adolescence” (Sorell & Montgomery, 2001, p. 102).

Life stories and personal narratives provide an integrative framework for different personifications of self. Keller-Cohen and Gordon (2003) also propose the “metaphor as one way of achieving coherence within individual life story narratives” (p. 2) while producing an overall theme in the narrator’s story. Positioning the self within the story world, narrators construct a sense of self, based on their embodied experiences, beliefs and values (Freeman, 2003; Kraus, 2006). The narrator also positions him/herself in relation to the dominant discourse in his/her chosen characterisation of self. In accounting simultaneously for the past and present, and ultimately giving birth to the future, the main character emerges as the narrator engages in the process of identity construction and reconstruction (Barresi, 2006). He or she creates a main character, a personal myth, fashioning his story of self that expresses how he/she views him/herself and perceives others who think and talk about him/her (Riessman, 2002).

The fairytale metaphor

In many childhood stories and fairytales from across the globe, we come across the basic principle of the “prince” character who, after his release from enchantment (the transformation), represents an integrated, multi-faceted identity (the content). Even in adult literature (e.g. Shakespeare’s “Hamlet”, Fitzgerald’s “The Great Gatsby”), the prince/hero theme prevails, often telling the story of the firstborn male who pursues great achievements both in the private and public spheres. In terms of identity development, fairytales — for example, the “Frog King” or “Iron Heinrich” by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm; fables from Scotland, Sri Lanka and Korea (Ashliman, 2008), China (Folk Tales from China, 1958), Russia (Tradestone Gallery Fairy Tales, n.d.), and Israel (Internet Sacred Texts Archive, n.d.) — provide a pertinent metaphor for identity construction, both in terms of content and process. Two themes emerge as (i) the frog-theme, when the individual experiences a curse or enchantment, and (ii) the prince-king theme, when the individual finds liberation or transformation. The themes are not stages progressing in a unilateral manner from one to another. Rather, the themes occur and recur in the continuous process of constructing and reconstructing a sense of identity throughout adulthood and when confronting life’s challenges and the tasks of everyday living.

The frog-theme emerges when individuals are grappling with diffusion and insecurities offered by bounded external scripts, or searching for new identifications. Young people have the diffused identity type (i.e. the frog-theme) and it is through active exploration and commitment that they reach identity achievement in late adolescence (i.e. the prince-king theme). Society grants a moratorium while the person explores and tries on different roles and ideologies, values and self-definitions before finding an integrated sense of self. The prince-king theme emerges as a characterisation of self of those who transcend the diffusions of the past and the insecurities of “not-knowing”, and through continuous soul-searching, reflection, education, psychotherapy (the “beautiful maiden”), make use of available resources to integrate new identifications, values, and ways of being into their already complex identities. The frog-theme re-emerges as the individual continues to construct and reconstruct identity, and as his life story unfolds integrating good and bad qualities, successes and failures, dependencies and independencies in both the private and public spheres of life. It is not a one-dimensional transition or an over-simplification of identity development. Rather, the “prince-king” character in childhood stories and fairytales and the prince/hero in adult literature suppose a process of transformation and that the prince-king, after his release, became the one who had the social-cognitive skills and attributes to negotiate everyday actions with flexibility and variability.

Embedded in the transition during identity construction is the content and processes of the foreclosed and diffused types evident in the self-representations of firstborn males. Identity achievers find transformation from the frog to the prince-king in their active exploration and commitment —

liberation from the enchantment — and display high levels of self-differentiation and self-integration in the stories they narrate about their lives. The firstborn male, on the other hand, often finds liberation from the curse of diffusiveness by prematurely adopting specific values and goals and committing through limited self-examination to the foreclosed identity type. With his foreclosed achievement, however, the firstborn male emerges as a “crown prince” rather than the prince-king. They have a tendency to endorse authoritarian views and exhibit rigid and inflexible values and belief systems (Berzonsky & Adams, 1999; Niens, Cairns, Finchilescu, Foster, & Tredoux, 2003). The crown prince characterisation of self is a kind of pseudo-identity through which the individual adopts the values and goals provided by parents or other influential persons rather than through self-exploration.

The firstborn male who remains in the diffused status even after adolescence and the end of the moratorium, avoids the transition process (self-examination) and commits himself to his “frog” status and characterisation of self — a pseudo prince-hood of his own making, a frog-prince. He remains subject to external control, lacks internalized values, goals, and aspirations, and seemingly avoids self-differentiation and the tasks associated with constructing and reconstructing a coherent sense of identity (Berzonsky, 2005). His avoidance of the transformation is also associated with “procrastination, an external locus of control, emotion-focused coping, cross-situational variability, and impression-management concerns” (Berzonsky & Adams, 1999, p. 580). For both the foreclosed (crown prince) and the diffused (frog-prince) identity, there is entrapment under the curse of the “wicked witch”, the fathers of society, the patriarchal discourse. They avoid the transformation (a process) from a frog to a prince-king who has an integrated, multi-faceted identity (the content) after his release from enchantment.

METHOD

In this paper, I explore two characterisations of self in the mythmaking processes of firstborn males. Contrary to the supposition, I believe that the firstborn male identity is often “the identification of choice and suppression” (Schachter, 2004, p. 177). He presents the central character in his life story as the crown prince or a frog-prince, and the transformation to become a prince-king never really takes place. I employed a non-empirical philosophical research design (Mouton, 2001) for the exploratory project searching for conceptual linkages in the oral histories of firstborn males as told by themselves and family members. I adopted a standpoint approach, a “method of analysis based on the assumption that groups (and members of groups) differing in social position also differ in their material interests and their social understandings” (Sorell & Montgomery, 2001, p. 99). I also acknowledge being both personally and professionally motivated (Josselson, Lieblich, & McAdams, 2002) by a sense that current knowledge about identity construction does not provide an adequate framework to explain the intricacies and complexities involved in the unique subject positioning of the firstborn male child and his identity construction.

The stories of firstborn males in this paper came from mostly informal, unrecorded exchanges I have had with both men and women over a period of almost ten years. My conversation partners ranged in age from 22 to 46 years and conversations took place in informal settings and in many different localities, including South Africa, Asia and Europe, where I met with people from different nationalities, races, statuses and birth orders in their families. They were all in the adult phase of their lives, and it was therefore not difficult for them to tell their life stories. They were not representative of all firstborn males, but they shared a certain socio-historical heritage in patriarchal societies, and their stories revealed the emergence of a particular characterisation of firstborn males. The conversations were not interventionist in nature nor were they intended as therapeutic, and I obtained consent in follow-up conversations to use the reconstructed stories below in the analysis. I assured each narrator that I would not use any identifying information that could place them or their families in jeopardy.

The limitation ensuing from the lack of transcripts made it impossible for me to give voice to my respective conversation partners in their own words. I reconstructed the stories I present below from many conversations while maintaining thematic coherence through careful consideration of the themes related to the topic under discussion. In some respects, one could consider the stories as fictional. However, I did not invent the events included here and their credibility lies in the real-life experiences of the narrators. Stories of events are themselves limited portraits where meaning is contextual, not fixed and universal, and partially, selectively and imperfectly represent reality (Josselson *et al.*, 2002; Riessman, 2002). The reconstructed stories are as close to the original as possible, although I use my own words to tell them. As this particular project did not attempt to address the frequency of cases and it was not my intention to generalise to all firstborn males, external validity was not an issue (Winter, 2000). My purpose is primarily illustrative, and I use the reconstructed stories to suggest the characterisations of the crown prince and the frog-prince in the identity construction of firstborn males rather than claiming to substantiate them via a detailed analysis of evidence.

DISCUSSION

Using a combination of narrative and thematic analysis (McAdams, 1993; Josselson *et al.*, 2002), I read the reconstructed stories in order to clarify and explicate conceptual and theoretical linkages (Mouton, 2001) concerning the main characters, settings, events, and plots, as well as the narrative tone in the life stories of firstborn males. I asked data-specific questions, always focusing on the “imagos as carefully crafted aspects of the self ... [that] often embodied in external role models and other significant persons in the adult’s life” (McAdams, 1993, p. 123). I used the fairytale as a frame of reference, and analysed the reconstructed stories as a whole for the crown prince and frog-prince characterisations in the narrator’s subjective self. Reading and rereading texts on identity development, both traditional perspectives and more recent endeavours, sensitised me to recognise a particular characterisation in the identity formation of firstborn males. The analysis thus aimed to create new characterisations for further theorising as proposed in grounded theory (Charmaz, 2000) and the standpoint approach (Sorell & Montgomery, 2001).

The crown prince — bounded scripts and foreclosure

Growing up as the youngest of three siblings and the only son, Andy, a 46-year old male, recalled a number of significant events in his early years that were associated with family traditions, authority, and power assertion. Our conversation took place at an informal family gathering, celebrating yet another “public” achievement of this man in his attempt to live out his family’s legacy. His father, also an only son and the youngest of three, always expected him to act and behave in a way appropriate of the superior, the hero, the champion of the family cause, and his mother praised him whenever he acted as his father did. Andy further recalled outings alone with his parents while his sisters played with their dolls or studied for school exams. Other significant events that Andy included in his personal myth involved his father as an active community leader sometimes taking young Andy to meetings and encouraging him to champion a worthy cause, often with an elitist perspective of being part of a superior race, a chosen people. They also frequently discussed the roles and responsibilities of good and upstanding citizens of the country. Andy further recalled purposefully doing what he thought would impress his parents and fit the image they had of him as the head of the family and fighting causes his father would approve. Although he dropped out of college and initially had difficulty finding a job, he glossed over these incidents. For the most part, he apportioned blame to others, including his sisters, who supposedly had more intelligence than he did, the college professors who could not identify a good argument when they read his essays, or employers who did not know how to manage their own businesses. However, he spent quite some time talking about his great successes in those areas of ideology and relationships that mattered

most to his father. He was particularly proud of having a son (the only grandson of his parents) and heir to the family whom he named after his father, and he took an active interest in and disciplining both his own and his sisters' children, and helping them plot their future careers. He was clear about his political ambitions and power over those less privileged (including his sisters and women in general), and that he was the head of his household.

In his personal myth, Andy's story mirrors the crown prince characterisation, a kind of pseudo-identity evident of a foreclosed status. In his story, there is always some position of authority to uphold, some economic or political power to exert, and he aggressively strived for control of the family legacy. He perceives himself as masculine, dominant and aggressive and values the supposed pre-eminence of ancestors as his personal code. Friends and family are "subjects" compelled to accept his superior insights and supposed concern for their wellbeing. Relationships provide him with opportunities for "princely actions." From his perspective, the other actors in his story emerged as challenging his authority and position as the one who was "strong" and "true" to the ideology conferred on him by his role as firstborn male child and the crown prince.

The crown prince characterisation in Andy's story is that of the firstborn male and not the same as that of the prince-king imago we find in the fairytale or life stories of males with an achieved identity status. Although there is evidence of some commitment to specific values and belief systems, the crown prince character is stereotypically associated with the masculine sex role and a foreclosed identity (Berzonsky & Adams, 1999; McAdams, Josselson, & Lieblich, 2006). For the most part and despite his birth order — as the younger sibling rather than the one actually born first — from a young age, Andy had to act as the achiever, the courageous one that would conquer, control and rule. He acted in the present and approached a future in which he had to take action on behalf of others by deciding about their prospects, their alliances, and their futures and he had to be strong in order to have an impact on the world. Being in the foreclosed status, Andy accepted the values and beliefs of significant others and was strongly predisposed towards power, autonomy, mastery and achievement.

The frog-prince — diffusion and opposition

Charlie, a 33-year-old male, told his story at a club in Thailand where he was having a party celebrating his birthday. He spent quite a lot of time in clubs and bars, paying for his pleasure from a monthly allowance his father transferred to his bank account. Charlie remembered his early childhood years accompanying his father on endless and boring excursions around their wine estate, and specifically remembered receiving preferential treatment from his family and everybody on the estate, finding the esteem bestowed upon him as the boss's son a source of great amusement. Another vivid memory when he was a teenager was of his father's encouragement for him to become a top rugby player. He hated his father's interference in trying to ensure him a position on the team, and a prestigious scholarship with SARFU (South African Rugby Football Union) — a position he did not take up. Charlie remembered always wanting to be a journalist and cartoonist or maybe an actor. He liked travelling and being merry wherever he went. He had no time for his family and despised them for what they wanted him to be and for what they represented as supposedly upstanding citizens of society. He was reluctant to talk about his father, but acknowledged that he was happy because his father still paid him a monthly allowance to add to his meagre commission-based salary and support his lavish lifestyle. He had not once talked to his father in the year prior to our conversation. When Charlie did talk about his father, it was to renounce him for divorcing his first wife and marrying Charlie's mother to beget a son and heir. He also did not speak favourably about his mother mentioning that she was of no consequence in his life except for giving birth to him. Talking about his escape from the vineyard, Charlie recalled adamantly refusing to work there or with the "poor faceless" people working for his father. His superior self-image also influenced his view of other authority figures, including those in his current job and he gloatingly

proclaimed that they might fire him because he did not bring in any customers and did not care for the job. Although he had no relationship at the time, Charlie was outspoken about being gay, particularly when his father and other heterosexual men were around, and despised the notion of sex with a female just to beget an heir to the throne. Despite previously dreaming of becoming a journalist, he did not really know what he wanted to do in the future and did not care, vaguely saying that he might consider getting married when he turned forty, particularly if he could find a rich heir/heirress who could support his lifestyle.

Charlie's personal myth is the story of a frog-prince who actively opposes familial and societal expectations — the expectations of his birthright — and who remains in the diffused-avoidant status of identity development. Although he could have adopted the crown prince characterisation due to his status as firstborn male and only heir to his family's legacy, his story is that of the frog-prince who actively abhors the stereotypes — the prince ideal — imposed upon him by the fathers of society. Charlie defines himself as "prince" in his own life, but his prince-hood evolved as a continuous avoidance strategy and an active denial of commitment to ideals and values of a multi-faceted and coherent personhood. He proclaims openly to loath his father and actively denies his heritage by moving to a different country altogether. Even his mother receives little affection. He perceives himself as superior to others (the workers on the farm, his half-sisters) and rejects the esteem gained from his birth position and heritage. Charlie's story is that of a son who constructed a sexual identity in opposition to the father's explicit heterosexuality, a rejection of the privileged positioning of his birthright and maleness, and he adopts a pseudo prince-hood of his own making.

The frog-prince in Charlie's story is the dialectical opposite characterisation of the crown prince. He creates an oppositional sense of the self that belies the values and beliefs of the prince or hero self-characterisation for which he is supposedly destined. As the frog-prince, Charlie is stuck in being oppositional to the prescriptions of his birthright. This characterisation of self embodies the properties of neither agency nor communion, and the central theme seems geared around opposition and escaping the expectations of his birth legacy. McAdams (1993, p. 171) notes of these characters that they are "unable or unwilling to take on the responsibilities of work and home, the escapist lives for diversion and amusement." As a frog-prince, Charlie revels in adopting an ideology, occupation, and interrelationships that are antithetical to that expected by his family and the social order. Thus, the frog-prince becomes Charlie's locus of identity construction, rendering him unable to find a dynamic balance between the various aspects of his identity as he tends to negate the "prince-king" identity altogether. The frog theme in the fairytale is a temporary role in the process of constructing and reconstructing identity in interaction with complex social and political demands. Stuck in a diffused-avoidant status, the frog-prince continues with the frog theme into adulthood.

The reader should note that the frog-prince characterisation does not imply gender identity only and therefore it does not reflect the personal myths of homosexuals per se. As research has shown in recent years, most people accepting a homosexual gender identity construct personal myths that are both coherent and open and express a clear consolidation of themes and plots in the stories of their lives (Cohler & Hammack, 2006; Halbertal & Koren, 2006). The frog-prince characterisation is the metaphor for identity construction that is dialectically opposed to the expectations and privileges that both society and family have bestowed upon the firstborn male. The individual, usually the firstborn male who opposes the demands and privileges of his birthright, adopts this subject positioning for his self, turning himself into the frog-prince.

Patriarchy preventing transformation

The fathers of society — the patriarchal discourse and the benevolent king in the fairytale bestowing on the crown prince the power to rule — prescribe the identity construction of the firstborn male. Both in terms of content and process, patriarchy imposes on him a bounded script by virtue of his sex and birth order (male and only/firstborn son in the family). The firstborn male is thus in a subject

positioning appropriated by a discourse that privileges the firstborn male in particular. Throughout his life, the firstborn male child in a patriarchal context receives multiple subtle and subliminal messages, and through fairytales, information about roles, expectations, privileges and responsibilities, thus fashioning the characters that will one day dominate his personal myth (Burman, 1995). He experiences the “curse” of the fathers of society that prescribes the expectations of who and what he should be, and implying a normative characterisation of self, that of the crown prince or of a frog-prince.

Adopting the crown prince code, Andy accepted without question the power and agency afforded him by virtue of his birthright. However, his choice of agency and power curtailed efforts of constructing and reconstructing identity in adulthood, compelling him to suppress identifications that he thought would not conform to his crown prince status. He could only ever be the crown prince who inherited the kingdom complete with subjects and power vested in him by his birthright. Andy's status as firstborn male precludes any exploration of alternatives that would provide him with sufficient integrity to cope with life's challenges. The normative processing strategy evident in foreclosed individuals also indicates a low tolerance for ambiguity and a high need to maintain structure and cognitive closure (Berzonsky, 2005). Even though he might have experienced some failures in life, Andy had difficulty integrating these into a coherent and comprehensive sense of self. His is a dysfunctional story of authoritarianism and foreclosure.

Charlie, on the other hand, had to be in opposition to the prescriptions and expectations of the patriarchal discourse. As the frog-prince, he remained in the diffused status, adopting a more hedonistic approach to life, and seemingly preoccupied with countering masculinity standards for success and physical toughness imposed by society (Tokar, Fischer, Schaub, & Moradi, 2000, p. 389). However, being a frog-prince did not make him more likely to feel and express positive emotions or seek transformation by integrating a coherent sense of the self and committing to a multi-faceted identity. Although he supposedly moved away from the expectations of the fathers in society, Charlie somehow remained caught up in the curse of the patriarchal discourse, and was unable to integrate the complex aspects of self in a congruent and multi-faceted personhood. He was the outcast and his self-characterisation blinded him and prevented him from seeking the kiss of the maiden, thus avoiding conflict within the self and transformation into a well-rounded individual.

The patriarchal discourse thus entrapped the firstborn male, resulting in his constructing an identity in response to the demands of the stereotypes, rather than through self-exploration. Although they might find their interactions with life challenging, having committed themselves to the values of society or having avoided commitment to any values, the crown prince and the frog-prince both have difficulty integrating their failures, apportioning blame to others and to circumstances, and telling dysfunctional stories of foreclosure or diffusion. Plurality of identity does not emerge in the narratives of firstborn males adopting the crown prince or the frog-prince characterisations of self. Rather, they present a one-dimensional self, in relation to others and to the wider social context of interaction, and there is little opportunity to explore a multiplicity of self, to “creating a personal myth that contains a rich but finite source of characterisation [and to] resolve the problem of simultaneously being the many and the one” (McAdams, 1993, p. 122).

In the fairytale, the involvement of a “beautiful maiden” or princess lifted the enchantment of the curse. Her involvement provided the context in which the frog utilised available resources (a kiss, a compassionate relationship) to find a new sense of self in the process of constructing and reconstructing identity. The stories of firstborn males, however, reveal another facet of the transformation process experienced by a foreclosed or diffused identity. Enmeshed in a network of emotional and political processes, the construction of the crown prince and the frog-prince sense of the self excludes to a large extent alternative accounts of gendered subjectivity. It also influences their denial of assistance offered by the beautiful maiden — friendship, psychotherapy, education, counselling — in the continuous process of identity construction and reconstruction. As Tokar *et al.* (2000) pose, men's

negative attitudes toward counselling, an attitude initiated by stereotyped masculinity, preclude them from seeking help, as such help would not fit their self-images.

Neither Andy nor Charlie accepted the need for liberation or transformation. Because of his pre-emptive commitment to the ideal, Andy lived on in the blissful ignorance of the “other” world, the world of the frog where he could also learn interdependence upon the goodwill of the beautiful maiden (psychotherapy, education, etc.). The frog-prince, Charlie used a diffused-avoidant processing style, and procrastinated and delayed as long as possible in making any kind of commitment (Berzonsky & Adams, 1999). He also did not find any need for transcending his self-imposed curse, happy to remain a frog-prince and wallowing in self-pity for being “cursed” by the expectations of his birthright. Thus, the content of the narrative self appropriated to and adopted by the firstborn male child in a patriarchal society was somewhat one-dimensional. It did not allow alternative schemas to form. It did not allow him to act upon the prince-king theme in the fairytale, and as the crown prince and the frog-prince, Andy and Charlie developed either/or identities. Society and its patriarchal discourse limits firstborn males from exploring different identities as they commit to cognitive schemas of either obedience (foreclosed) or opposition (diffuse-avoidant) to the authoritarian voice of the patriarchal discourse. Although they could not escape the first part of the curse/enchantment (i.e. they could not change their birth order or sex), the firstborn males could change the self-reflective interpretations revealed in their stories. Accepting the valuable contribution of psychotherapy or counselling could help them to understand the dilemma they faced, the dilemma of being stuck in a one-dimensional identity condition, and they could engage in alternative myth-making and create a prince-king imago in their life stories.

CONCLUSION

With regard to firstborn males, I believe that ideology and the different domains of self remain highly enmeshed, precluding explorations of a differentiated self and a multi-faceted identity construction. Although the crown prince presents a pseudo-identity and the frog-prince discovers pseudo prince-hood, both Andy and Charlie struggled with finding their true selves and with integrating multiple aspects of their personhood. Transformation remained elusive as they denied their need for transition and becoming the prince-king. Thus, the climactic moment in the fairytale, the moment when the frog transformed into a “real” prince-king who is a better person than before, was not part of the plots in the life stories told by these firstborn males. The firstborn male has a special place prescribed by the social discourse (patriarchy) that privileges males in general. In the continuous task of identity construction and reconstruction there is a constant psychological pull, multiplicity and conflict in the dialogic self that emerge in the individual’s effort to create a coherent and integrated story. For the firstborn male, this is a conflict he cannot accept or confront. It is an either/or situation that affords him little or no opportunity to search for a dynamic and coherent self and blinds him to the need for finding solutions being simultaneously many and one in the integrated self-defining story of his life.

The characterisation of the crown prince and the frog-prince I presented here are but a beginning in trying to find conceptual and theoretical connections explaining the complexities of the dominant discourses of male identity construction. The main limitation was that I had to work with reconstructed texts that did not reflect the actual words of my conversation partners. There are also many other questions crying out for further investigation and that can only be done by collecting first-person stories. Some of these questions deal with the frog and prince-king themes in firstborn males with an achieved identity status, and the crown prince and the frog-prince imagery in a family of only girls or only boys or identical twins.

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