

Stockholm syndrome in beauty and the beast



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

From the 1700's to today, many fairy tales have grown, changed, and taken on different meanings. Children are most commonly told the Disney versions because they do not contain the violence, sexualization, or the objectifications that the original versions had. The versions that were originally told contained all three of those characteristics. In every fairy tale, whether it is the edited or the original versions, it is easy to find a common theme present in each. In "Beauty and the Beast," the common theme is a girl falling in love with her captor or beginning to feel compassion towards him and then marrying him.

This is commonly known as Stockholm syndrome. Stockholm syndrome is a psychological disorder or condition where a hostage or captive begins to show sympathy, compassion, or even just positive feelings towards their captor. They may even begin to defend them. "Beauty and the Beast," written in 1757 by Jeanne-Marie LePrince De Beaumont, focuses on this theme as well. Although very similar to the version everybody is familiar with, this French version also comes with some differences.

The theme in "Beauty and the Beast" centers on Stockholm syndrome by exploring the transformation that Beauty and the Beast experience through love, morals, the society, and emotions. Beauty's transformation occurs partially due to her morals. The main thing that sticks out in her is her virtue. In Beaumont's story, she says of the father, "He admitted the virtue of his daughter, above all her patience" (Beaumont 33). Beauty was loved by all, except for her jealous sisters, because not only was she beautiful, but also she showed true compassion and was genuinely kind to everyone around her.

Her patience was shown by her willingness to help her father when the family had to move out of town. Beauty's sisters gave her a hard time because she was more liked than them and because she did housework, something that they thought only a maid should do. Her sisters only cared about wealth and marrying somebody with money, while Beauty was more concerned by the wellbeing her father and her family. Because of this, she showed a willingness to sacrifice herself since she cared more about others than herself.

Jack Zipes discusses this idea in his article, "Towards a Social History of the Literary Fairy Tale for Children." Beauty's virtues and morals were something that was expected of her during this time period. Zipes questions why the literary fairy tale was created, and he believes that it was for that reason. He says, "Adults needed and developed the literary fairy tale to prescribe the manners and values which children were to acquire for the further development of upper-class civility and Christianity" (Zipes 25).

This tells the readers that children, especially young girls, were expected to act, like Beauty, with compassion and a willingness to help your family. Compassion and that willingness made Beauty more vulnerable which made her susceptible to Stockholm syndrome. Stockholm syndrome is more common in young women who are vulnerable and have the virtues to find the good in any person. At one point in the story, Beauty's father had to go to town to pick up merchandise from the home port and the elder daughters ask for extravagant things, while Beauty only asks for a rose.

It says, " It's not that Beauty was anxious to have a rose, but she did not want to set an example that would make her sisters look bad" (33-34). Even though her sisters did not treat her with any respect, she still treated them with as much kindness and respect that she could offer. This continues to prove the idea of Stockholm syndrome because she still finds kindness to offer to her sisters, despite the hate they give her. In De Beaumont's tale, she also stresses the importance of obedience and self-denial.

In this time period, obeying one's elders was something that was to be expected of a young girl. Richard Lynch discusses the role of women in fairy tales in his article, " Symbolic Narratives: The Dangers of Being an Intertextually Inclined Character. " Lynch says, " Women in the stories...are a subclass of the powerless in fairy tales generally: Beauty, who feels obligated to sacrifice herself to save her father..." (Lynch 8). Even though Beauty was not asked to take her father's place in the castle, she knew that it was expected of her to offer to do so.

Volunteering to take her father's place, gives Beauty a sense of power because she is able to take control of something and prove that is not powerless. Another value that Beauty had over her sisters was that she placed a higher importance on essences rather than appearances. Beauty says to the Beast after he watches her eat the first night, " You are very kind. I swear to you that I am completely pleased with your good heart. When I think of it, you no longer seem ugly to me" (38).

This is the point at which Beauty begins to realize that although somebody may be ugly on the outside that does not reflect who he or she really is. This

realization made her more vulnerable because she was not as shallow as her sisters, valued more important things, and was able to see past a person's appearances. This vulnerability continues to make more susceptible to Stockholm syndrome because she is beginning to see that Beast is not a bad person, which is the beginning of her feelings of compassion and friendship for him.

She was able to experience love because she was able to look beyond the human imperfections. The way the society functioned in the 1700's also helped to push Beauty's transformation. A main focus point of this fairy tale is the idea of an arranged marriage. Often times, girls entered these relationships freely because it represented their culture. At this time, arranged marriages were very common and a lot of women had multiple anxieties or fears surrounding this idea of being with somebody that they might never come to love.

Beaumont helped to dispel these fears and anxieties by showing that it is capable to love somebody that a woman was "assigned" to be with for the rest of her life. In Jack Zipes article, "The Dark Side of Beauty and the Beast: The Origins of the Literary Fairy Tale for Children," he discusses how Beaumont uses arranged marriages in her tales. He says, "Beaumont addressed an audience of young girls in pre-puberty and always took care to insist on this role of submissiveness. She wanted to prepare them for life, that is, for marriage..."(Zipes 6).

Zipes notes that in every short story Beaumont has written, it focused on educating young children, particularly girls, in submission because that was

the way they were expected to behave. Beauty volunteers to become the Beast's captive and submits to what he wants. Even though she went out of her own free will, it still represents the idea of an arranged marriage. Many times during the tale, the Beast asks Beauty to marry him, but she politely denies his request every time. The first time he asks, Beauty says, "It is too bad he is so ugly, for he is so kind" (38).

This shows that the girl is beginning to feel some kind of compassion for her captor. It also points out that even though she has to stay at the castle, she can't help but begin to feel love and compassion for the Beast. Beaumont shows the audience that it is capable to love somebody in an arranged marriage because Beauty is able to fall in love with a hideous beast that she was forced to live with. The submissiveness that Beauty displays continues to prove the theory of Stockholm syndrome because it shows her vulnerability and her ability to feel compassion for anyone.

Beauty's transformation was also encouraged by romance and love. June Cummins notes in her article, "Romancing the Plot: The Real Beast of Disney's Beauty and the Beast," that "Beaumont emphasizes Beauty's love of music and books, creating a heroine who is a reading woman, an important concept at a time...when literary heroines represented a new kind of female protagonist" (Cummins 3). After Beaumont introduces the idea that Beauty loves to read and learn, that idea never comes back to light. The main focus then switches to romance, which is the main focus of every fairy tale.

Beaumont switches to preparing young girls for what lies ahead of them, marriage and a possible love story. In the story, Beauty thought she could never come to love somebody so hideous and foolish as the Beast. But by the end of the story, she discovers that she does indeed love him and wants to marry him. The Beast allows her to go home to see her family for a week, but her sisters trick her into extending her stay. When Beauty returns to the Beast, she finds him dying of grief. She says to him, " No, my dear Beast, you will no die. You will live and become my husband.

From this moment on, I give you my hand in marriage, and I swear that I belong only to you. Alas, I thought that I felt only friendship for you, but the grief I am feeling makes me realize that I can't live without you" (Beaumont 41). Beauty finally realizes that she has fallen in love with who he is, rather than how he looks. After she says this, the Beast turns into a handsome prince, which is Beauty's reward for her kind-heartedness. Although the Beast was similar to a captor and Beauty was his captive, she was still able to find love and compassion in him.

This shows that love and romance exist in every kind of relationship, even with a beast. Beauty finding compassion and love in her relationship with Beast also proves the theory of Stockholm syndrome. She was help as his captive, yet she falls in love with him, which is the main idea of Stockholm syndrome. Beauty's life was transformed because of her virtues, her role in society, and her ability to fall in love with the Beast. She ends up agreeing to marry her captor because of how vulnerability, submissiveness, and her ability to feel compassion for even the ugliest beast.

Beauty is able to express empathy and sympathy towards the Beast. This fact is what proves the theme of Stockholm syndrome to be evident in the tale. The reason why Beauty is affected by this syndrome is because of her virtues and how she was expected to act. If the Beast had held one of her sisters hostage instead, the outcome would have been different because their hearts are filled with jealousy and rage. Beauty's heart was filled with love and kindness, which made her vulnerable and gave her the ability to connect emotionally with the Beast and believe in the myth of love.