

# Beauty: the evolution of perception

[Science](#), [Biology](#)



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Beauty": The evolution of perception When looking in the past to see how people lived and viewed the world, there is one commonality that stands out. A woman's beauty says a lot on how the culture and the people of that society perceived themselves and others. These past perceptions affect how current society and culture is perceived not only by the individuals of our generation but by our future generations as well.

This paper will address how we as society view beauty as it has changed over a period of time, how these changes came about, and how the media played a role in this beauty evolution. How this beauty evolution begins starts in childhood. One of the first memories that children have is the reading of fairy tales. These stories set a foundation as to what we perceive as beauty. " Children's media has been found to be powerfully responsive to social change and not simply in a way that mirrors society (Baker-Sperry and Grauerholz 714). With this early exposure to what is portrayed as beauty, it is established early in the developmental years of childhood of how a woman should look as well as act. " Children's fairy tales can provide insight into the dynamic relationship between gender, power, and culture as well as the cultural and social significance of beauty to women's lives (Baker-Sperry and Grauerholz 712). The cultural and social significance can be seen as " girls and boys are taught specific messages concerning the importance of women's bodies and women's attractiveness (Baker-Sperry and Grauerholz 724). " These fairy tales were created to accommodate the cultural values and conflicts of the era, and establish the values of what our society deems

as appropriate and what is acceptable for our young children to grow into as well as establishing a baseline for beauty.

As our children grow, they carry these values and ideals with them. These fairy tales portray women as meek and powerless, who are damsels in distress in need of a knight in shining armor. With maturity some of these values and ideals change; however, Baker-Sperry and Grauerholz state that “ The feminine beauty ideal is the socially constructed notion that physical attractiveness is one of woman’s most important assets, and something all women should strive to achieve and maintain (711). This belief is still prevalent in today’s society. This does not mean that “ there is a direct relationship between cultural values concerning feminine beauty and women’s behavior and identities, but the feminine beauty ideal may operate indirectly as a means of social control insofar as women’s concern with physical appearance (beauty), absorbs resources (money, energy, time) that could otherwise be spent enhancing their social status (Baker-Sperry and Grauerholz 723). The impacts of this ideal feminine beauty not only affect our children, but it also affects how they perceive themselves and how the future generations will perceive us. “ The feminine beauty ideal can be seen as a normative means of social control, where by social control is accomplished through the internalization of values and norms that serve to restrict women’s lives (Baker-Sperry and Grauerholz 712). This ultimately means that girls who are exposed to these fairy tales develop a belief that there are certain expectations that need to be upheld and if these expectations are not met then they will lack the power to succeed. “ Workers of above average beauty earn about 10 to 15 percent more than workers of

below average beauty. The size of this beauty premium is economically significant and comparable to the race and gender gaps in the U. S. labor market (Mobius and Rosenblat 222). According to Naomi Wolf “ More women have more power and scope and legal recognition that we have ever had before; but in terms of how we feel about ourselves physically, we may actually be worse off (Wolf 16)” She also goes on to state “ There is no legitimate historical or biological justification for the beauty myth; what it is doing to women today is a result of nothing more exalted than the need of today’s power structure, economy and culture to mount a counteroffensive against women (Wolf 19). ” Due to this, beauty is now linked with power in the sense that the more beautiful you are the more powerful you are.

This idea that beauty is power became more noticeable during the woman’s movement according to Wolf (19). She states that “ By the time the women’s movement had made inroads into the labor market, both women and men were accustomed to having beauty evaluated as wealth (Wolf 26). ” This influx of women in the work force changed how young girls related to the fairy tales they once read. They no longer had to portray the roles of the damsel in distress, but had to use their beauty to gain power and attention.

This evolution from the damsel has led to a more independent woman who uses her beauty to get what she needs. “ Before women entered the work force in large numbers, there was a clearly defined class of those explicitly paid for their “ beauty”: workers in the display professions-fashion mannequins, actress, dancers, and higher paid sex workers such as escorts. Until women’s emancipation, professional beauties were usually anonymous, low in status, un-respectable (Wolf 33). ” Now our young girls want to look

like all the actresses, musicians, models etc... that they see on TV, movies and in magazines.

I think these changes occurred once the fairy tales were no longer in written media, where we used what was written down and our imagination to create our ideal of beauty. Once these fairytales became a visual (movies, TV. and magazines) our young girls wanted to copy what they saw. In 1969 Vogue offered a new look for women's magazines (Wolf 73). " Vogue began to focus on the body as much as the clothes, in part because there was little they could dictate with the anarchic styles (Wolf 73). " " The number of diet related articles rose 70 percent from 1968 to 1972.

Articles on dieting in the popular press soared from 60 in the year 1979 to 66 in the month of January 1980 alone. By 1984, 300 diet books were on the shelves (Wolf 73-74). " The timing of this influx of dieting articles is due to the popularity of a model named Lesley Lawson otherwise known as Twiggy. She hit the height of her career in 1966 where she was on the cover of Vogue magazine. She was the ideal beauty of that era where being boyishly thin was in. Whereas a decade before having womanly curves was the idea of what beauty was for example the pin-up girl Betty Grable.

She was what was considered the ideal of that era. The images of both of these women show the significance of how models, actress and movie stars affect the women and youth of our society. Both of these women were portrayed in women's magazines or movies. " A woman reading Glamor is holding women-oriented mass culture between her two hands (Wolf 76). " With the mass media evolving and able to mass produce the media quicker than ever, the new ideals of what our young women view as beauty changes

at an even more rapid pace. With the introduction of the internet mass media is now instant, and on demand. Glamour, beauty and the perfect body: these are the values upheld within our culture as necessary to the fulfillment of desirable femininity (Wark 41). " With this beauty evolution consistently changing it also reflects the changes in the values that we as a society hold. The mass media will always be an integral part of our Beauty evolution as it reflects society's values. Works Cited Baker-Sperry, Lori, and Liz Grauerholz. " The Pervasiveness and Persistence of the Feminine Beauty Ideal in Children's Fairy Tales. " *Gender and Society* 17. 5 (Oct 2003): 711-726. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3594706>. Web. 19 November 2012. Fox, Greer Litton. Nice Girl: Social control of women through a value construct. " *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 2 (1977): 805-817. Print. Mobius, Markus M. , and Tanya S. Rosenblat. " Why Beauty Matters. " *American Economic Review* 96. 1 (2006): 222-235. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30034362>. Web. 19 November 2012. Wark, Jayne. " Wendy Geller's 48 hour Beauty Blitz: Gender, Class and the Pleasures of popular Culture. " *Art Journal* 56. 4 (1997): 41-47. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/777719>. Web. 19 November 2012. Wolf, Naomi. *The Beauty Myth: How images of Beauty are used against Women*. New York: HarperCollins, 2002. PDF File.