

# Fairy tales essay sample

[Health & Medicine](#), [Beauty](#)



Fairy tales offer children a fantasy world of magic, romance and adventure where pumpkins are transformed into crystal coaches and a kiss from a handsome prince can bring a young girl back to life. But tales like “Cinderella,” “ Sleeping Beauty” and “ Snow White” are also sending strong messages about the importance of having a beautiful appearance, according to a study by Purdue University sociologist Liz Grauerholz and Lori Baker-Sperry, an assistant professor of women’s studies at Western Illinois University. Grauerholz and Baker-Sperry examined 168 Brothers Grimm fairy tales to study how they deal with beauty in “ The Pervasiveness and Persistence of the Feminine Beauty Ideal in Children’s Fairy Tales.” Beauty or ugliness is referred to in 94 percent of the Grimms’ fairy tales, with evil characters often being described as ugly. In “ Cinderella,” beauty in women was referred to 114 times. The stories have fewer than 35 references to male characters, according to the study. “ I think the message that’s given to girls is that beauty is one of the most important traits for females in our society,” says Grauerholz. “ Boys don’t get the message as much that it’s so important to be handsome.” The Brothers Grimm fairy tales were written by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm in the early 19th Century.

Originally written in German, they were translated into English in 1851. Five have been reproduced more than 100 times: “ Cinderella,” “ Snow White,” “ Briar Rose” (also known as “ Sleeping Beauty”), “ Little Red Cap” (also known as “ Little Red Riding Hood”) and “ Hansel and Gretel.” The heroines are usually beautiful, and ugliness is seen as a sign of evil in 17 percent of the stories, according to the study. Many argue that beauty or ugliness is used a symbol of each character’s capacity for good or evil. There are

notable exceptions to this — such as Snow White’s beautiful, evil stepmother -but ugly characters with kind hearts are hard to find. “ A lot of the response we’ve gotten has been: ‘ Oh come on. What’s wrong with beauty?’ ” Baker-Sperry says. “ Most people who have responded negatively or questioned this have not questioned the findings..” Baker-Sperry says the lengths adolescent girls go to in seeking society’s beauty ideal, such as developing eating disorders and seeking plastic surgery, are argument enough that the preoccupation with beauty can become dangerous. It affects boys as well in their view of women, Grauerholz says. “ In some ways, I think boys get the same message, which is what’s important about girls is what they look like,” she says.

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Tue 25 Nov 2003 ) Fairy Tales ' May Cause Children Low Self-Esteem' By Mark Sage, PA News, in New York Parents who read fairy tales to their children may be causing them low self esteem, US social scientists said today. Classic stories, which have been passed down the generations contain so many stereotypes they could be just as harmful as the sexual images paraded in pop videos, it was suggested. " There is a lot of association between beauty and goodness and then conversely between ugliness and evil and laziness," said study co-author Liz Grauerholz. Ms Grauerholz, an associate professor of sociology at Purdue University in Indiana, said the stories which had survived for generations concentrated on looks particularly female beauty. " We had predicted that as women's status increased in the 20th Century, there would be less emphasis on looks and beauty," she said. " But those that had been reproduced were tales that heightened and glorified female beauty." She said parents should not simply throw out the books, or refuse to tell the tales, but discuss the plots and characters with their children. " To me it is not about not telling the stories, but being aware what the messages are, and asking the children questions about that," she said. " With my own daughters, who are nine and 11, I am very aware of the messages I am giving them. I don't want them to think they are valuable for just their looks."

14 Jan 2004 Page 3 of 3 Ms Grauerholz and her co-author, Lori Baker-Sperry from Western Illinois University, analysed 168 fairy tales which had been written in the 1800s by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm commonly known as the Brothers Grimm. They then studied which ones had been reproduced the most in the 20th Century. The top five re-told tales were the stereotype-

laden Cinderella, Snow White, Sleeping Beauty, Little Red Riding Hood and Hansel and Gretel. Nearly all 94% of the 168 stories referred to physical appearance, with an average of 14 such references per story. More often the tales referred to women's beauty than to men. One in five of the stories linked being ugly with being evil and in many stories ugly characters were punished as part of the plot. The full findings of the study can be found in the journal Gender and Society.

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