



## Beauty Standard Portrayed in *The Princess Who Wasn't* by Templeton Moss

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### Article Info

### Abstract

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This study has the purpose of deeply and critically analyzing the beauty myth standard, which is the major issue in the picture book entitled *The Princess Who Wasn't* that is mostly read by children. Beauty standards refer to the norms within a society that idealize specific physical traits and appearances. These standards may vary across different cultures and time periods, but they have a significant influence on an individual's self-perception and body image. With the fundamental theory of Beauty Myth by Naomi Wolf in 1990, this study adopts a qualitative methodology as the approach. By analyzing the narrative and visual representation, the study explores how the picture book presents beauty standards and their potential impact on young readers. Furthermore, the study examines the storyline of a picture book to determine whether it focuses more on changing someone's appearance or on emphasizing the significance of inner beauty and individuality. Beauty is becoming an oppression for women in society. The standard of beauty in society makes it necessary for a woman to look pretty, wear a dress, and be a beautiful woman. This analysis deeply examines beauty myths in society, the standard of beauty, and a woman's right to be herself.

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## INTRODUCTION

In today's society, beauty standards still hold great power, are a controversial topic, influence most aspects of our life, and shape the perception of people in society. People often say in social media and advertisements that beauty is relatively subjective. Subjective in this context is used to express an opinion, thought, or feelings based on different perspectives. According to Warsito & Fitria (2022), beauty standards all around the world have one thing in common, which is that it tends to glorify physical appearance rather than the intelligence or value that exists in each woman self. The ideal or standard of beauty in today's society is to have a beautiful face, be white, and have a good body shape. Beauty is a factor in the oppression of women. Women are told to behave themselves and dress up, are expected to be quiet and submissive, and have no opinion or option that makes them restrict their freedom. Not only that, but to look beautiful and meet beauty standards, some women do not hesitate to sacrifice and hurt themselves through facial surgery and other treatments that have a lot of risks. Some other women also starve themselves to meet the criteria of beauty standards, which is to have a slim body. The obsession with being beautiful is due to the social environment of society, which demands that they be beautiful. Advertisements, films, magazines, social media, and even children's picture books promote a specific idea about the beauty standards.

In this era of globalization, social media platforms like TikTok have significantly impacted society's perception of beauty. These platforms have become powerful influencers in shaping the beauty standard. Moreover, TikTok is dominated by visual content, such as images and videos. TikTok users have the ability to edit and modify their pictures before sharing them with their followers. They can use filters, and editing tools, and select favorable angles to create a flawless appearance. And if the users are searching for trending filters, they will be presented with beauty filters such as the "Natural" filter that can lighten their skin color and change the user's face shape. This culture creates an ideal image that is often unrealistic. They attempt to promote the beauty standards set by society, which often prioritize specific physical traits, such

as an hourglass body shape, smooth skin, and symmetrical facial features.

The picture book *The Princess Who Wasn't* written by Templeton Mass and illustrated by Karina Shuba tells us about the poorest king in the fifth kingdom, who is searching for a beautiful girl to become a princess. According to the kingdom's villagers, Kathy is the most beautiful girl in that kingdom, so they chose her as the princess' candidate. But Kathy refuses it because she wants to be a shepherd and be just the way she is. The next day, the King visits her and announces that each of the women in the kingdom will be the princess, even if they all have different appearances. In this picture book, there is some evidence that indicates a beauty standard. For instance, on the page of 11, where the scouts of the kingdom held high heels and jewelry. High heels and jewelry indirectly illustrate that a woman will look beautiful if she has long legs, a tall figure, and a luxurious appearance.

In this study, the writers determine the beauty myth or the beauty standard shown in the picture book *The Princess Who Wasn't*. This picture book's features fit its target audience, which is primarily young children. As everyone knows, children are the nation's strongest opportunity for keeping up with this generation and making it even better. Since this picture book was written by an adult, the author indirectly made an essential contribution to the presentation of critical issues, particularly liberal feminism and beauty standards. Evidence of a beauty standard can be found in the picture shown when the King asked how to get a princess, and his advisors brought heels and jewelry. Another example of the beauty standard can be seen in the contest flyer, which portrays a "beautiful" girl with nicely done hair, flawless skin covered with makeup, and shiny jewelry on her. Thus, a standard of beauty was shaped that made all the girls participate by dolling themselves up from head to toe. By including such issues, it is possible to derive the moral value that readers should prioritize all people based on their intelligence rather than merely their physical looks and should be made more aware of this. In addition, society has a duty to treat every individual equally, regardless of their gender, race, social class, or other characteristics. It is therefore hoped that the availability of children's literature like this will benefit many parties, particularly children and society. The benefits for children are that they can use their new knowledge to understand what they read, develop their skills in literacy and language, and have

a fun time. As for society, publications like this picture book are considered one of the books that can help educate children. In order to help children in this modern world, humans need to educate them by paying attention to issues that arise and occur in people's daily lives.

The beauty myth concept by Wolf (1990) constructs that women have to focus on their outer beauty or appearance rather than their attitude and intelligence. This theory possessed six values: work, culture, religion, sex, hunger, and violence. In this picture book, the writers found three things which are culture, work, and hunger. The first one is the culture that is portrayed when the king announces that he is looking for a princess, and the major requirement is that the woman has to be beautiful because of traditions that have been passed down in their kingdom. The setting of time and the plot may also be the answer to why the king always sticks to the old tradition of having a beautiful princess. The second is work, which depicted in this picture book is when the most beautiful girl is immediately chosen as a princess because she is the most beautiful woman on the island to come and work as a princess. However, she does not agree to this because she has a job at a sheep farm, which is preferable for her. This illustrates that the job of a princess must have a beautiful face to be in a kingdom with a king. The last is hunger, portrayed implicitly when Kathy is dressed in a dress that is small enough that she has difficulty breathing. This will indirectly think of going on a diet to have a thinner body and fit in wearing a dress as a princess.

There are several previous studies that are referencing this study. The first study by Warsito and Fitria (2022) from Universitas Pamulang, entitled "The Depiction of Beauty Myth in Coelho's *The Spy*," discusses the experiences of the beauty myth of the main character in *The Spy* novel. This research used Wolf's (1990) theory about the beauty myth. This study is supported by a qualitative method. This first study presented some findings that show beauty myths such as the main character's joy, money, power, jewelry, and valuables from the perspectives of personal and social. Still, that beauty myth destroys the main character's life horribly at the end of the story by trading all of those things for sex.

The second study determined by Ernawati and Purnomo (2019) from Universitas Negeri

Surabaya with the title “Beauty Myth in *Novels* by Tiwiek S.A.” examined the beauty construction concept of Javanese women portrayed in the Javanese novel named *Novels*. This study uses a qualitative approach. This second paper is supported by the theory of feminism in beauty myth theory by Wolf (1990). This study finds that women who prioritize beauty are eventually subjected to both physical and verbal sexual abuse, such as getting their chests pinched and touched by men. Not only that, but the women also have a disturbing experience of being seduced, which then becomes an offer of money by some men, who have the supremacy.

The last study is from Hermawati, Piyatna, and Adji (2016) from Universitas Padjadjaran, named “Instagram and the Myth of Beauty in Muslim Women,” which was conducted through a qualitative analysis specifically using the discourse analysis method. This research investigated the beauty myth of Muslim women through the discourse on Instagram. The research’s results display that Instagram has constructed three terms of beauty which are spiritual, physical, and ethical beauty. Besides that, the writers also depicted the patriarchal culture that influences Instagram’s discourse on beauty myths. Even now, Muslim women wearing hijab as a fashion is suspected to hold the potential to strengthen women’s beauty, and it also shows that Muslim women wearing hijab as a fashion are all facing commodification

This study and the three related studies produced by Warsito and Fitria (2022), Ernawati and Purnomo (2019), and Hermawati, Piyatna, and Adji (2016) have both similarities and differences. The issue and the method are all comparable. All of the related studies used a qualitative method and studied the beauty myth. The similarities also come from the first, second, and this study, which uses Wolf’s (1990) theory. The differences, or the gaps, between these three related papers and this paper, are the objects. The goal of the first and second studies is to analyze a novel. The third study is to analyze social media, particularly Instagram, while this study is to examine a children’s picture book.

Feminism is a movement that aims to break down gender-based power imbalances and inequalities by examining how power works in relation to gender. It acknowledges that gender is

a concept shaped by society's norms and values. Feminists study power dynamics that keep gender oppression alive, challenging traditional gender roles that reinforce inequality and limit women's freedom. Intersectionality is the key to feminism, recognizing how gender connects with race, class, sexuality, and ability, leading to various levels of privilege and discrimination. Feminist theory emphasized the importance of women's resistance, challenging the idea that they are passive victims, and urging women to make decisions for themselves. It questions society's construction of gender, challenging harmful beauty standards and stereotypes that suppress individual expression.

One of the significant issues within the feminist discussion is the concept of the "beauty myth," as explored by Naomi Wolf in her influential book, "The Beauty Myth" (1990). Wolf explores the common influence of the "beauty myth" in society, specifically focusing on the construction and preservation of unrealistic beauty standards for women. Wolf argues that the beauty myth serves as a powerful means of social control, captivating women's focus, and effort in an attempt to have an idealized and often unachievable physical appearance. Wolf highlights that the beauty myth enforces severe criteria that prioritize and glorify youth, slimness, and typical attractiveness, consequently influencing feelings of lack and self-doubt among women who do not meet these specific ideals. By placing such emphasis on appearance, the beauty myth sets aside other valuable aspects of women, diverting attention from their intellect, skills, and achievements. This idea of unrealistic beauty standards not only strengthens societal gender inequality but also restricts women's personal and professional growth. Wolf's exploration of the beauty myth sheds light on the harmful impact of these standards and calls for a reevaluation of society's expectations.

Naomi Wolf identifies five areas where the beauty myth exerts its influence, including work, sex, religion, hunger, and violence. Those areas affect the shaping of women's experiences and strengthen gender inequalities. Regarding the influence of beauty myths at work, Wolf (1990)

stated, "The more legal and material hindrances women have broken through, the more strictly, heavily, and cruelly images of female beauty have come to weigh upon us." This pressure to meet beauty standards not only diverts attention from a woman's skills and qualifications but also promotes gender inequality by prioritizing appearance over intelligence. As a result, women often face discrimination based on their physical traits, restraining their professional growth and limiting their access to opportunities. Moreover, the beauty myth's impact is particularly felt in industries that prioritize image, such as entertainment, media, and fashion, where the pressure to meet the specific beauty standard is needed. This not only suppresses women who do not fit within these standards but also reinforces harmful stereotypes and expectations.

A culture fixated on female thinness has not an obsession with female beauty, but an obsession with female obedience (Wolf, 1990). The beauty myth judges a woman's worth by her sexual attractiveness, reinforcing the objectification of women and supporting harmful ideas of the male gaze. Women are often judged and valued based on their physical appearance, creating unrealistic standards of beauty that can lead to body image issues, self-esteem problems, and a constant pressure to meet societal expectations. This narrow focus on physical traits, ignoring the complexity and depth of women's experiences and contributions, treats them as objects of desire rather than individuals with means. Challenging the beauty myth in the context of sex involves breaking the patriarchal norms that promote objectification, and instead promoting consent, and encouraging healthy and respectful relationships based on mutual respect and understanding.

Wolf's observations on the beauty myth provide valuable insights into how the beauty myth often intertwines with traditional religious ideologies, reinforcing expectations of modesty and suggesting specific beauty rituals for women. In the Christian tradition, for instance, female beauty is a sign of God's favor, while ugliness and old age are seen as a divine curse (Wolf, 1990). Religious teachings may promote ideals of purity, chastity, and modesty, which can be interpreted in ways that place a heavy emphasis on women's physical appearance and obey to

certain standards of beauty. This can lead to the policing of women's bodies and the reinforcement of patriarchal norms within religious communities.

The beauty myth intersects with issues of hunger and eating disorders, as Wolf (1990) states, "A culture fixated on female thinness is not an obsession about female beauty, but an obsession about female obedience." The beauty myth promotes the idea that thinness is equal to beauty and worth, creating a dangerous ideal that many women attempt to achieve. This constant effort towards thinness can lead to messy eating patterns, unhealthy relationships with food, and the development of eating disorders. The pressure to meet societal beauty standards can result in extreme dieting, self-starvation, and other harmful behaviors in an attempt to achieve the desired body shape. It is important to promote body positivity, and self-acceptance, and foster a healthy relationship with food. It is also crucial to provide education and support systems that address the underlying psychological, societal, and cultural factors that contribute to disordered eating and body image issues.

The relationship between the beauty myth and violence becomes obvious as women are frequently subjected to body-shaming, sexual harassment, or assault due to their failed attempt to meet societal beauty ideals. While it may seem that our society's obsession with female beauty is about aesthetics, it is, in reality, about power and control (Wolf, 1990). The beauty myth promotes damaging beliefs that women must follow certain standards of beauty to be accepted or valued, and preserves power imbalances that contribute to violence against women. Body-shaming comments and objectification of women's bodies are common issues of this phenomenon, leading to a harmful impact on women's self-esteem and well-being.

## **METHOD**

This research will be conducted using the descriptive qualitative method. This method is typically used to establish the importance of the central idea, explore the problem, and develop an understanding of small individuals in social problems (Creswell, 2012). The researcher will collect the data from the chosen text, written by Templeton Mass and illustrated by Karina



Shuba's picture book entitled *The Princess Who Wasn't*. Qualitative research aims to understand the meaning individuals attach to a certain phenomenon they have experienced (Meriam, 2009). Therefore, a descriptive qualitative study was chosen to support this study. In collecting the data, the researchers will use the documentation method, as the data used in this research was written. As Sugiono (2009) noted, documentation is a technique for collecting data by obtaining information from various written sources or documents that exist in the respondent's or place's possession. This research will take the following steps in order to collect the data. First, the researcher will collect the data by reading the picture book. Second, the researcher will mark the beauty standard found in the picture book. Third, the data containing the beauty myth evidence will be identified by the researcher. Lastly, the data will be analyzed according to the theory of the Beauty Myth by Naomi Wolf.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

In this chapter, the writers will be analyzing the beauty myths of the characters in *The Princess Who Wasn't*. The beauty myth phenomenon is a scary thing for women. Beauty becomes a benchmark for a woman to try to look beautiful according to the standards that exist in social society. This picture book tells the story of a king who is looking for the most beautiful girl on his island to become a princess. Because of that, this picture book titled *The Princess Who Wasn't*, which was written by Templeton Mass and was drawn by Karina Shuba in 2023 can be explored through the issue of the beauty standard. In this article's analysis, the writers found three types of beauty myths as defined by Wolf (1990) that the beauty myth prioritizes a gorgeous physical appearance, and the writers found three out of the six types of beauty myths that are culture, work, and hunger.

### **Depiction on Beauty Myth: Culture**

There are some parts when the king is looking for someone to accompany him with the criteria and standards that must be beautiful. The culture of a princess is mostly that of a beautiful girl,

so it is still applied when finding a princess for the kingdom. This can be proven by seeing the quotation,

“The King and his advisers had put together a list of traits necessary to be a princess and “beautiful” was at the top of the list” (Moss, 2023, p.7).

The quotation refers to the beauty myth, according to Naomi Wolf, specifically about the culture where the king's partner has always been a beautiful woman. Thus, the main criterion for being a princess in the kingdom is being beautiful, not anything else. According to Wolf (1990), “Culture perpetuates beauty myths by consistently presenting some idealized image of beauty as the norm, creating unrealistic standards that are naturally unattainable. The constant assault of these images in the media and popular culture helps reinforce the notion that physical appearance is the most important aspect of a woman's worth”.

The statement about beauty being the standard for a princess is reinforced by the King who thinks that all women want to be princesses also can be proven by seeing the quotation on the page..., “What!??” exclaimed the King, " I thought every girl wanted to be a princess!" (Moss, 2023). It demonstrates that in the mind of a king, all the women in the land wanted to be the candidate for a beautiful princess that used dresses, high heels, and expensive jewelry.

Besides the way of the king that requires a princess to have a beautiful appearance, there is also another quotation that relates to the Wolf's (1990) theory about culture in the beauty myth. It is shown in this picture book, on the ... page, which is the culture that brings stereotypes by the sentence,

“Well, I don't! I want to be a sheep herder, which is what I am. I don't like fancy dresses and make-up and high heels and jewelry. And, by the way, why are those the things that make a princess anyway? Who's to say a princess can't be someone who likes to work with animals? Or wears casual clothes? Or isn't this necessarily skinny? who decided that a princess has to be pretty and elegant and

not do anything except marry a prince or go to a ball?” (Moss, 2023, p.15).

The quotation above is uttered by one of the characters, Kathy, who breaks the King's thoughts and tradition that beauty does not require every woman in the land to be a princess, and they have the freedom to choose what they want to be despite being a princess.

The culture that has been passed down since ancient times about a princess who must be beautiful has led to the existence of a beauty myth constructed in society. As we know, a kingdom certainly has a past setting of time, which is certainly why the whole picture book's plot is still very deep in the old traditions. Therefore, it is expected that the king still sticks to the tradition. Not only that, the social environment in the kingdom is accustomed to the requirement that a princess must be beautiful, as stated by Wolf (1990). Competition between women has been made part of the myth that women will be divided from one another, and so many young girls are obsessed with looking beautiful in order to be chosen as princesses. This is maintained by one of the requirements for being a princess of a king, which indicates the beauty standards.

### **Depiction on Beauty Myth: Work**

In addition, not only the culture, but this picture book also represents the work of a princess, who has a criterion that the candidate and the-soon to be-princess must be beautiful. Beauty gives some women an advantage in getting a job and other benefits. This can be proven by the following quotation, “Because, unluckily, Kathy was the most beautiful girl in the village and was chosen by the King's men to come to the castle to try out for the job of a princess” (Moss, 2023, p.10).

The quotation above proves that a woman who has a beautiful face gets the privilege of being chosen to work as a princess in the kingdom. Being a princess is a job that is only run by a woman chosen by the king because she is the most beautiful woman on his island. As defined by Wolf (1990), work is a beauty myth that develops expectations and oppression for a woman to meet unrealistic beauty standards, and this can hinder career advancement and gender

equality. This leads to discrimination against other girls just because of the beauty standards in a job, and less appreciation of abilities and achievements by overvaluing appearance. Getting a beautiful face while being a princess is quite a tough job since the princess must maintain all of the good things for the sake of her reputation. The princess also has to accept a job that certainly makes her not free because inevitably she has to follow the rules in the kingdom, for example, she is required to be perfect so she must maintain her visual and body and being a human that can do anything but is restrained, because again, being a princess doesn't mean we have everything.

Apart from that, Kathy's character as someone who was chosen to be a princess directly by the king breaks the statement that not all women want to work as princesses in the kingdom. Women have the freedom to be what they want to be. Then it is agreed by the king that working as a princess is not only in the kingdom. This is proven by the following quotation

King said “..is Princess of Milk.” “Princess of Chocolate chip cookies” “Princess of Basketball and a Princess of Juggling..” (Moss, 2023, p.21).

The quotation above illustrates that all women are princesses in the way they want to be. Also, whatever physical shape they are in, they are still beautiful in their own way. As stated by Wolf (1990) that women have the same rights to develop their potential in the workplace and be appreciated for their achievements regardless of their appearance. Thus, it is important to address this before it becomes discrimination because of physical appearance.

At the very beginning of the story, the King has a goal to make his kingdom get money and reputation like the other four kingdoms by finding a princess. This can be proven by the citation of the phrase,

But the fifth was small and poor and never had any tourists. The king and his advisers sat down to figure out what the other kingdoms had that theirs didn't. ‘Princesses,’ said Larry, the King's chief adviser (Moss, 2023, pp. 4-5).

At the end of the story the King decides to give the title of princess to every woman in the land, then the King's initial goal is fulfilled, "And, of course, with all those princesses, the kingdom becomes a booming tourist attraction" (Moss, 2023, p.22). This sentence is a proof that the princess is also implicitly employed to attract the notice of people, in this context is tourists, which is included in the beauty myth: work.

### **Depiction on Beauty Myth: Hunger**

According to Wolf (1990), one of the six types of beauty myths is hunger, which is explained as a beauty myth that encourages women to be obsessed with a thin body and a diet culture that can lead women to have an eating disorder and an unhealthy connection to the foods. This happened because of the women's insecurities and dissatisfaction with their own bodies. Hunger in the *The Princess Who Wasn't* picture book when Kathy has an opportunity to be interviewed even if she does not want to do that portrayed in the sentence, "...in a fancy dress that was so tight around the waist she could barely breathe in it,..." (Moss, 2023, p.13). The dress that can be worn to meet the king as part of the princess selection is so small and tight for Kathy that she cannot breathe, which implicitly tells the reader that wearing a fancy dress can only be done by people who have a thin body, and if they want to get that, then they must diet or at least not eat to maintain the body. Something similar happens when Kathy continues to say on page 15, "...Or isn't necessarily this skinny?..." which means that one of the rules of being a princess must be having a skinny body, but Kathy is against on it.

### **CONCLUSION**

The conclusion from the analysis of the issue stated in the previous chapter about finding and analyzing the beauty myth is that it is represented by the character of *The Princess Who Wasn't* a Picture Book. The beauty standards of the characters happen in certain ways. The king of the kingdom has determined the rules for becoming a princess and is supported by the advisers in their rule that a princess should be beautiful. So, the young ladies wearing nice dresses use makeup to look beautiful in front of the prince. Later on, from the king's point of view, the king

stated that every woman wants to be a princess, but the main character, as a person not supported by Beauty standards, becomes a princess. On the other hand, in the end, the beauty myth is destroyed by the main character, who does not approve of the rules. Moreover, she said in her statement that a woman has the right to be as beautiful as she wants; a princess does not always wear fancy dresses, jewelry, high heels, and many more things. Then the king destroyed the beauty standards of a princess; he supported their choices to become the princess that every woman in the kingdom wanted.

We hope that the existence of children's literature, especially picture books, will bring numerous advantages, both for children themselves and society as a whole. These picture books offer various benefits for children, such as improving their understanding of what they read, also their literacy and language skills, and providing an enjoyable and engaging way to spend their time while learning. Additionally, society can benefit from such publications, as they serve as a valuable educational tool for children. In today's modern era, it is crucial for us, as responsible individuals, to educate children by addressing the issues that they encounter in their daily lives. By doing so, we can contribute to their growth and development in a positive manner.

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