

## THE PORTRAYAL OF BEAUTY PRIVILEGE AND BEAUTY IDEALS IN SNOW WHITE AND THE SEVEN DWARFS

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**ABSTRACT** This study explores the portrayal of beauty standards and beauty privilege in the classic fairy tale *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, using a feminist literary approach and intersectionality theory. The tale, widely known through the Brothers Grimm version and its popular adaptations, continues to influence societal perceptions of beauty, particularly concerning women. The research is motivated by the need to critically examine how such narratives contribute to the normalization of idealized beauty and its impact on gender roles. In this tale, beauty is not only central to the protagonist's identity but also determines how others treat her, reflecting how physical appearance can translate into unearned social advantages—a concept known as beauty privilege. The study employs a qualitative content analysis method, focusing on selected narrative elements and character interactions that emphasize Snow White's appearance. Using feminist literary criticism, the analysis investigates how Snow White's beauty becomes the primary source of her value, overshadowing traits such as intellect or agency. Meanwhile, intersectionality theory is used to examine how beauty interacts with other social factors, such as gender and age, to shape power dynamics and privileges in the story. The findings reveal that Snow White's beauty repeatedly spares her life, earns her protection and admiration from strangers, and culminates in a marriage proposal. These privileges underline the societal inclination to reward those who conform to dominant beauty ideals. This study contributes to broader discussions on how literature perpetuates gendered beauty norms and their real-life implications on women's roles and worth.

**Keywords:** Beauty privilege, Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, feminist literary criticism, intersectionality, beauty standards

### INTRODUCTION

The concept of beauty and its role in defining women's worth is deeply embedded in societal and cultural frameworks. As Rousseau (2024) and Ma (2025) explain, a woman's image is often inextricably tied to prevailing beauty standards, which dictate how her value is perceived within her social environment. Beauty, therefore, becomes a site of competition and comparison, exemplified through various beauty contests, national nominations for the "most beautiful women," and the growing influence of social media, which amplifies and disseminates these standards globally. The competitive nature of beauty is not a new phenomenon, but its implications for women have become more pronounced over time, especially in the modern era, where appearance is increasingly commodified and valued.

Scott (1997) identified four central themes in the cultural construction of beauty ideals, two of which highlight critical dimensions of women's relationship with beauty: "Beauty is imperative for women" and "Beauty is paramount among women's qualities." These themes reveal the pervasive societal expectation that beauty is not just a desirable trait but a requirement for women to succeed or be valued. This emphasis on beauty reflects the disproportionate weight placed on women's physical appearance as compared to their other attributes, such as intelligence, talent, or character. The result is a cultural framework where beauty becomes a form of capital that women are expected to cultivate, often at great personal and financial expense.

Both men and women participate in the scrutiny of women's bodies to assess how closely they align with societal beauty standards (Forbes et al., 2007). The pervasive scrutiny can lead to objectification, where women are evaluated solely based on their physical traits. Those who do not meet these narrowly defined standards often face derogatory judgments, reinforcing the idea that women must continuously conform to societal expectations of beauty. This pressure drives many women to pursue extreme measures, such as plastic surgery, in an

attempt to achieve the idealized appearance. Katz (2020) notes that women overwhelmingly outnumber men in undergoing cosmetic procedures, with a female-to-male ratio of approximately five to one, highlighting the disproportionate impact of beauty standards on women.

In parallel with the societal pressures surrounding beauty standards, women who meet or exceed these ideals often benefit from "beauty privilege" or "attractiveness privilege." Studies have consistently demonstrated that individuals perceived as more attractive are treated more favorably than those considered less attractive (Colombo et al., 2022; Langlois, 2022). This treatment can manifest in various forms, such as receiving preferential treatment in social interactions, job opportunities, or even legal judgments (Wang & Niu, 2021; Romi, 2024). Beauty privilege, therefore, operates as a subtle yet powerful form of social capital that disproportionately advantages those who fit within societal definitions of attractiveness, which are often more rigid and prescriptive for women than for men.

This research focuses on the portrayal of beauty standards and beauty privilege within the classic fairy tale *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. The story's central conflict, which revolves around beauty and its consequences, presents a microcosm of how beauty ideals shape societal dynamics. In the tale, the Queen's jealousy of Snow White is sparked by the young princess's beauty, which is continually reaffirmed by the magic mirror's proclamation that Snow White is "the fairest of them all." Snow White's beauty is presented as the ultimate standard, and the Queen's failure to reach this ideal drives her to plot Snow White's death. The Queen's actions represent the destructive potential of internalized beauty standards, where a woman's sense of self-worth is contingent on how well she measures up to societal expectations of attractiveness.

Snow White, on the other hand, experiences the benefits of beauty privilege throughout the story. Her appearance not only spares her life when the Huntsman refuses to kill her, but it also elicits immediate kindness and protection from the seven dwarfs, despite her being a stranger. These moments illustrate how beauty can function as a shield, affording those who possess it an unspoken advantage in their interactions with others. The tale ultimately suggests that beauty is a form of power, albeit one that renders Snow White passive and reliant on the actions of others—especially men—to secure her safety and success.

Despite the extensive scholarly attention given to gender representation and domestic ideology in *Snow White*, existing research has largely centered on themes of female subservience, anti-feminist rivalry, and gendered labor expectations. Winchester (2021) and Santigo (2020) provide compelling critiques of how Snow White and her stepmother are situated within traditional gender roles, with Snow White idealized as a passive, domestic figure and the Queen demonized for asserting independence or desire. Similarly, Budidarma et al. (2023) emphasize the narrative's reinforcement of conventional beauty hierarchies and female dependency on male saviors. However, while these studies highlight the oppressive gender dynamics and dichotomies of virtue versus vanity, they fall short in examining how *beauty itself* functions as social capital—what this study frames as "beauty privilege." That is, prior research focuses on how beauty is *judged* and *policed* but not how it operates as a form of power that affords advantages to women who conform to aesthetic ideals, even as it restricts their agency within patriarchal structures.

Furthermore, the majority of existing analyses tend to treat beauty as a static moral ideal or a mechanism of female rivalry, without interrogating its deeper implications as a cultural currency that mediates power, protection, and privilege. While Winchester (2021) discusses Snow White's innocence and the Queen's sexual threat, and Santigo (2020) critiques domestic labor as the price of female acceptance, none of these works explore how Snow White's beauty not only incites conflict but paradoxically *safeguards* her within a patriarchal system. This research addresses that gap by shifting the analytical lens from a binary of 'good vs. evil

women' to an examination of how beauty standards are internalized, rewarded, and weaponized. Unlike earlier studies, this paper situates Snow White's experience within the broader discourse on beauty privilege, connecting it to contemporary debates on social media aesthetics, cosmetic enhancement, and the commodification of female appearance. In doing so, this study offers a novel contribution by historicizing beauty privilege through a classical narrative, revealing how early cultural texts have laid the foundation for modern perceptions of women's value being intricately tied to physical appearance.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Beauty Ideals

The notion of beauty has long been intricately tied to societal expectations of femininity. Scott (1997) identifies four central themes that characterize beauty ideals: "Beauty is fundamentally feminine," "Beauty is imperative for women," "Beauty is paramount among women's qualities," and "Woman's beauty requires substantial modification of the natural appearance." These themes highlight that societal perceptions of beauty are not merely superficial; they are deeply entrenched in cultural constructs of femininity. Women are often expected to embody these ideals to avoid social stigmatization or marginalization, placing immense pressure on them to conform. In this framework, beauty transcends being a mere physical trait and becomes the most crucial attribute for women, overshadowing other qualities such as intelligence, kindness, or competence. This perception enforces the belief that a woman's primary value lies in her appearance, making her success and acceptance in society largely dependent on how well she adheres to these standards.

Hiatt (1978) expands on this by describing the feminine style associated with beauty as emotional, illogical, and sentimental. This reinforces stereotypical gender roles that trivialize women's abilities and characteristics, further cementing beauty as a defining factor of their identity. The emotional and illogical connotations attached to the feminine style of beauty suggest that women's value is determined more by how they look than by their rational abilities or contributions to society. Such a framework marginalizes women by perpetuating the idea that beauty is their most valuable commodity and, therefore, essential to their social and personal worth.

Moreover, Scott (1997) argues that while beauty ideals evolve over time, they maintain three persistent elements. First, they are unattainable for most women, thus creating a standard that is impossible to reach for the majority. Second, these ideals demand substantial time and emotional investment, as women must dedicate considerable resources to meet societal expectations. Lastly, beauty ideals subject women to constant judgment, both from men and other women. The unattainability of these standards sets women up for failure, often leading to feelings of inadequacy and body dissatisfaction. As a result, women may experience heightened levels of insecurity, self-criticism, and social pressure, reinforcing a cycle of emotional labor invested in maintaining these ideals (Malik et al., 2024; Rao, 2024). This perpetual striving for an unreachable standard contributes to negative mental health outcomes such as depression, anxiety, and eating disorders, highlighting the destructive nature of rigid beauty norms (Marks et al., 2020).

In contemporary society, beauty ideals have evolved but continue to place immense pressure on women. Today's beauty standards emphasize thinness, a balanced diet, exercise, and overall health as markers of beauty (Merino et al., 2024). Since the 1920s, societal attitudes have shifted from viewing fatness as a symbol of wealth and health to associating it with poor self-management and lack of discipline. The preference for thinness aligns with societal values that prioritize self-control, discipline, and individual responsibility, particularly in Western cultures. This shift reflects broader cultural anxieties around body size, health, and morality,

where a slim body is equated with success and moral virtue, while fatness is stigmatized and pathologized.

Additionally, skin color remains a significant marker of beauty, with lighter skin, delicate features, and light-colored hair being highly valued in many cultures (Mady et al., 2023). These standards are rooted in colonial histories and perpetuated by global media representations that continue to prioritize whiteness and Eurocentric beauty ideals. The emphasis on whiteness as a standard of beauty reinforces racial hierarchies, suggesting that lighter skin is more desirable and attractive, while darker skin is devalued (Krozer & Gómez, 2023; Parkes, 2023). This creates a global beauty hierarchy that privileges certain racial and ethnic groups while marginalizing others, further complicating the relationship between beauty and identity.

The beauty ideal, which prioritizes thinness, whiteness, and youth, places considerable pressure on women to conform (Zhang, 2024; Bhana & Basi, 2025). These beauty standards not only shape personal self-worth but also dictate social and professional opportunities. Women who conform to these ideals are often rewarded with increased social status, positive attention, and professional advantages, whereas those who do not are frequently subjected to criticism, exclusion, or invisibility. This dichotomy illustrates how beauty can function as a form of social currency, where attractiveness is exchanged for privileges that are otherwise inaccessible.

Extensive research has demonstrated that beauty standards and practices reinforce women's inferior status in society by implying that appearance is their most important quality. The societal emphasis on beauty diminishes the value of other attributes, such as intelligence, kindness, or competence, and perpetuates the belief that women exist primarily for the visual and emotional pleasure of men. Forbes et al. (2007) argue that beauty standards serve as tools of oppression, placing women in a subordinate position within a patriarchal society that values their looks over their substance. The oppressive nature of these standards is evident in the ways they shape women's lives, from daily grooming routines to life-altering decisions such as plastic surgery. These practices reinforce the notion that women's bodies are public property, subject to constant evaluation and control by societal norms.

In conclusion, beauty ideals are not static; they evolve over time but continue to exert significant influence over women's lives. The persistent focus on unattainable beauty standards, coupled with the time and emotional investment required to meet these ideals, highlights the ongoing pressures that women face in relation to their appearance. These standards not only shape women's self-perception but also reinforce broader societal hierarchies related to gender, race, and class. By understanding the historical and cultural roots of beauty ideals, we can better appreciate the ways in which they continue to shape women's identities and opportunities in contemporary society.

### **Intersectionality**

Intersectionality is a critical theoretical framework that highlights how overlapping social identities, such as race, gender, class, and appearance, interact to create unique experiences of privilege and oppression (Simon et al., 2022). It sheds light on how these interconnected identities shape an individual's position within society, impacting their access to resources, opportunities, and the way they are treated. Intersectionality is especially useful in understanding how beauty privilege operates, as it considers how different forms of privilege and discrimination intersect to create distinct societal experiences. In the context of *"Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs"*, intersectionality allows for a deeper analysis of how Snow White's beauty functions as a form of privilege, giving her advantages that others in her position might not receive if they did not meet society's beauty ideals.

Suyemoto et al. (2022) define privilege as the unearned benefits or advantages bestowed upon individuals based on specific characteristics, such as race, class, gender, or

physical appearance. Within this framework, beauty or attractiveness privilege refers to the societal rewards and advantages given to individuals whose appearance aligns with cultural or societal beauty standards. As Li and Zhang (2021) explain, attractiveness privilege is a powerful form of social capital. It provides individuals with unearned advantages that can significantly influence their personal and professional lives. Those who meet these beauty ideals are more likely to be perceived positively, receive preferential treatment, and access opportunities that might not be available to those deemed less attractive.

Research consistently demonstrates that attractiveness plays a central role in social dynamics. Numerous studies reveal that attractive individuals are perceived more favorably and treated more kindly than their less attractive counterparts (Dion, 2022; Tu et al., 2022; Hofmann, 2024; Walter et al., 2025). This phenomenon is not limited to superficial interactions but extends to various aspects of life, including employment, education, and romantic relationships. Despite widespread claims that internal traits such as kindness, intelligence, or character should hold more weight, societal treatment remains disproportionately influenced by physical appearance (Chaiken, 2022). These findings illustrate the pervasive nature of beauty privilege, where attractive individuals, particularly women, enjoy more positive attention, greater social rewards, and preferential treatment across different spheres of life (Maestripieri et al., 2017).

One significant area where beauty privilege manifests is in romantic relationships. Research suggests that physical attractiveness is often a determining factor in romantic interest, particularly for women. Men, in particular, tend to prioritize physical appearance when selecting romantic partners, often associating attractiveness with traits like health and fertility (Yarosh, 2019; Lassek & Gaulin, 2019). This results in attractive women receiving more opportunities for dating, relationships, and even marriage compared to those who do not meet the same standards of beauty. This dynamic underscores how beauty privilege intersects with gender roles and expectations, further influencing the social experiences of women in romantic contexts.

However, intersectionality also reveals that beauty privilege is not a straightforward advantage. It interacts with other social identities and can lead to complex and sometimes contradictory experiences. For instance, while attractive individuals may benefit from certain privileges, they may also face discrimination or be perceived as less competent in professional environments where physical appearance is not considered relevant. Wexler (2017) points out that attractive women are often stereotyped as lacking the skills or intelligence needed for certain types of work, particularly in male-dominated fields. This highlights the complexity of beauty privilege, where attractiveness can be both an asset and a liability depending on the context. The intersectionality framework helps to unravel these nuances, showing that beauty privilege does not operate in isolation but is mediated by factors such as gender, occupation, and societal expectations.

Additionally, intersectionality helps us consider how privilege and oppression intersect to shape an individual's lived experience. In the case of beauty privilege, attractive women may experience advantages in areas such as social interactions and romantic relationships, yet still face other forms of discrimination based on their gender, race, or class. This intersection of privilege and oppression is crucial for understanding how beauty privilege operates within the broader societal framework. Attractive women, for example, may be perceived as more desirable in some contexts but may face objectification or be seen as less competent in others. Intersectionality allows for a more comprehensive understanding of how these layers of privilege and discrimination overlap, creating unique societal experiences for individuals (Simon et al., 2022).

Intersectionality provides a powerful lens through which to analyze beauty privilege, illustrating how different social identities intersect to create distinct experiences. Beauty

privilege offers unearned benefits to those who meet societal beauty standards, leading to more positive perceptions and preferential treatment in social, professional, and romantic contexts. However, the advantages of beauty privilege are not universally applied, as they intersect with other social identities, such as gender and occupation, to produce more complex outcomes. Understanding beauty privilege through the lens of intersectionality enables a deeper appreciation of its nuanced effects and highlights the importance of considering multiple dimensions of identity when analyzing societal privilege and oppression.

## RESEARCH METHODS

### Research Design

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research design, focusing on the exploration and interpretation of cultural and literary themes. Qualitative research involves empirical inquiry in which the data are not in numerical form but are derived from observation, experience, or textual analysis (Adedoyin, 2020; Muzari et al., 2022). This approach is appropriate for examining how beauty standards and beauty privilege are portrayed in the story *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*.

### Data Sources

The primary data source for this study is the narrative of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, with a focus on the Brothers Grimm version. In addition to the primary text, secondary data were gathered from academic journals, critical essays, and scholarly literature relevant to feminist literary criticism and the concept of beauty standards.

### Data Collection Techniques

The data collection process involved the following steps:

1. Close Reading: The researcher conducted multiple readings of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* to thoroughly understand the story and identify recurring themes.
2. Note-Taking and Annotation: Important passages related to beauty, gender expectations, and privilege were highlighted and annotated for analysis.
3. Documentary Review: Secondary sources such as peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and online scholarly publications were reviewed to provide theoretical support and enrich the analysis.

### Data Analysis Procedures

The analysis was carried out using thematic content analysis guided by feminist literary criticism. The process involved:

1. Theme Identification: The researcher extracted themes related to beauty standards and privilege from the primary text.
2. Interpretative Analysis: Selected excerpts were analyzed to explore how beauty is constructed, valued, or contested within the narrative.
3. Feminist Framework Application: Through the lens of feminist literary criticism, the analysis examined how gendered expectations are embedded in the story and how these reflect broader societal views.
4. Conclusion Drawing: Insights were synthesized to draw conclusions about the portrayal of beauty and its implications for understanding gender roles in cultural narratives.

This analytical approach allows for a deep and critical understanding of how beauty operates as a social and literary construct within *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*.

## FINDINGS

### Portrayal of Beauty Standards in Snow-White's Characterization

The portrayal of beauty standards in "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs" is a central theme that the author introduces from the very beginning of the story. Snow White's beauty is

emphasized as her defining characteristic through a discursive method, as illustrated in the quotation:

*"Now, Snow-white was growing prettier and prettier, and when she was seven years old, she was as beautiful as day, far more so than the Queen herself."*

Table 1. Portrayal of Beauty Standards in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*

No.	Excerpt	Description of Beauty Standard
1	"Now, Snow-white was growing prettier and prettier, and when she was seven years old, she was as beautiful as day, far more so than the Queen herself."	Establishes Snow White's beauty as surpassing the Queen's; beauty is central to her identity.
2	"Queen, you are full fair, 'tis true, But Snow-white fairer is than you."	Beauty is ranked and validated through an objective source (the mirror).
3	"And as she was so lovely, the huntsman had pity on her, ..."	Beauty invokes mercy and pity.
4	"O goodness! O gracious!" cried they, "what beautiful child is this?"	Beauty elicits positive responses from strangers.
5	"He saw on the mountain the coffin, and beautiful Snow-white within it ..."	Beauty persists as Snow White's defining feature even in death.
6	"...with a skin as white as snow, lips as red as blood, and hair as black as ebony..."	Aligns Snow White's beauty with Western ideals of fair skin and youthful appearance.

This quote establishes that Snow White's beauty surpasses that of her stepmother, the Queen, setting up the central conflict of the narrative. The emphasis on Snow White's appearance is consistent throughout the story and reinforced by other characters through character-to-character interactions. For instance, the magic mirror asserts:

*"Queen, you are full fair, 'tis true, But Snow-white fairer is than you."*

Furthermore, the Huntsman, initially tasked with killing Snow White, finds himself unable to complete the deed due to her beauty:

*"And as she was so lovely, the huntsman had pity on her, ..."*

The seven dwarfs also express their amazement at Snow White's beauty upon first seeing her:

*"O goodness! O gracious!" cried they, "what beautiful child is this?"*

Even the Prince, upon discovering Snow White in her coffin, is struck by her beauty:

*"He saw on the mountain the coffin, and beautiful Snow-white within it ..."*

These quotations collectively demonstrate that Snow White's beauty is a universally recognized and agreed-upon trait within the story. This aligns with the concept that certain physical characteristics are widely perceived as beautiful, transcending subjective opinions. The portrayal of Snow White's character aligns perfectly with the Western ideal of beauty, as outlined in beauty ideals theory.

Specifically, the author describes Snow White's appearance in the following manner:

*"... with a skin as white as snow, lips as red as blood, and hair as black as ebony, and she was named Snow-white."*

This description highlights Snow White's fair skin, a characteristic often associated with beauty in Western cultures. Her youth also plays a crucial role in her portrayal as a beautiful figure. At seven years old, Snow White embodies the association between beauty, youth, health, and fertility. This contrast between her and the Queen, who is older, underscores the idea that youth is a vital component of beauty.

Moreover, the Queen's envy and subsequent actions are driven by the recognition of Snow White's superior beauty. Despite the Queen's own acknowledged beauty, the magic mirror's declaration that Snow White is fairer ignites the Queen's jealousy and sets the plot in motion. This highlights the societal pressure on women to maintain youthful beauty and the

perceived threat posed by younger, more attractive women. Snow White's characterization in the story vividly illustrates the Western beauty standards of fair skin and youthfulness. Her beauty is not only her most defining trait but also the catalyst for the story's conflict, reflecting societal ideals and the value placed on physical appearance.

### Portrayal of Beauty Privilege in Snow-White's Characterization

Table 2. Portrayal of Beauty Privilege in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*

No.	Excerpt	Instance of Privilege Gained Due to Beauty
1	“...she began to weep... ‘Oh, dear huntsman, do not take my life’ ... And as she was so lovely, the huntsman pitied her...”	Her beauty saves her life.
2	“O goodness! O gracious!” cried they, “what beautiful child is this?”	Her appearance leads to immediate acceptance by the dwarfs.
3	“...I cannot live without looking upon Snow White... you shall be my bride.”	The Prince proposes solely based on her physical beauty.

Snow White, as the embodiment of ideal beauty in the tale, receives numerous privileges due to her appearance, a concept known as beauty privilege. This phenomenon is first evident when the Huntsman is ordered to kill Snow White. Initially, he is prepared to carry out the Queen's command without hesitation. However, upon witnessing Snow White's beauty and her tearful plea, he experiences a change of heart. The author describes this moment as follows:

*“The huntsman consented, and led her away; but when he drew his cutlass to pierce Snow White’s innocent heart, she began to weep, and to say, ‘Oh, dear huntsman, do not take my life; I will go away into the wild wood, and never come home again.’ And as she was so lovely, the huntsman pitied her, and said, ‘Away with you then, poor child.’”*

This quotation illustrates that the Huntsman's pity is directly linked to Snow White's beauty. Intersectionality theory supports this observation, suggesting that individuals with attractive physical appearances are often treated more favorably. If Snow White were not as beautiful, the Huntsman might have carried out his orders despite her pleas.

Snow White's beauty also affords her privilege when she encounters the seven dwarfs. Upon discovering her in their house, the dwarfs are initially shocked by the presence of a stranger. However, their reaction is overwhelmingly positive due to her appearance:

*“O goodness! O gracious!” cried they, “what beautiful child is this? And were so full of joy to see her that they did not wake her, but let her sleep on.”*

Despite being strangers, the dwarfs' immediate joy and decision to let her sleep undisturbed are solely based on her beauty. This reaction aligns with intersectionality theory, which posits that attractive individuals are often perceived as having positive traits, making others more inclined to help them. Had Snow White not been so lovely, the dwarfs might have reacted with anger or suspicion and driven her away.

At the end of the story, Snow White's beauty once again grants her privilege when the King's son discovers her in the coffin. He is instantly captivated by her appearance, leading to the following interaction:

*“He saw on the mountain the coffin, and beautiful Snow-White within it, and read what was written in golden upon it. Then he said to the dwarfs, ‘Let me have the coffin, and I will give you whatever you like to ask for it.’ But the dwarfs told him that they could not part with it for all the gold in the world. But he said, ‘I beseech you to give it me, for I cannot live without looking upon Snow White; if you consent, I will bring you to great honor, and care for you as if you were my brethren.’”*

*“I would rather have you than anything in the world; come with me to my father’s castle, and you shall be my bride.”*

These quotations reveal the extent of the Prince's fascination with Snow White's beauty. He offers anything the Dwarfs desire in exchange for her coffin and subsequently proposes marriage without ever having known her. This behavior exemplifies how physical attractiveness can grant individuals significant opportunities and privileges, such as immediate romantic interest and marriage proposals. The Prince's actions underscore the concept of beauty privilege, highlighting how Snow White's appearance allows her to secure favorable treatment and relationships effortlessly.

In summary, the tale of Snow White illustrates the concept of beauty privilege through the character's interactions with others. Her beauty spares her life, gains her immediate acceptance and care from strangers, and secures her a marriage proposal from a prince. These instances reflect societal tendencies to favor and bestow privileges upon those who meet ideal beauty standards.

## DISCUSSIONS

### Beauty Ideals and the Feminine Identity

As Scott (1997) argues, beauty ideals often require modification of natural appearance, which is reflected in Snow White's depiction as the epitome of the idealized feminine figure. Snow White's "skin as white as snow, lips as red as blood, and hair as black as ebony" are hyperbolic representations of beauty ideals, which are far from naturally attainable for most women. Her portrayal serves as a reflection of the unattainable beauty standards identified by Scott—standards that not only emphasize youth and fairness but also require significant emotional investment, as seen in the Queen's obsession with the magic mirror. The Queen's envy and ultimate downfall represent the societal judgment that Scott highlights, where women are constantly evaluated based on their adherence to these beauty norms.

Hiatt's (1978) description of the feminine style as emotional, illogical, and sentimental can also be linked to the characterization of both Snow White and the Queen. Snow White's passive acceptance of her fate, relying on her beauty to be rescued by external figures like the Huntsman and the Prince, reflects the sentimental and emotional depiction of women in traditional narratives. Her beauty becomes the primary means through which she is valued, in alignment with the feminine style of beauty described by Hiatt.

### The Role of Intersectionality and Beauty Privilege

Yonce's (2014) concept of attractiveness privilege is central to understanding the social dynamics within *Snow White*. Snow White benefits from unearned privileges based on her appearance, which aligns with societal beauty standards. The Queen, despite her own beauty, experiences oppression once Snow White is declared "fairer" by the magic mirror. This reflects Suyemoto et al.'s (2022) view of privilege as a system of unearned benefits tied to certain characteristics, such as physical attractiveness. Snow White's privileged status, conferred by her beauty, manifests through the admiration she receives from the dwarfs, the mercy shown by the Huntsman, and the love she inspires in the Prince, even while in her death-like slumber.

Intersectionality offers a framework to analyze how Snow White's beauty intersects with other social factors, such as age and power. The Queen's descent into jealousy highlights the intersection of aging and beauty standards. While Snow White's youth is tied to ideals of health and fertility, as noted by Lassek and Gaulin (2019), the Queen's aging appearance places her in a disadvantaged position, leading her to resort to drastic measures to reclaim her former status. This dynamic is reflective of the larger societal narrative where youth is equated with desirability, and older women are marginalized or deemed less valuable (Åberg et al., 2020; Cecil et al., 2022).

### Beauty as a Catalyst for Judgment and Conflict

The constant judgment faced by women, as described by Scott (1997), is clearly evident in the Queen's relationship with the magic mirror. The mirror functions as a societal judge,

enforcing unrealistic beauty standards that place Snow White in a position of superiority over the Queen. The Queen's relentless pursuit of Snow White is fueled by societal expectations of beauty, which demand that she maintain her position as "the fairest in the land" at all costs. This is reflective of the broader social pressures women face to adhere to beauty standards, and the negative mental health outcomes identified by Meriono et al., (2024), such as anxiety and depression, which can result from this unrelenting scrutiny.

Additionally, as Forbes et al. (2007) argue, beauty standards reinforce women's inferior societal status, suggesting that their appearance is their most important asset. In *Snow White*, this is portrayed through the Prince's actions—his attraction to Snow White is based entirely on her physical appearance. Her passive role in the story, coupled with the fact that her beauty leads to her "rescue" and eventual marriage, reinforces the message that women are valued for their looks rather than their inner qualities, a theme central to Forbes' analysis of beauty practices as a form of female oppression.

### **The Unattainable Nature of Beauty**

The unattainability of beauty standards, another theme highlighted by Scott (1997), is illustrated through the contrasting portrayals of Snow White and the Queen. While Snow White represents the ideal, the Queen's failure to maintain her status as the fairest reveals the fleeting nature of beauty. This serves as a commentary on how beauty is often an elusive goal, constantly out of reach for most women. As Scott notes, this unattainability leads to significant time and emotional investment, as seen in the Queen's obsessive need to restore her beauty through magical means. The Queen's eventual transformation into the old crone symbolizes the destructive consequences of this endless pursuit.

### **Beauty Privilege and Intersectionality in Snow White's Relationships**

The incident with the Huntsman offers a clear manifestation of beauty privilege. As described in the tale, the Huntsman, tasked with killing Snow White, hesitates and ultimately spares her life solely due to her beauty. The quotation, "as she was so lovely, the huntsman pitied her," reveals that her physical appearance alters his initial intentions. This reflects Yonce's (2014) concept of attractiveness privilege, where individuals receive unearned benefits based on their alignment with societal beauty standards. Snow White's beauty, in this case, supersedes the moral or ethical considerations of the Huntsman's task.

In a feminist analysis, this moment exemplifies the reduction of women's worth to their physical appearance, which is consistent with Scott's (1997) argument that beauty is "paramount among women's qualities" in patriarchal societies. Snow White's beauty becomes a form of currency that saves her life, reinforcing the idea that a woman's primary source of power or influence is her physical appearance rather than her intellect or actions. The fact that the Huntsman responds to her beauty rather than her plea for mercy highlights the objectification of women, where their value is tied to their external features rather than their humanity. Feminist criticism would view this scene as a reinforcement of patriarchal norms, where women are passive subjects whose fate is determined by their physical allure.

Moreover, intersectionality theory (Simon et al., 2022) helps us understand that beauty, as a social privilege, intersects with other identity markers such as class, age, and social status. Snow White's youth and innocence, combined with her beauty, make her a more sympathetic figure, thereby earning her the Huntsman's compassion. Had she been older or less conventionally attractive, the story might have played out differently, emphasizing how privilege operates in layers and is not merely based on beauty alone. This intersection of youth and beauty aligns with Lassek and Gaulin's (2019) assertion that youth is associated with fertility and health, making Snow White's attractiveness a symbol of vitality and desirability, which earns her protection.

### **Beauty as a Social Advantage: Snow White's Reception by the Dwarfs**

When Snow White encounters the seven dwarfs, her beauty once again grants her immediate acceptance. The dwarfs' reaction, "What beautiful child is this?" demonstrates how her physical appearance causes them to view her favorably, even as a stranger. This mirrors Maestripieri et al.'s (2017) findings that attractive individuals are perceived more positively and treated with greater kindness and generosity. The dwarfs' decision to allow her to stay and sleep uninterrupted reflects this phenomenon, suggesting that had Snow White not been beautiful, their reaction might have been far less hospitable.

This part of the story also reflects the feminist critique of beauty standards, which argues that women are often reduced to their physical appearance, with little regard for their inner qualities. The dwarfs do not inquire about Snow White's character, background, or motivations, but instead, their actions are immediately driven by her appearance. Forbes et al. (2007) argue that beauty standards serve as a vehicle for the oppression of women, emphasizing that their value lies in their appearance rather than their agency or capabilities. Snow White's beauty ensures her survival and comfort, further reinforcing the notion that a woman's beauty, rather than her skills or intelligence, is what earns her acceptance in a male-dominated world.

Additionally, this scenario highlights the power dynamics at play between Snow White and the dwarfs. Snow White's beauty, as a form of privilege, allows her to enter and remain in their home without question. The dwarfs, though small in stature and considered outside the norms of conventional masculinity, still exhibit patriarchal behavior by objectifying Snow White based on her appearance. This dynamic reflects the societal norms where even those who are marginalized in one way (such as the dwarfs' physical stature) still engage in the objectification of women. From a feminist literary perspective, this underscores how patriarchal systems of beauty standards are ingrained across different social strata.

### **Beauty as Power: The Prince and Snow White's Marriage**

The final and perhaps most striking example of beauty privilege occurs when the Prince, upon seeing Snow White in her glass coffin, immediately desires her as his bride. His offer to the dwarfs, "I cannot live without looking upon Snow White," reflects a superficial attraction based entirely on her physical appearance. Without knowing anything about her as a person, the Prince is captivated solely by her beauty, which prompts him to offer the dwarfs anything they desire in exchange for her body.

This moment reinforces the patriarchal narrative that a woman's worth is tied to her appearance and that beauty can secure love, marriage, and status without any need for mutual understanding or deeper emotional connection. Feminist critics would argue that this portrayal reduces Snow White to an object of desire, with her beauty functioning as a passive asset that secures her future rather than her actions or personality. Her beauty is commodified in this transaction, where the Prince is willing to trade wealth and honor to possess her. This reinforces the traditional gender roles in fairy tales, where women are passive and valued for their looks, while men are the active agents who seek to acquire beautiful women.

Forbes et al. (2007) assert that beauty practices reinforce women's subordinate status, and in Snow White's case, her beauty does not grant her autonomy or agency—it merely grants her the privilege of being desired and protected by men. The Prince's desire to marry Snow White without any interaction prior to seeing her speaks to the deep-seated societal belief that physical attractiveness is enough to warrant love and lifelong commitment, reducing women to mere objects of beauty.

### **Feminist Critique and the Limitations of Beauty Privilege**

While Snow White benefits from beauty privilege, a feminist critique would argue that this privilege is ultimately limiting and serves to oppress women within the boundaries of patriarchal society. Scott (1997) notes that beauty standards are unattainable for most women and require constant maintenance and emotional investment. Snow White's beauty secures her

privileges but also renders her powerless in many aspects of her life. Her beauty becomes the basis for others' actions, reducing her agency and ability to shape her own destiny. As the literature review highlights, beauty standards often lead to judgment, competition, and objectification, which are evident in the rivalry between Snow White and the Queen, where the Queen's jealousy stems from society's relentless valuation of youthful beauty over age.

Furthermore, Snow White's passive role in the story reflects Hiatt's (1978) observation that feminine beauty is often associated with emotional, illogical, and sentimental traits. Snow White does little to assert her own power or autonomy; her beauty passively grants her privileges, but it also confines her to the role of an object to be admired, protected, and possessed. This dynamic reinforces the patriarchal notion that women's value lies in their physical appearance, ultimately limiting their capacity for agency and empowerment.

## CONCLUSION

The analysis of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* through feminist literary criticism and qualitative textual analysis reveals how deeply entrenched beauty standards are within cultural narratives. Snow White's character exemplifies the Western ideal of feminine beauty—fair skin, youth, and gentleness, which becomes the basis for her worth and shapes her interactions with other characters. Her beauty spares her life, gains her sympathy and admiration, and ultimately leads to her marriage, illustrating how physical attractiveness translates into unearned social advantages, a phenomenon known as beauty privilege. However, this same beauty also invites envy, objectification, and danger, particularly from the Queen, revealing the double-edged nature of such privilege.

This study contributes to feminist literary discourse by demonstrating how classic fairy tales reinforce patriarchal norms, where a woman's value is tied to her appearance rather than intellect, character, or agency. The use of intersectionality theory further highlights how gender and beauty intersect to shape social experiences, exposing structural biases that continue to influence modern gender dynamics.

However, this research is limited to a single text and focuses predominantly on gender and beauty without considering intersections with race, class, or sexuality. Future research could expand the analysis to include other fairy tales or contemporary adaptations to explore how beauty standards evolve across cultures and media. Comparative studies could also examine how non-Western narratives depict female protagonists and whether similar beauty-based privileges and constraints appear. Such studies would deepen the understanding of how literature shapes and reflects societal expectations of women across different contexts.

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