

What happened to the heroines in folktales?:

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An analysis by gender of a multicultural sample of published folktales collected from storytellers.

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## **What Happened to the Heroines in Folktales?: An Analysis by Gender of a Multicultural Sample of Published Folktales Collected from Storytellers**

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### Abstract

Using grammatically defined units and a random selection of 1,601 folktales, this article analyzes the gender of protagonists of published folktales as related to the gender of editors, collectors, and storytellers. The differential representation of female folktales is statistically quantified. Independently reproducible results uphold mainstream feminist objections to supposedly impartial analyses of folk and fairy tales and indicate that structuralist analyses that have not taken gender into account in the compilation of their data

KATHLEEN RAGAN

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Although the gender/sex question has diminished in importance in fields such as women's studies, folk and fairy-tale studies, and folklore (Boyd, "Jane" 1), this question remains prominent in fields such as sociobiology, evolutionary psychology, and the emerging field of literary Darwinism. Gender first emerged as a significant issue in the study of folk and fairy tales in light of the women's movement of the 1960s and 1970s (e.g., Bottigheimer, *Grimms'*; Lundell; Stone, "Things Walt Disney," "Misuses"; Tatar, *Hard Facts, Off, Zipes, Don't Bet*). Scholars analyzed common Western fairy tales and criticized the image of the passive, somnolent beauty (e.g., Bottigheimer, "Silent Women"; Kolben-schlag); the focus on self-sacrifice, marriage, and the helpless woman (Rowe); and the connection of women's power and action with evil and ugliness (Lieberman 197).

Torborg Lundell mounted a formidable challenge to the Aarne-Thompson tale-type index, the structuralist, dominant classification scheme used in the study of folk and fairy tales. Lundell offered many examples of how the Aarne-Thompson index places both male and female protagonists under male headings, ignores female activity, focuses on male activity at the expense of females, portrays females as passive, and uses different standards to evaluate male and female behavior. "That there is urgent need for revision of these research tools

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