

Defining beauty through lucy grealy's autobiography of a face

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The Oxford Dictionary defines beauty as “ a combination of qualities, such as shape, color, or form , that pleases the aesthetic senses, especially the sight” (“ beauty”). In “ Autobiography of a Face,” Lucy Grealy expands this definition by exploring her own interpretation of beauty throughout the various stages of her life. As she examines life before her diagnosis, she mentions little about beauty as a factor in her development. She was a “ tomboy par excellence”, more concerned with play than lusting after David Cassidy (15).

While Grealy is subjected to extensive surgeries and chemotherapy she continues to be unconcerned with appearances, though she was “ still keeping myself ignorant of the details of my appearance, of the specific logic of it ”(104). She was aware of her looks from the taunts and teases of classmates, but remained intentionally unable to judge herself with the harsh eyes of post-pubescence. It wasn't until Grealy experienced her first Halloween that she realized just what an impact her association of beauty had on her.

Under the concealment of her Eskimo costume, she realized “ just how meek I'd become, how self-conscious I was about my face until now that it was obscured (120). ” As time goes on, other people seem to compensate for Grealy's lack of concern with her odd appearance. Her mother purchases turtlenecks in an effort to alleviate attention from the scar. As puberty reached her peers, she accepted that she “ would never have a boyfriend, that no one would ever be interested in me in that way (159). Grealy accepted ideal of beauty, throughout her adolescence, concerns only the

opposite of what appearance she could hope to achieve. This is a feeling that can be echoed through the hallways of every high school across America, but strikes particular chord in Grealy's psyche. It is not until reaching college that she feels fully comfortable in her outward appearance. Sarah Lawrence was a campus where the students were wrapped up in asserting their own individuality and bizarre aesthetic, and Grealy thrived in this environment.

Grealy's personal definition of beauty cemented itself in individuality, as she grew unconcerned with the frivolous nature of the physical aspect of it. She concludes this beautifully by writing that society "tells us again and again that we can most be ourselves by acting and looking like someone else, only to leave our original faces behind to turn into ghosts that will inevitably resent and haunt us. (222)" Word count: 414 Works Cited: Grealy, Lucy. *Autobiography of a Face*. New York: Perennial, 2003. Print. "Beauty." Def. 1. Oxford Dictionary. 2012. Web.