

"oate's" and "where
are you going, where
have you been?"
essay



The story "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been," by Joyce Carol Oates, is the story about a young girl's attempts who tries to get free from the surrounding and acts accordingly, drawing the attention of a dangerous man. The main character in the story, Connie, lives in a small town with her mother, father, and Connie's older sister. Although Connie is fifteen, she realizes that males find her attractive. She defines herself in opposition to her mother and sister, the former used to be beautiful, and the latter never was.

The unfortunate aspect of the story is that Connie plays up her attractiveness and plays the role that other people want her to have, the one of a beautiful girl. Using a feminist critique, we can see how Connie leads herself to her unfortunate fate by allowing to be unwittingly trapped in the patriarchal gender roles of society.

The photograph of Connie's mother where she was younger is a symbol of the emptiness that comes from defining oneself solely through one's looks. Connie's mom was a very attractive woman in her youth, but growing older, she lost those looks. When the mother sees the pictures of her daughter, she recognizes the beauty that she once had but lost. This is the major loss for the mother, since she apparently never learned to define herself in any other manner.

Once her looks were gone, there was nothing left of the woman. As such, she envies her own daughter's physical attractiveness and acts in a mean way towards Connie. Her mother, who noticed everything and knew everything and who hadn't much reason to look at her own face, is always scolding

Connie for it. ' Stop gawking at yourself. Who are you? You think you're so pretty?'. (Oates)

Since her mother is obviously jealous of her, Connie feels as though she is right in valuing her looks in the way she does. To Connie, physical attractiveness is so important that nothing else seems to matter, so she doesn't hold any regard for what other people might have to offer. Instead of listening to anything that her mother has to say, Connie feels as though she can simply dismiss anything that her mother might have to say to her, which is simply another way for a woman to keep herself trapped.

For example, she can hardly believe that the woman in the pictures is really her mother: Her mother was pretty too, if one could believe those old snapshots in the album, but now her looks were gone and that is why she has always been after Connie. For Connie, being beautiful is simple, the state which you are to inherit, and like all young and immature people, she doesn't have any idea how easily it can be lost, whether slowly over time like her mother did, or having it suddenly and violently ripped away from her.

The thing that she ran away with a boy foolishly led Connie to believe that she matured further than her older sister and anyone else in her own age group. It appears to almost be a game for her, but when she finally realized what the price of her desires were, it was too late.

Being only fifteen, Connie has yet to realize that she has defined herself by the way other people view her, which is through her looks only. She has become trapped in her own assets, and this stunts her growth as a whole person. While she views herself as using these tools to her advantage, in <https://assignbuster.com/oates-and-where-are-you-going-where-have-you-been-essay/>

reality she is doing nothing but harming herself and her ability to survive in life.

While at times Connie gets excited and enjoys the attention that she receives, she quickly realizes how terrifying unwanted attention of this kind from the wrong person can be. When Arnold Friend tells her that he was "Gonna get you, baby," she quickly realizes that not only she is trapped, but she has been trapped all that time by allowing herself to be defined in such a manner. What Arnold does is to treat her as a mere physical attribute, thus, neglecting her personality.

He thinks he has the right to do the horrible things with her: Arnold Friend stabs her with words again and again with no regret. After that she becomes withdrawn from the rest of the world. Once it happens to her, she no longer has any forces to struggle, live and survive. We can see Connie's unequivocal surrendering and resignation when she allows people to treat her as an object but not a person, that is something that she has been allowing to do to herself all those years unconsciously.

At the end of the story, she has completely broken away from herself and any sense of self-identity; she views the events as though they are happening to somebody else and not to her: " She put out her hand against the screen. She watched herself push the door slowly open as if she were back safe somewhere in the other doorway, watching this body and this head of long hair moving out into the sunlight where Arnold Friend waited." (Oates)

The story does not have a clear ending, we see Connie fully losing herself and becoming fully trapped within this patriarchal system represented by the terrible and dangerous Arnold Friend. This main aspect of Connie completely breaking away from herself and surrendering herself and her sense of identity is what we need to realize from this story which shows the readers the dangers that women face in a prison of patriarchy.

Oates, Joyce Carol, " Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?" Epoch, Fall 1996, <https://celestialtimepiece.com/2015/01/21/where-are-you-going-where-have-you-been/>

You Aren't Going Anywhere: A Feminist Critique of Joyce Carol Oates