Unique Flaws

Why can’t society accept that people are not all alike? “Birthmark” by Miranda July is a short story about a lady who wants to change her appearance because of a slight imperfection across her face. She has a birthmark and wants to get it removed to satisfy those around her. Society creates a perfect mold that people should strive to become; however, there will always be obstacles that keep people from reaching their idea of perfection. Every person is unique. We each have different skills and/or traits about ourselves that make us who we are. TV Stars, magazine covers, weight loss commercials, fast food restaurants having healthy foods, and other forms of “life changing opportunities” are becoming more available to our generation. These businesses make the mold for the ideal person, and we alter who we are to become something they’ve created.

“Birthmark” was written in 2003 by Miranda July. This story explains the emotional attachment the lady in the story has towards her birthmark. She was given the opportunity to have her birthmark removed; however, afterwards, she didn’t get the satisfaction she wanted. “Now began the part of her life where she was very beautiful. Except for nothing,” stated the narrator from the story, “And she felt a sense of loss. Even though she knew she had never had an accent” (July 2012). Before she got her birthmark removed, anytime she encountered someone, they always gave her strange looks or asked her what she had on her face. After she received the surgery to get her birthmark removed, the people around her still found something
wrong with her or thought she had lost something about herself. In today’s society, people want to achieve perfection in appearance, money, weight, and other aspects of life that will ultimately please others around us. It is human nature to want to make others happy, but is the media pushing their idea of perfection too far?

The lady in “Birthmark” wanted to be flawless. She wanted to change herself and didn’t care about the lengths she had to go to do it. Some people might say she was determined; however, her determination was motivated by negativity. In the story, “She didn’t think she would have bothered if she hadn’t been what people call ‘very beautiful except for’” (July 2008). The people around her constantly reminded her of the red flaw across her face. All of their questions and funny looks pushed her to remove the one unique difference about herself that no one else could ever copy. Magazines and tabloids encourage readers to be skinny and become the perfect mold that they’ve created. In US Magazine, Jillian Michaels stated, “My taste has changed, I prefer the curvaceous figure now.” The article states that she made this statement after Suze Orman’s wife told her that she was chubby (Corneau 2012). In today’s society, we want to please people, and we don’t care what we have to do to do it. Jillian Michaels is a trainer on the show The Biggest Loser, but yet she likes the curvaceous figure. Some might believe that she only likes the curvaceous figure now, because she has a curvaceous figure. Others might believe she likes the type of figure because she has accepted that she cannot change everyone. The lady in the birthmark thought that the people around her constantly judged her appearance and she wasn’t meeting her full potential, according to their standards, because of her birthmark. She never took the time to stop and realize that no one is flawless. She was beautiful with the birthmark, and she wasn’t complete without it.
“You can achieve the unachievable.” That’s the famous motivational quote from Achieve Medical Weight Loss. We not only want to alter our appearance to please others, but we also want to alter the size of clothes we wear. In the story, after her surgery, “She was a very beautiful person who was missing something very ugly. Her winnings were the absence of something, and this quality hung around her” (July 2012). If we could achieve the unachievable, then we wouldn’t have anything to strive for. Even if we achieved what we wanted, we would still strive for something higher than our original goal. People get involved in weight loss programs, become hooked on weight loss drugs, and, at the end, they’re never fully satisfied with their weight loss. All in all, people try to accomplish a set goal, accomplish the goal, and then are still unsatisfied. When people become unsatisfied, they then strive for a more difficult goal, and again seem unsatisfied. In the story, she got what she wanted and then she felt like she was missing something.

Society creates an ideal person that they believe people should strive to become; however, there are many hardships that people encounter that society doesn’t consider. Children are born without knowing the right way to live their life. Parents and friends teach children right and wrong by what society considers right and wrong. If society says, “Children should know that the only way to get a job is to have a college degree,” many parents will then push their children to go to school and graduate with some kind of degree. Society encourages people to conform to what they believe is accepted through media and other social connections. If you stand in line at Wal-Mart or you watch commercial ads on TV, you come in contact with society’s forms of encouragement to lose weight, eat healthy, or change something about yourself. The opportunities to change your appearance, weight, and other features have become more acceptable and easier to achieve in recent years. Being perfect is a challenge, but the real
test is being true to yourself. That is what the main character in the “Birthmark” learns because she changed herself to please others, but never asked herself what she wanted. In the end, she realized that she was perfect the way she was and she was herself with the birthmark. We shouldn’t let people decide what we need to do or what we need to look like. If we are happy, then the people around us should be happy for us. Ultimately, you are the one dealing with yourself forever. You will only encounter the people around you for as long as you want to encounter them.
Works Cited
