Dress & Appearance Analysis: Beautiful Boy

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 Gender, Dress and Society
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Such movies through the years can depict the current state of a generation and resemble what many young adults are going through now. The movie Beautiful Boy directed by Felix Van Groningen and written by Luke Davies (Angelika Film Center, 2018), is about a boy and his strained relationship with his father due to his drug addiction. The movies based on the memoirs Beautiful Boy: A Father’s Journey Through his Sons by David Sheff and Tweak: Growing Up on Methamphetamines by Nic Sheff (Angelika Film Center, 2018). Nic Sheff is the main character in the movie that is played by the talented and Oscar nominated actor Timothée Chalamet. Steve Carell plays his father David Sheff. The movie shows the relationship between father and son and the obstacles a father goes through to save his son from an addiction. An emotional, heartbreaking, and realistic film depicts the roller coaster of emotions a person goes through when going through a drug addiction. In this paper, I will first talk about Nic’s role and the life of his character, then talk about the socio-culture influences that dress has on Nic’s character. How dress can convey what the character of Nic was going through at the time, and finally how the audience gets to see the character change just by analyzing the way he is dressed. As a reader, you will get to the importance of dress, roles and society.

 Nic Sheff is the son of David. He comes from a middle class family. His father is a freelance writer for Rolling Stones magazine. His parents David and Vicki are divorced and he alternates from living with his dad and his mother who lives in Los Angeles, California. His father has a wife named Karen and two kids a boy and a girl. In the beginning of the movie, David discovers that his son is missing. Two days later Nic reappears in their home and his father suspects that he is on drugs. Nic appears disheveled when he awakes from his sleep hours later. He notices that Nic is wearing the same clothes he had when he left, has a broken lip and has dark and tired eyes. David decided to take Nic to rehab. Progress is made and Nic convinces his father to let him live in a half-way house, where more free time is given outside of the facility. David gets a phone call some time later that Nic has not returned to the facility. David begins to search for Nic and finds him in the street all dirty and obviously on drugs. In this part of the movie, the audience gets to hear a music score of the song Territorial Pissing by Nirvana.

 Nirvana was a big grunge band in the 1990s that influenced many youths in that generation and future ones (Sclafani, 2011). There is a scene where we see Nic’s room that is full of posters and drawings all over the walls. One of the posters was from the band Nirvana. From looking at Nic’s style and dress, I can see that he is influence by Nirvana’s grungy style and that it is part of his aesthetic. The definition of dress is an assemblage of modifications of the body and/or supplements to the body (Eicher & Rich Higgins, 1992). In this movie, Nic’s character dresses very casual. He usually wears a T-shirt with a flannel or plaid button up shirt or a sweatshirt/hoodie, denim jeans and sneakers. He almost has shoulder length hair that is nicely groomed. Nic is a slim person, who is 6 feet tall and has green eyes. Through his difficulties battling his addiction we see his style or dress change. We also get to see his body physical change from a healthy young man to an almost diseased looking man.


*Figure 1*: Nic Sheff sitting outside of his college campus. Reprinted from Entertainment-Focus.com. (2018).

 Nic confesses to his father that he has been experimenting with different drugs for some time such as marijuana, cocaine, ecstasy, and most recent crystal meth. David then encourages Nic to go to college and pursue being a writer. When Nic was in college the audience sees an “under controlled” Nic. His appearance seems fresh and put together but still displays his artsy personality. He seemed happy and focused on his writing and he even meets a girl who becomes his girlfriend. He soon started to relapse when he takes pills from his girlfriend’s parents bathroom cabinet. He soon starts injecting crystal meth. The audience soon gets to see Nic’s social role as a Son, brother, college student, and writer deteriorating. His interest of drawing, poetry, surfing, biking and skating all come to halt due to his new interest in crystal meth. We also get to see a dark and disturbing side of Nic. In a scene, David goes into Nic’s room for answers. He was trying to understand why his son is a drug addict. He discovers Nic’s journal and starts to read only to discover disturbing imagery and entries. This causes the audience to see the intensity of his depression, emptiness and addiction.

 The audience starts to see there is an underlying reason why his addiction is so intense. The complexity of feelings is seen in a powerful scene when Nic meets up with his father David in the cafe they use to eat in ever since Nic was a little boy. In this scene, we see desperation and the toll the addiction is taking on Nic. His clothes look dirty and he is wearing many layers and has a backpack assuming that he is on the go. David is concerned with Nic seeing his condition. Nic is asking his father for some money but David refuses, as he knows he would only use it for drugs. He tells Nic that he just wants him to come home but Nic does not see that as an option. His frustration and desperation starts to grow as he pleading his dad for money. We then get to see that Nic feels claustrophobic at the hands of his dad and feels like his dad always wanting to control everything. David sees Nic as this perfect and extraordinary son and does not want to accept Nic for who he is. In the Movie, Nic emotional yells out “This is me Dad, this is who I am” (Beautiful Boy, 2018) as though wanting to tell his Dad that he is not this extraordinary kid, just a regular kid who is not perfect and makes mistakes. Nic wants acceptance from his father and wants his father to stop controlling him all the time. He believes his father is always manipulating him as he aggressively says, “You’re doing it right now!”(Beautiful Boy, 2018). In this scene, we get to see the a roller coaster of emotions that Nic is going through and how foolishly he thought it was going to go his way. We also see his role as the Son diminishing as David starts to see there no hope. Nic’s financial status has also changed coming from a middle class family, having two supporting parents and a supporting step Mom to now not having any support and being homeless.

 The audience gets to see a fresh start when Nic goes to Los Angeles to stay with his mother. He starts going to a rehabilitation center where he attends interventions and meetings. He also starts to work there. In this part of the movie we get to see Nic looking healthy, he is wearing a button up navy blue shirt with dark denim jeans and his hair is combed. His physical appearance is not of a drug addict but of a man with a bright outlook and positive attitude that shines through. He gives a beautiful speech in one of the meetings where he says that he “wants to make his family proud”. Nic even begins to be more active and starts doing things he likes. In one of the scenes he is biking with his rehab mentor, we get to his competitive and fun side. After a while, he goes to visit his dad and he starts engaging with his little brother and sister. They even try to go surfing, but Nic’s fresh start is short- lived when he drives to San Francisco and runs into Lauren an old friend who is a drug addict. He immediately starts to relapse again and they have a drug escapade. Since Nic is now homeless, again he breaks into his dad house to take valuables and then runs away, which is followed by a car chase by Karen.

 Nic’s life turns very dark, he runs off with Lauren and all they do his inject crystal meth. We get to see the severity of his addiction when Lauren almost has an overdose. Nic kept on using drugs though he saw his lover almost die. Nic’s physical appearance is getting worse and worse, he is losing weight, he has numerous lesions and bruises on his arms from injecting meth, his lips are cracked and bloody, his under eyes are dark and he looks dirty. Since Nic is homeless, he does not have many clothes. Throughout the movie, he wears the same old blue baggy jeans. Nic turns from a beautiful boy to a sad and frightening drug addict.

 Crystal meth can do horrible things to the body, not only inside but also outside. It can affect the person’s appearance. Meth mouth is a big indicator of a meth addict. Meth mouth typically involves the decaying of teeth, dry mouth, cracked lips and gums becoming infected leading to gum disease (Kessler, 2011). A meth addict can experience this in just a few years. This is a tragic sight to see not only for the addict but also for people around them. It takes away from their appearance and can cause people to judge them. Many people know what a meth mouth is this will cause society to shun them or treat them differently. According to American Addiction Center, meth can also cause extreme weight lost and can make the person look sick and very fragile (2018). These conditions were starting to be visible on Nic and could have greatly affected Nic appearance and self-image if his habits continued.

 Throughout the movie, we see scenes of David remembering Nic when he was a little boy. In those flashbacks, we get to see an innocent Nic who loves his father very much. As a teenager, we get to see Nic’s dress start to change. He wears baggy pants with black Dr. Marten lace up boots, and T-shirt. His dress is starting to resemble his personality and his mood. He is style is grungier which can be associated with his angst teenage self. This foreshadows what is to come for Nic to the audience but these flashbacks for David gives him a sense of clarification of where it went wrong. In my opinion, the reason that David has these flashbacks is because he wants to know what caused it and if he caused it. By the end of the movie, he becomes hopeless and soon starts accepting that his son is a drug addict. He finds out that it is a disease he cannot control. In the end of the movie, Nic overdoes but is miraculously saved by the doctors. David and his mother Vicki go visit him at the hospital. Nic is very fragile and can barely walk. David has to hold him up and help him to walk. The audience for the last time gets to see the condition of his addiction.

 In conclusion, Drug addiction is a debilitating disease that affects many young people. In the United States crystal, meth addiction is increasing among the ages of 18-25 (NIDA, 2013). According to the 2012 National Survey on Drug use and Health, approximately 1.2 million people have admitted to using meth in the past year (NIDA, 2013). Mental illness has also been increasing among this age group. 5 percent of men and nearly 10 percent of women are experiencing depression (Dulzen, Liu, 2008). Depression can sometimes lead people into using drugs. This movie does not only have to do with drug addiction but also mental illness. Nic feels empty inside and that is why he uses drugs, in order to feel alive. This film is very important to young adults because it gives us an insight of how drugs can affect a young person’s life. The drug crisis that we are seeing within this generation is growing in a high rate. Movies like this can open these groups of people’s lives. Nic at the end is saved and has been sober for 8 years. He wrote a book called Tweak: Growing up on Methamphetamines, which tells his journey and battle with his addiction (Kojder, 2018). In this paper, we get to see the up and down of his addiction and how this has affected and changed his appearance and dress. As a reader, you read on how socio- culture can influence personality and dress as well as indicators of social status. Nic’s character is a great depiction of what we see today in this generation. Addiction is not afraid to cross any boundaries; race, gender, age and ethnicity are no exception. This movie also speaks to us about an important topic that needs should be spoken more about, especially today.

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