

November 2011
Self-Image



aletheia

www.lhsaletheia.org

Mission

Aletheia, which means “truth” in Greek, is a student outreach publication that strives to provide a voice for all students at Lynbrook High School. Inspired by Los Gatos High’s *Reality Check* and Monta Vista’s *Verdadera*, *Aletheia* was created to facilitate communication and overcome stigmas concerning prevalent and taboo issues within the Lynbrook community. At the beginning of the school year, the staff designates a list of monthly topics pertaining to the realities of high school. Each issue of the publication comprises of firsthand experiences submitted anonymously by Lynbrook students and alumni, professional articles relating to that month’s theme, and resources compiled by the student staff. Finalized newsletters are published into a PDF format and emailed to Lynbrook families. Back issues can be found on our website, www.lhsaletheia.org, under Archives.

The content in *Aletheia* is composed by the students at Lynbrook High School in San Jose, California. Ideas and thoughts expressed within the publication are not necessarily reflected by the school administration or staff.

This is the second issue of *Aletheia* for the 2011-12 school year.

Submissions

All Lynbrook students and alumni are eligible to submit stories to *Aletheia*. We publish every submission that adheres to our guidelines, which may be found on the website. The *Aletheia* staff is committed to preserving the integrity of your submission and will not make any changes, with exception to certain profanity (which will be asterisked-out). We do not edit stories for grammar or syntax.

Our December topic is Religion; submissions are due by November 11. If you are interested in sharing your experiences, a submission box and a suggestion form for future topics are both available online.

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Self-image; its the focal point of the teenage world, (and admittedly, of mine too) and one of those things that you can never be too sure of. Most teenagers -unequivocally, most of them girls- are obsessed with their physical appearance. But when we consider self-image, we don't just admire our lovely features. Self-image is what we think of ourselves. This includes our personality, our judgments, our behavior, and our opinion of ourselves. Personally, I reflect on my image daily. Every time I do something embarrassing—did he/she get what I meant? I must have looked like a total dork. Was that too outspoken? Hmm. What if she liked that band? Why are they staring- wait a minute; did I forget to comb my hair today?

Doubts and insecurities. They're a package deal. I am not the most beautiful person on the planet. Period. In fact, ninety percent of people feel that way and are constantly looking for ways to improve their physical appearance. Is that right? Well, depends on the society you regularly mix with. Are your friends really that biased that they'll only accept you if you wear ten pounds of make-up and ripped jeans? Our physical appearance should not be a big deal—but it is. And that's usually what causes me to feel most insecure- maybe the reason that I'm friendless is because I don't look good.

Not that there aren't things I like about myself. I'm pretty good at not rhapsodizing about my personal opinions for fear of hurting people. I can listen to people when they talk to me and occasionally advise them. But I don't think I'm a great person. My personality is flawed. Duh. Who's isn't? But it's like a waking nightmare to know that there are things about me that other people might not like. I know that sometimes, I'm not so nice, and sometimes I mix up *Bones* and some other freaky TV show. Does that make me a bad person? Do other people think I don't belong because I'm not exactly like they are? What's the whole point of emphasizing that we're all different if people only make friends with you if you're exactly like them?

My behavior and my personality—its agonizing to go over them again and again. Sometimes I hate myself. Sometimes I feel pretty proud of myself. But despite mulling over it for all twelve of my waking hours, I don't know whether the changes I try to make in myself are right. I don't know what other people think about me—I only have my own opinions to regard. Problem is, what if it's wrong?

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Honestly, I don't care how people view me physically all that much. I used to care a lot a couple of years ago. But now, all I care about is my academic success. That disgusting feeling of failure—that's what I fear the most. Not how people judge me physically, but I guess how people judge me academically. Whether I measure up to their standards of competence is what keeps me occupied. I pride myself whenever I do something "successful." I feel like cr*p when I don't do as well as I think. I thrive off people thinking I'm better than them, that I'm more competent, that I'm smarter than them. That's so sick. Yet addicting.

"Always be a first-rate version of yourself, instead of a second-rate version of somebody else."

- Judy Garland

I care so much if people think I'm pretty—and when they say I am it just makes my day. Yeah, I'd say I'm attractive, but I want to be better than what others see me as. I want to believe I'm beautiful. So I make my personality unique—so every part of me is unique. I'm not just a pretty face, I'm better than that. I'm an exception. That's beauty to me, and that's me.

"Most of the shadows of this life are caused by standing in one's own sunlight."

- Ralph Waldo Emerson

I feel like people always whisper when I walk back. "Look at that fat girl! Look at Fat Girl waddle! Look!" It's probably just me being paranoid, right? Well, at one point, it wasn't. I've gotten over it. No, I take that back. I've forgiven the boy. Somehow. I don't know how. Though I still feel the pain he inflicted sometimes, I've forgiven that boy who used to call me names. Fata** was one of them. Manly b*tch was another. I was bullied for the way I look, the way I walk, the way I talk. Just thinking about those days makes me shudder... I cried everyday after school, in the girl's bathroom. And they'd follow me there, asking me why

I'm not going into the boy's bathroom, since I looked like one. And you know what? I feel stupid, but I succumbed to their wishes. I became bulimic. I puked after every meal. It was gross. I didn't even have to stick my finger down my throat. Just willed myself to. That's how much that stupid boy and his friends affected me. When bulimia made no difference, I tried anorexia. I would look in the mirror every morning and whisper to myself, "You're an ugly b*tch," because those retards had convinced me of being one. That's when my parents found out. They flipped out. I had to have a bunch of blood tests done, and go to counseling at my Sunday school. It was embarrassing. But also very helpful. On the first day, the woman helping me asked me a question that I'll never forget. "Say five nice things about yourself? Things that you're proud of? Things you like about your personality?" I couldn't reply. I couldn't think of a single thing. That's when my mother stepped in. She said that she loved that I was always kind, enthusiastic, studious, and honest. I guess, when my mom stepped in, it really got me thinking. I needed to start believing in myself. I needed to find something I was good at, a group of friends that kept me happy. I needed to change my life. And I did. I left my old friends, who belittled me every chance I got, and found a new friend who made me smile and feel special. She doesn't realize this, but she changed my life. Or maybe she realizes it, but is too nice to tell me. There are days when I look at my friends, who are all beautiful and amazing in every way possible, and wonder how I fit in. Why are they even friends with me? And yeah, we have our conflicts, like all friends do, but I guess as days go by, I find myself looking in the mirror and telling myself that I've got a lot of things going for me.

"The body is a house of many windows: there we all sit, showing ourselves and crying on the passers-by to come and love us."

- Robert Louis Stevenson

What do I think of my physical appearance? I could probably write enough about that to fill up all of Aletheia. But to summarize it, I think I'm fat and ugly and I hate how I look. I've had an eating disorder since seventh grade. I've thrown up, I've starved myself, I've binged, I've done it all. And it's a nightmare. I would give anything in the world to be able to

look at a piece of food and not think "That has _____ calories, I can't eat that, I'm too fat." I can't stand looking in the mirror every day and hating what I see. I am self-conscious of my body every second of every day, and it is exhausting. Do you know what it's like to want to claw your way out of your body and into one that you love? To see that you've eaten 1000 calories (which is below what's healthy) and feel like a failure? To stick your finger down your throat for the first time in a desperate attempt to do something, anything, to undo your mistake? Of course, it's never just about how your body looks. There's a whole lot more to it than that. I'm a perfectionist, and I go to a school where there's an obsession with achieving perfection. I'm sure stuff like that only feeds into it. Not to mention I'm sure I've got all sorts of other issues buried up inside of me, just waiting for a therapist to dig them all out. I wish I could just be normal. One of the worst parts is that I can't tell anyone, and maybe I never will. I wish that this would be the part where I tell you some great success story, about how I overcame my problem and now I'm fine. But I don't. Even if I do recover, eating disorders never fully go away. I could still spend the rest of my life never being completely happy with what I see in the mirror. You know what the other worst part of this is? I hate myself for being like this.

"It takes courage to grow up and become who you really are."

- E.E. Cummings

I'm fat. There, I said it: I'm fat. To be fair, I'm not overweight. BMI charts are the proof of that. They say I'm at a healthy weight. And there are times when I look at myself and I'm satisfied. But I'm not the thinner half of the population at Lynbrook, either. The thing is, the knowledge that I'm fat is constantly on my mind, even though it's not even completely true. This knowledge kind of lives with me—when I meet new people, when I associate with them, there's that small voice holding me back from being completely confident. But I'm used to it. I've lived with it for years. But that doesn't mean I don't respect myself. I really like myself, actually—I like who I am: my personality, my passions, my work ethic. And honestly, feeling fat isn't the end of the world to me. If it was, I would be anorexic. Besides, I like food too much. My attitude is that I'm healthy (I exercise and avoid junk food), and it's not worth forc-

ing myself to starve myself for people who would judge me for not being the thinnest person. But it's undeniable that the pressure is still there, no matter how much I want to avoid it. I'm fat, and I really could use losing some pounds.

"When people believe in themselves they have the first secret of success."

- Norman Vincent Peale

I'm average. I pride myself in art. I don't know how others perceive me; only a few friends here and there who believe I'm a genuinely good person. Though I suppose that means they haven't seen everything. Everyone has a good side, everyone has a bad side. I merely consider myself as everyone else. I'm average.

"The easiest time to cure an illness is before it is accepted as a part of the self-image."

- Jane Roberts

I used to think highly of myself, but recently life has shown me different. A friend told me the story of Oedipus when we were talking about school the other day, and it reminded me of myself (eerie I know). Some guy thinks highly of himself, and he gets f***ed over. The story reminds me of myself in a way. I always thought I was pretty cool, but everything's piling up and I'm messing up everywhere and can't do anything right and I'm realizing that I'm nowhere near as great as I used to think. I lost some big things, failed a couple of tests and now I don't know if I can get my grades up to where they need to be, lost a friendship, and am on the verge of getting kicked out of one of my extra-curriculars. How can I see myself as cool now, with everything that's falling apart? Really, I'm just cocky and stupid, and I need to learn to tone down my opinion of myself. I'm done misperceiving my personality and now I can see myself for who I truly am, a loser. Now if only I had realized this before.

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I try really hard to hold up a good self-image for my boyfriend's sake. He's an athlete and believe you me, those guys care everything about how a girl looks. A lot of girls tell me I'm attractive, and some guys have called me "hot," but I don't know if I'm exactly a "hot girl." I wonder what it's like for the girls that get asked by seniors to homecoming, and not by boys in their own grade. My boyfriend tells me I'm the best girl he's ever known and that's why he's stayed with me for so long, but I still want him to be PROUD of me. No matter what he says to make me feel better, I want to look in the mirror and truly believe it forever. Looks seem to be everything in high school. Especially to my boyfriend's friends. It's not like the girls they like are incredibly beautiful or anything, but the girls they CHECK OUT are the "hot/pretty" ones. I guess I would never know if I was a girl like that—you only really "know" if somebody approaches you and asks you out. But since I'm sort of "one of the guys" now (that's the kind of girlfriend I am, the one that becomes a part of the guy's life, and gets to know his friends), I hear all the talk about the girls. Of course they acknowledge my presence and they're polite about it (usually) but after some time you just hear too much of it. And after even MORE time it even gets to you a little bit... or a little bit more. You envy girls you may not have even looked at before only because the guys want them. And I sit there and wonder "that girl doesn't have a nice *ss, she doesn't even have one!" or "She looks pretty generic but I guess she's pretty..." Why am I investing so much into the superficial? For these boys? I think the image I really care about is how I'm perceived as my boyfriend's girlfriend. If my boyfriend could go around saying that he has ME for a girl with pride (Of course I wouldn't know if he does already) then I'd truly feel comfortable with myself. It's strange, I don't care too much what others think of me, and yet I care so much if I'm beautiful—to those few guys and my boyfriend. So do I act different in public? Not necessarily, but I try to enhance myself as much as possible; meaning, I'm always on my toes. I am proud at my ability to talk to guys. I don't flirt excessively like some do, nor do I act crude and crass. I just try to be as real as possible, and I think guys enjoy a girl that is real. I'm quirky, smart, funny, and I like to have a good time. I'm moralistic and yet I know when to get in on one of those mean inside jokes. Maybe that's why his friends seem to like me more than the other jocks' girlfriends—not for appearances (or maybe my appearance is great, I don't know these things) but because of my candor. When

someone tells me “I’ve always thought you’re really pretty” or “I hear you have a nice *feature*” I’m thoroughly and pleasantly surprised. It’s nice to know that people have actually considered me. It’s shallow but to me, if people care, it’s kind of like being special or... wanted. Finally, I would say that my opinion of myself is more or less different than my perception of who I am. For instance, I bet there are some people out there that think I’m a total b*tch just because I have this sort of icy stare. Truth be told, I’m only a b*tch to those I think deserve that attitude from me. And others could say I’m a flirty little flake with hardly anything up there; I don’t think so. I’m just happy! And it’s not a fake sort of happiness, I laugh at funny things. But with those guys, if they get the wrong image, it stings. So the real issue here must be within myself, and my boyfriend is just my way of projecting it onto a certain goal... I want to be the “it girl” so my boyfriend will stay. And that’s an insecurity I’m not proud of.

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I honestly don’t care all that much about how I look. I’d rather get more sleep than to get up in the morning to primp myself. To be at Lynbrook is to struggle to survive every day. I don’t have time or energy or patience to care about something stupid as physical appearance. I know I’m pretty and I’ll care about make up and clothes and stuff like that when I have the luxury of doing so. But high school isn’t about luxury. It’s trying to make use of every minute, every second of the day and being productive and actually surviving.

“Each of us is something of a schizophrenic personality, tragically divided against ourselves.”

- Martin Luther King, Jr.

I like to blend in. That is kind of hard to do being a girl close to 6 feet tall in an all-Asian school. I have some self-confidence where I don’t really care what I wear to school (though do I come to school in pajamas, no). But it is really hard to be a girl this tall because there are practically no guys taller than me who are available. Sure, due to my tall stature, dresses tend to look better on me than on shorter people, but what does that matter when there is no one to “show it off for”. Because of my height I tend to subconsciously

slouch (whether it is to try to seem shorter, or just to hear my friends I don’t know), but I do know that I feel more comfortable around taller people than I do around shorter people. I perceive my height as a curse rather than a blessing, but I guess it is one of those “grass is greener on the other side” kind of relationships because everyone wants what they can’t have. I should just learn to appreciate this and wait until college to find people (preferably guys) taller than me.

“To free us from the expectations of others, to give us back to ourselves—there lies the great, singular power of self-respect.”

- John Didion

I was comfortable with my appearance until my mom started calling me fat and ugly and worthless. Now my opinion of myself shrinks every day every time I hear her say those words: “You’re getting so fat. And look at all those zits. Why can’t you even take care of yourself right?” I used to be proud of the way I loved myself, but now when I say that to other people I like myself, I know deep down inside I’m lying.

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What do I think of my physical appearance? I literally stick out in a crowd. At this school, if you’re taller than 5’4” you stand out in a crowd. I always felt ashamed of my appearance, as I never really fit in with the traditional petite, and even as a young girl, I found myself to be always a size up or two from all my friends. I wouldn’t consider myself overweight; I’m quite healthy actually, and I participate in many activities to keep myself relatively fit. But I have somewhat of a large frame, and on top of that a family tree with some not-so-tiny contributors. I’m proud that I can be powerful, and I love the feeling of being able to accomplish things physically, whether it be being the starter on a sports team or simply helping a friend move in and out of their home. I have, however, always battled with my body. I have issues with my legs and arms, feeling that they are too big and bulky, and that I would look better if they were more slender and toned. In eighth grade, while walking to class, a girl sitting near my classroom whispered “thunder thighs” to me,

just loud enough for me to hear and my face to flush. That was so hurtful to me, and because of it I became bulimic and wouldn't participate in sports because I thought they would make my legs bigger and bulkier. I tried to make myself sick so I would lose weight, and eventually my mother had to help me come to terms with the fact that I didn't have to change, and that doing it in an unhealthy way would just hurt me more in the end. I have a more positive view of myself now, and I smile more now. One thing that is somewhat upsetting to me, however, is how I am treated because of my body. I have a more than average sized chest and I always get comments on how I should go into something of the adult entertainment business, which I would never do. Instead of looking into my personality, which I pride on being generally good-hearted, they look at my chest. I feel like that throws people off a bit when they see me and when they actually talk to me and get to know me: they jump to conclusions too soon. Sometimes I wish I could go a day in a different body, with the same personality, just to see how people would treat me. Personally, I perceive myself as somewhat mature, with quirks and nuances to get used to. If only people could see the inside instead of the outside...

"You are very powerful, provided you know how powerful you are."

- Yogi Bhaajan

Are you proud of who you are? It's a good question. A common one. A yes or no question. Or so one would think. Maybe you don't. I don't know. The thing is, it's not that simple. Am I proud of myself? What part of myself? The academic student that I am? Yes, I am proud of myself. Proud that I can pick myself back up again after a bad grade. Proud that I strive for the best. Proud that I don't cheat. The daughter I am? I suppose I'm a good daughter. I don't always listen to my parents, but I do abide by their rules and treat them well. The friend I am? Of course. I am loyal, I am nice, I try to find the good in people. But I think I'm pathetic. Desperate. As do all the guys in my grade. I haven't done anything wrong. Like I said, I follow my parents' rules. Yet, I find that I try too hard when it comes to the boys. And thanks to that, I'm totally insecure. I come off as even more retarded. I should just stay away from boys for the rest of high school. It seems like the safest choice.

I pride myself on my intelligence. But more than that. I pride myself on being able to think, and I pride myself on loving to learn. I look around, and here I am at Lynbrook. It's a competitive place, and heck, I know I don't have the keenest logic, and I know I don't excel at standardized testing. But I know that I'm smart. How do I know that? I love learning, and that love cultivates my reaching out to take hold of new knowledge. I'm aware of how BS this sounds, but it's Lynbrook, and we're the kings and queens of BSing. I look around, and here I am at Lynbrook. Really, I can't get out of this place, where I'm surrounded by judgmental girls whose brains are smaller than their private parts (you know what I'm talking about) and douchey boys whose mouths can cram more meaningless words than the mouths of those judgmental girls can take in loads (you know what I'm talking about); I'm surrounded by people who stick close to the value of reputation, and let that shape everything they know about one person. Honestly, what is there to love about Lynbrook? Maybe personality is a great thing—hey, maybe that girl you've been fantasizing about is nice. Maybe she's sweet, she's cute, she's funny, she's got curves like the parabolas you've seen in your math textbook. But she doesn't give a sh*t about just why she's learning about these nice-*ss parabolas. Her mind is so damn closed, that she thinks she's just learning math for the sake of earning the grade. Personally, I think that's a turn-off. It's hard to describe why, but there's something that disgusts me in that kind of attitude. Hey, maybe that boy in your literature class is hot. Maybe his eyes remind you of the sunset, or some bull-excrete like that. Maybe he's got hops on the court, maybe he's genuine, whatever that means. If he doesn't want to understand beyond what is right in front of his eyes, it's done. Personally, that's just a sign of something more than not caring about learning. I think it's a sign that they really don't understand what is beyond their little world. You can make the argument that people may be street smart, but not book smart. But you see, people use this term "street smart" much too loosely. The people with real street smarts? I'm sure they understand just as much as the book smart people do. I do see people—a handful, perhaps, who do love to learn. They shine in class, that sort of mellow glow from a nightlight. They don't try to show off what they know. I quote Alexander Pope's "An Essay on Criticism," "A little learning is a dangerous thing; Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring." People who sip from the "Pierian spring"—these people steal jealous

glances every chance they get, past the tips of their upturned noses. Please, too much. Just stop. Do you think you sense some irony in here? Maybe. But I look around, and here I am at Lynbrook, Really, this place. It changes me. Every moment I'm here, I become more different. More aggressive, more impatient, nastier by the second. Lynbrook—this place really kills me inside, intellectually and emotionally. I can't wait to get out.

"The person we believe ourselves to be will always act in a manner consistent with our self-image."

- Brian Tracy

The days every one of my insecurities surface are the worst. Days like this make me think that I should just starve myself and get it over with. I've been feeling very inadequate lately. One day during summer I went swimming with others and couldn't stop thinking about it. Out of the girls there, I looked the worst. The biggest thighs. Weird acne. Large waist. Bad skin. And on top of it all I'm socially awkward. I hate looking at other girls and thinking, 'Why can't I look like that?' Like the girls every other girl hates because they're so beautiful, or because they have such a nice figure. The girls whom guys chase. Kind, intelligent, beautiful girls. I hate that I'm not one of them. One day I discovered a certain diet online. A very restrictive one that would vary between low amounts of calories each day to trick the body out of starvation mode, supposedly. And I had been feeling like cr*p lately, so for a while I thought seriously about it. And I really wanted to go through with it, but what was stopping me was the prospect of others finding out. I was scared of fainting on the field during practice. Or going out to eat with people and hardly touching my food—purging isn't an option for me. I've tried, but my body just doesn't work that way, apparently. Most of all I was scared someone would find out and reveal me as a girl as fake as some of the ones from school. Not a day goes by that I don't think about what I eat. I have researched calorie contents of foods since I was eleven. I have the exact calorie contents of dozens of foods memorized. I rarely let anyone else make food for me, for the sole reason that if I don't make it myself, I have no idea of the calories I'm taking in. I am not anorexic. Sometimes I wish I were, just for the satisfaction of being thin. Most of the time I have the good sense to know

that anorexia isn't pretty and it isn't fun, and I can talk myself out of it. I am fortunate for that. But I know that voice is there, somewhere behind me, sneaking around wherever I go. It's the voice that convinces me of how worthless I am, of how ugly I am, of how fat I am. I know I am not anorexic, but somehow I always feel the onset of it creeping over me, ghosting over my back. I feel like it will get me one of these days.

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I have always looked at myself with a tinge of contempt. I have always felt that I look a little too fat, a bit too slow to respond, a fraction too ugly, a tiny bit too strange. Not that being strange is bad I love being strange but I know that I can't judge myself with any sense of unbiased truth. So when I say I'm fat or stupid or ugly I just say that I can't really tell but still it niggles me, a tingle of a thought at the back of my mind. I say it but still I wonder if I'm right so deep down I believe it. The best thing I have found after I have spent a thought on all these things is to realize that I don't care. I may look on the other people and envy their ease of normal speech and thought, but I have a strange way of thinking and a stranger way still of expressing it and I think I would rather be me with all my flaws and failures than another person who never spent an idle hour wondering how many butterflies it would take to fly, or how different the earth would be if life had formed but there had been no sun to supply it. So while I may pretend to be normal and mimic speech and conversation that is normal you should know I'm thinking how many moths it would take to carry you away to a far away land.

"The 'self-image' is the key to human personality and human behavior. Change the self-image and you change the personality and the behavior."

- Maxwell Maltz

I've had issues with self-image since I was ten. The first person who told me I was fat, was my grandmother. It's one of those things you don't forget. To this day I remember exactly what she said, "Goodness you're eating like a pig, and you look like one too." I've since learned that being fat is not the

worst thing. It didn't make me cruel, mean, or spiteful, which are things I consider to be worse than fat. Unfortunately some people don't see weight the way I do, as something insignificant, they see it like my grandmother sees it, like something of importance. I wish people could learn that weight doesn't matter, it's the person behind the weight that's important.

"Relentless, repetitive self-talk is what changes our self-image."

- Denis Waitley

I used to say that I was emo to be cool. I used to say I cut myself. I really didn't, though, but I thought that it made me cool. It's not so cool anymore, but I don't know how to take back my words. To everyone else, I'm still the emo kid who cuts.

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A lot of girls say that they're ugly, and sometimes they mean it. Most of the time, though, I think they only say it to garner flattery. Take the typical Facebook profile picture, for example. Caption: eww what's up with my facee i'm so uglyy but i'm using this pic anywayyyy but it's temp so yeah(: And when you look down the comment thread, you'll see things along the lines of "why so gorgeous? ;D" or "damn girl you prettay" or "why are you so beautiful? i'm so jealous." I don't do that, though. I think I'm pretty, and I'm not afraid to acknowledge it. That's not to say that I strut around like I'm the sh*t, or I go around telling people that I'm more attractive than they are. I keep that to myself; I don't say that I'm pretty, but I don't claim to be ugly, either. That's also not to say that I think I'm flawless, physically. My skin, while not bad, could be better. My jawbone is slightly wider than desirable, but it's insignificant enough for me. I'm also terribly unphotogenic; flash does terrible things to my skin quality and tone, and lens distortion emphasizes my jaws. I'm also very bad at smiling attractively if I'm not actually laughing. Personally, I think my best features are my shoulders and collarbones. Besides that and my face, though, I hate my physical appearance. I'm dimly flat-chested: I don't fit an A-cup, and I'm terribly insecure about that. I'm somewhat thin, but not skinny enough to make my tiny breasts look proportional. I

don't want large breasts, but I'd like to be able to hold up a strapless dress and to have a feminine silhouette. My thighs are really wide, and I rarely wear shorts because it exemplifies my fat. When I sit, I keep them off the chair, so that they won't appear bigger than they already are. My appearance doesn't really change who I am, though. It does upset me when people make fun of me for it (albeit in a joking manner), but I don't let it end a friendship or change my personality. I try not to let other peoples' views affect my confidence. I'm naturally not very confident, but throughout the years, I've managed to build enough of it to be able to walk without staring at my shoes. As for what's deeper than appearance, I love myself. I really do. I love the way I like or dislike something or someone. I love the way I express myself, and I love the emotions that pervade my conscience (unless, of course, it's sadness, but I still love that I can be sad). I know that I can be scathing and bitingly sarcastic, but it's part of my personality, and it's part of my dry humor. Something strange though: I find it much easier to express myself over the internet, both in words and on video. In person, I pay too much attention to my body language, because that was never something that came naturally to me; I had to learn it. If I could change one aspect of myself, I would become more intelligent. I'm comfortable enough with my appearance (breasts can wait) and my personality. I'm glad that I generally like myself. I can't imagine what self-hatred would be like.

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My mom and family friends call me pretty (out of courtesy, most likely) No one else ever does; kinda hard on today's image-obsessed teen, ya know? This and so many other things contribute to my lack of self-confidence. Let's see, there's my shoulders, the product of years of torturous swimming drills. I swam to get skinny; instead I just got man-shoulders. There's my nose, which always looks sweaty and pimply by 1pm every day. My butt, which just kind of hangs there like a blubbery tumor. And let's not even get started on emotionally and intellectually. If there's ever been a true motivation for me to study, it's so that I won't look stupid compared to my classmates. Sometimes it feels like the only thing I'm good at is bubbling in scantrons. But that's being a little morose. Honestly, I wouldn't want to be anyone but myself. I can drive myself crazy wondering what other people's lives are like, what they think about me, how they see the world. But in the end

it's me I'm stuck with... a 17-year-old who disobeys boundaries and mentally flips off judgmental people. Whiny, bad-tempered, ugly, man-shouldered me. And it's all right.

"Our society's strong emphasis on dieting and self-image can sometimes lead to eating disorders. We know that more than 5 million Americans suffer from eating disorders, most of them young women."

-Mike Murdock

It's a matter of what I see when I look into the mirror. Every day, I see the same person. Same eyes, same nose, same hair. All perfectly usable, all in working condition. But I want them to change so, so badly. Going to school, wearing matching socks, and getting my stuff together is hard enough. Looking into the mirror and thinking I'm the sh*t? That's another story altogether. But when I'm stripped of all of those qualities; those physical attributes? Then it's a matter of WHO I see when I look into the mirror. What I see is pretty damn fine. And I feel like we should all do that. Society corrupts and worms its seeds of doubt into all of our minds, leaving none the wiser. It makes us all think we should be people who we really aren't. And that's horrible. We should all look into the mirror and believe we're beautiful- not that superficial, Hollywood thinking of beautiful, but beautiful just in the way somebody is. Because no matter how pretty you may be on the outside, you could be the ugliest person on the inside. I don't even know what I'm saying anymore. But what I'm trying to get at is that it's hard to feel great when you see yourself. I know, I feel that way too. It's a path, though. A long step process. You just got to make sure you don't turn into a total douchebag with the amount of confidence you have in the end.

"To be beautiful means to be yourself. You don't need to be accepted by others. You need to accept yourself."

- Thich Nhat Hanh

"Who am I?" is such a simple question with such a complex answer... Not everyone wants to acknowledge the true you; sometimes they even refuse to accept the person that you make yourself out to be. Most of the time, however, as long as you're funny or have some kind of trait that makes you get along well with others, people will just enjoy your company and move on with their lives. But this can be super detrimental to your individuality. Personally speaking, I can tell that everyone just likes to see "what I'm good at" and not really care about who I am as a person. I'm so much deeper than this quiet, random high-school kid I've made myself out to be. I've been through a lot. I've gained such a broad perspective on what it means to really live. When I react strangely to small things by sounding overly excited or sad, people do a double-take. But it's then and only then when I'm truly aware of how sensitive I am. I mean, passion is a good thing, right? Doesn't it also make me deep and caring? Shouldn't people want to understand someone, like me, not because of their success or failures but because they want to learn how to reflect on themselves as a person? I honestly don't know what other people think of me, but the truth is it doesn't matter. I solely live to inspire and be inspired and there is no one in the world that knows me better than myself.

"No matter what our achievements might be, we think well of ourselves only in rare moments. We need people to bear witness against our inner judge, who keeps book on our shortcomings and transgressions. We need people to convince us that we are not as bad as we think we are."

- Eric Hoffer

I want to be pretty. I hate waking up and feeling unattractive and unloved and being surrounded by my friends in relationships... I don't know what's wrong with me, but it's probably the way I look. Or maybe I'm just an obnoxious b*tch. Or all of the above.

~ ~ ~

For many years, I believed I was fat. I'd look at down at my thighs and wish I could sink into the floor and disappear. I'd pinch my stomach and feel depressed about the large amount of plumpness I could gather between my fingers. My family perpetuated this thought even further in my brain. I'm sure they didn't intend to do so, but it happened anyways. A simple comment from my mother about how I should get some more exercise would leave me feeling terrible for hours. My brother would constantly make fat jokes about me. A certain (now ex) friend of mine wouldn't even let me jump on her trampoline because I was "too heavy" for it. I began to hide my body by wearing as non-revealing clothes as possible, and I tended to end conversations with people I didn't know well who I thought of as "good-looking" and "perfectly proportioned" as quickly as I could. When I pictured myself, all I could see was the word "FAT" in big block letters. It's only now that, when I look back at pictures of myself in middle school and earlier, I realize that I was pretty far from fat. While I was not thin, I was of a perfectly healthy weight. I played sports and I had friends. I looked nothing like the way I thought of myself. And now I realize that I should never have cared about my weight or physical appearance. None of that matters. It's all about who I am on the inside. People weren't talking to me because they only cared about how I looked. People were talking to me because they liked who I was, and I was talking to them for the same reason. I realize this, I understand this, I comprehend this. I repeat this to myself multiple times every day. But still, I cannot bring myself to be comfortable with my body. I still cannot change in the locker room with the others. I feel uncomfortable in my skin every day. Because now I'm no longer appropriately-sized. My BMI isn't average. Now I'm ridiculously close to being overweight. I keep gaining weight out of stress and I don't know what to do. I want to love myself as I am, but I'm afraid that I never will.

*"Your self image is your pattern!
Every thought has an activity
visualized. Every activity belongs
to a pattern. You identify with
your pattern or thought.
Your patterns lead your life."*

- J.G. Gallimore

"Self-image sets the boundaries of individual accomplishment."

- Maxwell Maltz

You know how many people say, "Don't judge people by outward appearances. It's what's inside that counts"? While most people might not judge by outer appearances, we obviously care more about how we look than we actually let on. If we didn't, why would makeup, contacts, and fashionable shoes exist? September 17th, 2010. the Cross Country Team ran loops at Fremont Older. Including me, of course. By the time we had gotten to the Fremont Older parking lot, we had already ran about 3.5 miles, and we were sweating through our shirts. Someone suggested we leave our shirts behind because we were going to do miles and miles of hills, and it was going to be painful. No shade for miles around, in 105-degree heat. So all of us boys stripped off our shirts. Everyone was so tan and muscular. Each abdominal muscle clearly defined, evenly bronzed without a single ounce of fat out of place. Everyone looked perfect. Except one person. Guess who? Obviously, this is an exaggeration. However, there is some truth to it - I could easily see the differences between my torso and others'. Thinking back to that day, I remember comparing my chest with another's, seeing my own slightly pudgy stomach and skimpy shoulders. My chest and back were also very pale, as I had hardly ever ran bareback that season. I ran with the group anyways, although I was feeling slightly embarrassed about my physical appearance the entire time. The point of it is, even if others don't comment on blemishes or disfigurements, I still feel incompetent and the desire to be better, and I'm sure others feel it too. This year I actually started to work out on my upper chest and abdominals over the summer, and I honestly noticed a huge change in my confidence and interactions with others. I felt more on the same level as my peers, which really helped me communicate with them. It's so much harder trying to talk to someone who you think is superior to you. This year I've started talking to a lot more people, hanging out after school hours, and even attending more Homecoming meetings! Before, Homecoming set-ups just felt like a place to stand around and awkwardly look for something to do. It wasn't that others were more accepting of me; I had just started reaching out to others. That's how simple it was.

Appearances are deceiving, right? And there seems to be a general consent that people who act differently under different circumstances are “fake”. But is it wrong to want to become somebody different? To want others to have a better opinion of you? Everyone acts differently when they’re not alone, myself included. It’s strange, but I can’t really differentiate between the two personalities now, who I am here and who I am there. Some would say that maybe it’s just because I’m the same, but that couldn’t be more wrong. I think it’s because when I’m around other people, they’re the perfect distractions. They distract me from how I’m feeling, from what I’m thinking, from everything. I also tend to become whoever I’m with, temporarily adopting their mentality. Is it really considered being fake or deceptive if it’s not intentional? Is it wrong to act differently in public so others are more accepting? I always hear people say “he/she’s so fake,” but aren’t we all? Just because I dislike someone, it doesn’t mean that I’m going to glare at them every single time I see them. Just because someone annoys me, it doesn’t mean I’m going to confront them in front of everybody else. But of course, no matter what I do, there seems to be something at fault. If I keep it to myself, continue smiling, and choose to tell someone else about it later, it’s considered ‘fake b*tch’ who “talks sh*t all the time”. If I choose to confront them on the spot, I’m a “b*tch who gets worked up over small things”. Well, what am I supposed to do? Others find me to be a happy person, simply because I smile and laugh at almost everything. But I’m not like that alone. It’s not that I’m pretending to be happy or that because I think smiling when I’m feeling otherwise is courageous or some sh*t like that. I really am genuinely happy at times, is that wrong? I don’t understand why people are so opposed to change. Am I supposed to be happy all the time or unhappy all the time?

“Don’t you dare, for one more second, surround yourself with people who are not aware of the greatness that you are.”

- Jo Blackwell-Preston

You there in the mirror. You know what’s wrong. You’ve let yourself go this past year, and it shows.

Your friends tell you you gained weight, your mom calls you fat every day, and your only response is to kick back on the couch and devour a big bag of potato chips.

But you’re not here to destroy your confidence. There’s still time to fix this. You’re not fat yet. You’re just lazy and need to stop eating your feelings.

Starting tomorrow, you will exercise. You will run. You will do push ups.

You will walk the dog. No, you’ll jog with the dog. You’ll do sit ups in between homework sessions. You’ll eat only when you’re hungry, and cut down on your junk food intake.

You will get through this slump. Just because your life is stressful doesn’t mean you can let yourself go in the nutrition department.

Just remember, it’s time to step it up. Let’s get rid of this cheek fat, these pimples, and this flab.

By June, this mirror needs to reflect a warrior.

“Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will spend its whole life believing that it is stupid.”

- Albert Einstein

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The October topic for Aletheia is Self-image. Self-image is defined as: the way you think about yourself and your abilities or appearances or: One's conception of oneself or of one's role. This topic drew a robust response. The following are the major themes presented this month:

- Eating disorders, primarily bulimia
- Critical remarks from parents
- Comparing oneself to others
- Basing self-esteem on how a boyfriend or girlfriend defines beauty

Eating Disorders

According to the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, in the United States, as many as 10 in 100 young women suffer from an eating disorder. Overeating related to tension, poor nutritional habits and food fads are relatively common eating problems for youngsters. In addition, two psychiatric eating disorders, anorexia nervosa and bulimia, are on the increase among teenage girls and young women and often run in families. These two eating disorders also occur in boys, but less often.

Parents frequently wonder how to identify symptoms of anorexia nervosa and bulimia. These disorders are characterized by a preoccupation with food and a distortion of body image. Unfortunately, many teenagers hide these serious and sometimes fatal disorders from their families and friends.

Symptoms and warning signs of anorexia nervosa and bulimia include the following:

- A teenager with anorexia nervosa is typically a perfectionist and a high achiever in school. At the same time, she suffers from low self-esteem, irrationally believing she is fat regardless of how thin she becomes. Desperately needing a feeling of mastery over her life, the teenager with anorexia nervosa experiences a sense of control only when she says "no" to the normal food demands of her body. In a relentless pursuit to be thin, the girl starves herself. This often reaches the point of serious damage to the body, and in a small number of cases may lead to death.
- The symptoms of bulimia are usually different from those of anorexia nervosa. The patient binges on huge quantities of high-caloric food and/or purges her body of dreaded calories by self-induced vomiting and often by using laxatives. These binges may alternate with severe diets, resulting in dramatic weight fluctuations. Teenagers may try to hide the signs of throwing up by running water while spending long periods of time in the bathroom. The purging of bulimia presents a serious threat to the patient's physical health, including dehydration, hormonal imbalance, the depletion of important minerals, and damage to vital organs.

With comprehensive treatment, most teenagers can be relieved of the symptoms or helped to control eating disorders. A child and adolescent psychiatrist is trained to evaluate, diagnose, and treat these psychiatric disorders. Treatment for eating disorders usually requires a team approach; including individual therapy, family therapy, working with a primary care

physician, working with a nutritionist, and medication. Many adolescents also suffer from other problems; including depression, anxiety, and substance abuse. It is important to recognize and get appropriate treatment for these problems as well.

Research shows that early identification and treatment leads to more favorable outcomes. Parents who notice symptoms of anorexia or bulimia in their teenagers should ask their family physician or pediatrician for a referral to a child and adolescent psychiatrist.

Critical remarks from parents

There's an old saying "Sticks and stones may hurt my bones, but words don't hurt at all." While words can't harm us physically, they can definitely do emotional and psychological damage.

We were surprised that a number of submissions described critical remarks from parents and grandparents. While possibly well intended, young people may take these words to heart and go to the extreme to try and "correct" the situation.

Out of our discussion, it was agreed upon that the comments and messages one receives from parents and others we're closest to has an effect on how we feel about ourselves. People react to criticism and judgment in different ways. Some become very fearful and close down emotionally in order to protect themselves from being hurt. They feel inadequate, inferior. Some become very angry, rebellious. Others manage to remain relatively open, strong, confident, and harmonious. Everyone, however, has some fear of being judged, rejected, and abandoned.

While parents want their children to look and do their best, it's important for kids to know that they are loved even if they are having a bad hair day or have a pimple on their face. No one is perfect all the time. Positive feedback from a parent goes a long way to developing healthy self esteem and accepting oneself and others for their strengths and their challenges.

Comparing oneself to others

It's natural to compare ourselves with others. Identifying who we are and how we fit in is paramount during the teen-age years. However, if fitting in with a certain group means acting or doing things that go against one's values or ethics, then it is time to step back and decide if it's really worth being a part of this group. It's also time to think about what friendship really means to you, and if you feel comfortable, accepted, and authentic. Feeling supported and feeling comfortable among friends is very important.

Basing one's self-esteem on how a boyfriend or girlfriend defines beauty

There's a big difference between a boy saying to a girl or vice versa, "I like your hair when you keep it cut short" vs. "If you loved me (or cared about me), you'd cut your hair short." People are allowed to have opinions on how they like your hair styled or the way you dress, but that should have nothing to do with how they feel about you or treat you. An individual should not have to change something about themselves in order to "earn" someone else's love or attention.

There was some discussion on social cliques. While the culture at Lynbrook does not particularly lend itself to cliques (jocks, goths, preps, skaters etc.), there was acknowledgement that various groups of students do exist. It was discussed that a healthy way to be part of a group is to seek others with shared interests, beliefs and mind-set. Students felt positively about the various clubs and leadership opportunities available at Lynbrook.

There was also some discussion about the fact that most of the submissions dealt with physical appearance vs. character or personality traits. A discussion ensued about physical appearance being a bigger concern for girls than boys. Boys tend to choose clothes for comfort and durability. Muscles, cars, sunglasses, hats, and shoes were of interest to boys, whereas girls worried about weight, skin, and other's perceptions of beauty. Girls also seemed to be more concerned with being "wanted" by boys because of physical beauty, and placing a lot of attention on being desirable.

Self-image is something that develops as we mature and make choices about colleges to attend, careers to pursue, and relationships to nurture. Recognizing our strengths, choosing friends who are supportive and authentic, and learning from our mistakes goes a long way to building healthy self-esteem and positive self-image.

Additional Resources

What Every Parent Needs To Know About Eating Disorders by Tonja H. Krautter, PsyD., LCSW

Health at Every Size by Linda Bacon, Ph.D.

Andrea's Voice Foundation (AVF)

AVF is dedicated to promoting education and understanding toward the prevention, identification, diagnosis and treatment of disordered eating and related issues. Transforming perspectives... one person at a time. <http://andreasvoice.org>

The Association of Professionals Treating Eating Disorders (APTED)

APTED is an affiliation of a broad range of professionals involved in treating people with eating disorders in the San Francisco Bay Area: including private practitioners- psychologists, licensed counselors (MFTs), social workers, physicians, psychiatrists, and nutritionists.

www.aptedsf.com

Avis Rumney

Avis Rumney, Licensed MFT and Eating Disorder Specialist, helps people with eating disorders and their families; her website, www.EatingDisorderServices.net describes her programs. She offers a free monthly conference call for mothers of eating disordered daughters to provide support, guidance and a forum to voice their concerns. Sign up to receive notices about the monthly conference call.

www.healyourdaughter.com

A Better Way to Look

Nan Dellheim (nan@HowILookJournal.com) consults with schools and professionals on the development of customized programming to prevent the spectrum of body image and weight related disorders. She is the co-author of the *How I Look Journal* and *How I look at my Daughter, Her World, and Her Future* , two concept-based guides in journal format that have been vetted by the National Eating Disorders Association and can be used by girls and mothers independently or as the basis for middle and high school body image programs.

www.abetterwaytolook.com

Gurze Books

An excellent catalogue which publishes and distributes a wide variety of book titles dealing with Eating Disorders. Free catalogues available online or by calling (800)756-7533.

www.gurze.com

Lucile Packard Children's Hospital Eating Disorders Program

www.eatingdisorders.lpch.org

Parent's Survival Guide: Childhood Obesity

www.parentssurvivalguide.org

Parent's Survival Guide Resources

www.parentssurvivalguide.org/resources

Anorexics and Bulimics Anonymous (ABA)

ABA is a Fellowship of individuals whose primary purpose is to find and maintain "sobriety" in our eating practices, and to help others gain sobriety. The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop unhealthy eating practices. There are no dues or fees for ABA membership; we are self-supporting through our own contributions. ABA is not affiliated with any other organization or institution, nor are we allied with any religion. www.aba12steps.org.

Food Addicts in Recovery (FA)

FA is an international fellowship of men and women who have experienced difficulties in life as a result of the way we eat. Through shared experience and mutual support, we help each other to recover from the disease of food addiction. Our program of recovery is based on the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous.

www.foodaddicts.org.

Body Positive

BodyPositive.com is an award-winning body image website created and maintained by a psychologist who specializes in treating eating disorders. The site has terrific resources and exercises built around the "Health at Every Size" model of body acceptance. "Change your mind, change your culture, and let your body be!"

www.bodypositive.com

Normal in Schools

A national nonprofit that educates about eating disorders (including binge eating disorder and obesity), the therapeutic impact of the arts, self-esteem, body image, family communication, and healthy coping skills.

www.normal-life.org

Overeaters Anonymous (OA)

Based on the 12 step recovery program, Overeaters Anonymous provides services and support groups for individuals with eating disorders and includes a schedule of local meetings and a newsletter. For local groups for Eating Disorders, call 408 268-7243 or visit

www.overeatersanonymous.org