

Social discrimination analysis



**ASSIGN
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For purposes of this paper, my social location will be used. I am 29 years of age, female and of Caucasian descent.

I live in a small California town where Caucasian families dominate the community. I currently weigh 142 pounds, have a heterosexual orientation and come from the middle class of society. During my adolescent and early adult life stages, I was considered overweight and was subject to constant and varying forms of discrimination. This was a particular occurrence in my secondary education experience. Of greater concern to me is not my current social location but the juxtaposition of my former and current social location, focusing more on my physical ability and physiological attributes. Though my blond hair and green eyes were of interest to dominant groups, my 242 pounds of body weight was of great concern.

It must be noted that during my high school years, I had experienced much discrimination and negative reactions towards my person because of my weight. I considered myself as ‘always the heavy girl in high school’, which could be characterized as being overweight, possession of heavy, stocky or chubby build, and being of unattractive physical appearance to others. During the mentioned years, I had been the object of ridicule and teasing, and often overlooked in important events in school. My social interactions suffered as well, only on the account of my physical appearance.

I was unable to acquire steady romantic relationships and would constantly be judged on my appearance and physical attributes. In layman’s terms, I, and almost all other people who shared the same heavy build as me, were labeled ‘unpopular’ which gave rise to discrimination based on physical

appearances and attributes. This caused me to be frequently forgotten or disregarded in being invited to various social functions, such as parties and gatherings. My unattractive appearance and internalization of this status also caused me to avoid attending social functions even if I was invited, knowing full well that I would only be an object of teasing and ridicule in the mentioned gatherings and perhaps the reason for my being invited was to be a source of ridicule.

Being of poor build, my physical abilities also suffered and were a basis for further discrimination and negative reactions for me. I was unable to participate actively in physical recreational activities and sports, as my body type did not allow me to withstand the rigors of training and exertion.

Through all these, I also considered myself unattractive and deserving of ridicule and negative reactions. Though poor physical build as a component of social location is detrimental to men and women, the dimension of gender as another component of social location (Lips, 2005) shows that being an overweight girl entails slightly different discrimination than being an overweight boy.

Because of the dominance of certain social groups, one social group being based on physical appearance, the dominant female group of physical attractiveness limited me in terms of peers, products and privileges in society. I was unable to wear attire that would fit my build and appearance appropriately, and because of my size, I was unable to acquire certain elevated statuses that had pertained to beauty. Overweight males were still able to connect to peers who were part of the dominant male group on attractiveness, but overweight females experienced discrimination from both

males and females. This could imply that I was being labeled ‘deviant’ to some extent, because of my deviation from the norm pertaining to physical attributes. But now, as I am 29 years old, I have also lost 100 pounds and am no longer considered overweight or of heavy build. Much slimmer and more physically attractive, I am no longer the object of ridicule and discrimination.

My social interactions and relationships are wider and more numerous, as people are wont to desire a connection or relationship with me because of my physical attractiveness. My romantic relationships, in particular, are more frequent in occurrence and more numerous. Privileges inaccessible to me before such as acceptance in social functions and in the products I would be able to purchase for my physical appearance were now accessible to me because of my conformity to the norm of physical attractiveness. Also, my adherence to the norm would now dissociate me from being considered deviant. Given my social location and the concept of sociological imagination as posited by Mills (Anderson & Herr, 2007), this may show that components of social location are socially-constructed and perpetuated by institutions through the dominant groups in society.

In the circumstances presented by myself, beauty, physical ability and attributes as a social location are merely descriptors of what society’s treatment is of a certain individual. In this case, I was treated negatively and even experienced discrimination because of my social location in terms of physical ability. Dominant groups, which often comprise the leaders and patrons of social institutions, prescribe roles and statuses to individuals as to how they are treated and viewed in terms of how their social location operates. Sociological imagination is operationalized and apparent in this

case because beauty is a social construction promoted and perpetuated by several institutions. My experiences, specifically the discrimination, the denied privileges, the limitations in social relationships, may be attributed not because of my physical appearance but in actuality the status that society prescribes on my physical appearance. Social institutions consider my physical appearance as deviant and negative, therefore to conform and adhere to society's norms; individuals are socialized to view being overweight as negative.

Though I may feel that the problem with my appearance and physical ability lies in my own efforts and activities to conform to societal norms, these norms are in place because of social institutions, which would imply that my personal struggle and experiences with my weight is not actually personal but sociological. During my high school years, I blamed myself and my own body for being unattractive when sociological imagination would instead posit that I should blame society for labeling my unattractive.