



“Why Am I So Fat?”
A Study of the Interrelationship Between
Poor Body Image and Social Anxiety

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Abstract: In this article I use various sociological theories to understand my experiences with poor body image and social anxiety. Although I do suffer from these, I learn that they are not completely my fault! Much of them have to do with many of the face-to-face interactions which I have been a part of throughout my life. I think that my parents and other family members have had a strong impact on the way that I view myself. Not only that, but society as a whole has affected me as well. If I did not live in such a materialistic, image-obsessed society, I might not feel the need to workout constantly and eat nothing but salads! Through writing this essay, I have seen both the micro as well as the macro effects that this society has had on me. And, you know what? It makes me angry. I like to believe that I am above the influence, but clearly I am not! This has been fairly eye-opening. So, what can I do to better myself? Are there specific steps that I can take to better my situation? I cannot be sure, but I think that listening to the words of the sociologist Morrie Schwartz could be a start. It has already begun to help me. I just need to get my priorities straight. Being super skinny should not be at the top of my list. Like Morrie suggests, love should be number one. I should concentrate more on my relationships with people and how important they are. Once I stop focusing so much on weight and looks, I can start focusing on those people that I care about.

Growing up, I was a chubby child. I never really thought too much about it though. Up until I was about ten years old, I did not even notice! I had no concept of fat or thin. However, around the age of ten I started to pick up on certain comments that the people around me would make. Other children would sometimes refer to me as “the chubby girl” and even my parents had things to say. I remember my father making fun of me with my grandparents this one time. He was telling them that he just could

not believe how much I could eat. He told them that I was eating constantly and that I actually ate more food than he did. Another time, I overheard my mother commenting on my size. I had just cleaned out my closet and I had made up a bag of old clothes to be donated. Before donating the clothes, my mother asked a friend of hers if she liked to look through my things and see if there was anything that she wanted. Her friend, a very petit woman, took from my clothing bag a pair of jeans for herself. Later that day,

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she called my mother and told her that, on second thought, she did not want the jeans and that when she had tried them on they were “swimming” on her. I began to realize that other people thought that there was something wrong with me, that I was fat. When I came to this embarrassing realization, I began to believe this myself. I was fat; I am fat.

By the time I was eleven years old, I had decided that I needed to go on a diet. Of course, at this age I did not know very much about dieting. Before coming to the conclusion that I was a fat girl, I had always eaten breakfast before going to school and then I would buy a school lunch. After school, I would usually come home and have a snack and then my family would sit down to dinner. As part of my “diet,” I began to cut out the breakfast and lunch portion of my day. I woke up, I brushed my teeth, and I walked to school. During lunch, I just sat and talked with my friends without any food in front of me at all. I was saving up quite a bit of unused lunch money! My parents were not there when I was getting ready in the morning and not eating breakfast and they were not at the lunch table where I sat not eating lunch. They had no idea that I was practically starving myself all day long. When I got home, I would eat dinner with my parents and everything seemed normal to them.

I began to lose a lot of weight. By the time I was thirteen, I had gone from being a woman's size eight or a nine to a size two or a three. I was very thin. I could not see it in myself though. I still felt like a fat girl. Friends would tell me how great I looked. They told me I was skinny and asked how I was doing it. I just laughed it off because I did not think they were serious. I still felt that I had a lot of weight to lose. I did not think I was skinny enough. At this point, I told my parents that I wanted to lose weight. They seemed to think that was a good idea. They had not even noticed the fact that I had dropped at least three pant sizes already! I thought that if my parents

had not noticed the weight loss, then it must not have been enough. I told them that I wanted to start drinking Slimfast. I had seen the commercials on television and it seemed like it could help me. My mother quickly went to the store and bought it for me!

The Slimfast did not really work out. I only used it for a couple of weeks. I began to feel like I could never lose all of the weight that I wanted to. At this point, I also started to really think less of myself. I did not feel that my parents thought I was thin enough and I agreed with them. My self-esteem started to go way down by the time I was in high school. I had previously been a fairly outgoing young girl. I had a good amount of friends and I was never afraid to talk to anybody. As I began to feel worse and worse about myself and my body, I also began to have fewer and fewer friends. I felt really uncomfortable in any kind of social situation. I did not like to be around large groups of people. I really only had one or two close friends. It got to the point where I did not even want to talk to people on the telephone.

These days, I still struggle with all of the same issues, the poor body image and the social anxiety. And, my parents continue to comment on my size. In fact, just this past December when I went looking for a winter coat with my father, he said something negative to me. He was helping me look for a coat and he asked which size to look for. I told him to find a small because, believe it or not, I fit into a small sized coat. And he said, “You're a small? I wouldn't think that you would fit into a small. You're not really a small woman.” I was flabbergasted! Who says this kind of a thing to their own daughter? I am currently five foot six and one-hundred and twenty-nine pounds. I know that is a normal weight for a girl like me. I know that is a healthy weight. Yet, I still feel that it is too much. I still feel that I am not good enough for myself or for my parents. I am always living with a kind of **double consciousness**. I am constantly looking at myself and my body through the eyes of others,

especially my parents who I know do not see me as thin enough. This makes me feel terribly about myself to the point that I do not even want to talk to people. I have social anxiety. I do not feel that I will be good enough for anybody.

What am I to do about all of this? Are these issues that I have unique to me? Is it something exclusively in me or in my life that makes me feel this way? Or, has society played a part in causing my poor body image and social anxiety disorder? With almost a quarter of the nation on some sort of diet at any given point and about 5-10 million adolescent girls and women struggling with eating disorders (Eating Disorders Awareness and Prevention, Inc.), I think it is fair to say that society has played some role in all of this. What I am going to attempt to do here is to look at my problem from different sociological perspectives, both microsociological and macrosociological. I want to see just what effect society has actually had on me. I will examine my body image and anxiety issues through the eyes of the phenomenologist, the social exchange theorist, the symbolic interactionist, the functionalist, the conflict theorist, and also the post-modern perspective. Hopefully, through all of this examination I will be able to find some sort of peace in my life! Maybe I will discover the true root of my problems. And, perhaps in the process I will even be able to cure myself! We shall see.

First, we will look upon my issues at the **microsociological** level of analysis. This will include the perspectives of phenomenology, social exchange, and symbolic interactionism. These micro perspectives look at person-to-person encounters and the details of human interaction and communication. This is different from **macrosociology** in that macro perspectives are more concerned with the large scale characteristics of social structure and roles. Basically, microsociology focuses more on the individuals in a social situation while macrosociology focuses more on society as a whole and how it affects those

individuals. However, as we have learned from C. Wright Mills and his ideas on the **sociological imagination**, both perspectives are important. In fact, he tells us that there is a huge link between these two perspectives and that knowing one can be very helpful in understanding the other. And, one can also have a great effect on the other.

I will first look at my problem through the microsociological perspective of **phenomenology**. In order to do this, I think that it is necessary to first gain some understanding of what phenomenology is actually concerned with. This perspective questions the taken for granted assumptions, challenges culturally learned ideas, and treats as problematic what is taken for granted in order to understand the everyday world. Generally, we simply accept what we see in our everyday lives and assume that it is normal and the way that things are supposed to be. We do not realize that things could be done much differently and that perhaps our current way of doing things is wrong. We only believe that things are as they should be because that is what our society tells us. This is why Berger and Luckmann encourage us to explore our everyday lives using their concept, **social construction of reality**. It is our actions and our interactions which make up our reality. Thus, reality can be changed.

In her paper, "The 'Difference' A Red Face Makes: A Critical Sociology of Bullying in Capitalist Society" (2004/5), UMass Boston student Deborah D'Isabel writes about being ridiculed by her fifth grade teacher. He, along with the other children in her class, made fun of her because of the fact that when she gets nervous, her face turns beet red. As a child, she never questioned her teacher's actions because he was an authority figure and she just assumed that what he was doing was right. She took for granted the idea that adults can do things that are inappropriate and wrong. I think that this really has a lot to do with Dorothy Smith's **standpoint theory**. She mainly fo-

cuses on women, but I believe that the theory could also be applied to children as they are also “**underdogs**” or a marginalized group. Basically, this theory focuses on what she calls the everyday/everynight worlds of individuals situated in subordinate positions. I feel that I can relate to this. When my father was talking with my grandparents about how much food I could eat, making fun of me for eating more than he did, I never thought to **problematize** his actions, or point out what he might have been doing wrong. I simply thought that something must have been wrong with me. In my mind, my parents knew everything and were always right. That is what my culture had told me that adults are right and children are wrong. Clearly, there was an error in my judgment. **Ethnomethodology** is the process by which people invoke certain taken for granted rules about behavior with which they interpret an interaction situation and make it meaningful. When I look back on it now, practicing ethnomethodology in understanding those events, I see that there was actually a flaw in my father’s actions just as there was a flaw in the actions of D’Isabel’s teacher. I was a child and my father was really in charge of whatever I put in my mouth. I did not know anything about nutrition or planning a healthy meal. As a parent, my father should not have allowed me to eat so much food. He could have told me “no” once in a while. Maybe if he had done that, a weight issue would not have arisen at all.

I feel that the film *12 Angry Men* also contains some good examples of phenomenology as well as a few linkages to my personal experiences. This is a film about twelve jurors who are trying to decide whether or not a young man is guilty of murdering his father. Immediately, eleven of them are ready to send him to the chair. Only one juror is thoughtful enough to question the boy’s guilt. Why are these men so quick to assume that the boy is guilty? I think part of it had to do with their initial in-

ability to question the so-called facts of the case. They take for granted that people on trial might not always be telling the truth even if they think that they are. That one juror who voted not guilty took a rather phenomenological approach and actually questioned and problematized every so-called truth from the case in order to better understand what had happened. He understood that what other people said were not always correct. I think that I could take a page from this man’s book! What I mean is that in my life I assume that the people who are telling me that I am not thin enough are correct in their statements. Maybe this is not the case, though. Perhaps there is actually nothing wrong with me. Perhaps there is something wrong with them.

It seems that we have a useful understanding of how to look at my issue from the perspective of the phenomenologist. We now take a look at things from the perspective of the **symbolic interactionist**. Symbolic interactionism is concerned with our **gestures** and **language** and the meanings that we place on them. These are symbols that help us to understand each other’s actions. There is also a focus on the self and the effects of a person’s internal thoughts and emotions on his or her social behavior. And, when you are experiencing what Charles Horton Cooley calls the **looking-glass self**, your internal thoughts can have a huge impact on your behavior! This is due to the fact that the looking-glass self, according to Cooley, is based on three elements: “the imagination of our appearance to the other person, the imagination of his judgment of that appearance, and some sort of self-feeling such as pride or mortification” (Wallace & Wolf, 203). Clearly, with my body image issues, I feel that I appear fat to other people and I imagine that they think less of me because of that, and so I end up with a self-feeling of mortification. This in turn leads me to not really want to socially interact with other people.

In her essay, “Alice in the Gendered Sports-Fan Wonderland: A Sociological In-

quiry" (2004/5), UMass Boston student Elizabeth J. Schumacher discusses women's place in the sports world as fans. She talks about the ways that women are expected to act at certain sporting events and the ways that they actually act. She says that certain behaviors are not as accepted coming from women as they would be from men such as jumping up and down and yelling and getting really into a game. She says, "It is our appearance, many times, that defines how others will treat us and how they believe we should behave" (Schumacher, 11). I agree with this statement. And, I feel that it goes along quite well with the ideas of symbolic interactionism. For me, it is not so much about being a woman who is physically into sports games as it is about being thin.

Thinness is a symbol. I feel that it symbolizes the elite. I think being thin definitely affects how others behave toward you. I think that I want so badly to be thin because I feel that it would really change how others view me and thus change how I am treated. Or, it would at least change how I would expect to be treated. I definitely feel that being the weight that I am at and having the appearance that I currently have cause people to treat me differently than they would if I were my desired weight. Obviously, there is a lot of **self-interaction** taking place here! All of these thoughts about my desired weight and the effect it will have on the way people treat me are things that go through my mind on a daily basis. I often interact and talk with myself about what I can do to change my appearance for other people. This has a lot to do with Erving Goffman's idea of **impression management**. That includes the ways in which the individual guides and controls the impressions others form of him or her. I want to be thin so that people will form a different impression of me than I think that they currently do. That is probably a huge factor in my social anxiety. Because of my appearance, I do not feel good enough and I do not expect people to treat me or view me as good enough. I ex-

pect people to think less of me because I think less of myself. I see myself as fat and so I feel anxious about **face to face social interaction**, or interaction in which I am physically in at least one other person's presence, because I think that the other person will see what I see in myself and also feel that I am not good enough.

The film *Affluenza* serves as a good example for symbolic interactionism and it also has certain connections to me and my issues. This is a film about people who need material things. They work their lives away trying to buy bigger and "better" things for themselves. These material things are symbolic of a certain status in society. I think that people's need for material possessions is very similar to my need for thinness. People feel that if they acquire things such as a nice car, a big house, or a yacht that they will receive a certain kind of respect from other people. I feel the same way about becoming thin. I feel that if I can make myself look a certain way, I will get the respect that I deserve. In this way, thinness as well as material possessions are symbolic. Each symbolizes an elitist way of being, something to be respected. These symbols help to instruct others how to act toward you.

The next perspective which I will look at is the **social exchange theory**. This perspective focuses on the assessments that individuals make of the **costs** and **benefits** as well as the **punishments** and **rewards** of their participation in a certain action before they act. Simply put, "What is in it for me?" "Do I have something to gain from this?" Or, "Do I have something to lose?"

In her essay, "Obsessed with Impression Management: A Critical Sociology of Body Image in Capitalist Society" (2003/4), UMass Boston student Michelle B. Jacobs actually relates this theory to her own body image issues. She writes about how looking good can actually bring you many rewards. She says that often if a female looks good, she is very likely to have a drink bought for her at the bar. And, Jacobs believes that a

more attractive person is generally more likely to be hired for a job over a less attractive person with similar qualifications. Both of these are clearly benefits of being attractive. I can really relate to what Jacobs is saying here. Obviously, I feel that by being thin which is much like being attractive, I will receive more benefits than costs and more rewards than punishments. I will no longer have to deal with the punishments of hearing my parents discuss how fat I am or how I need to lose weight. Instead, if I become thin, I will receive the reward of being told that I look incredible. That is important to me and that is part of the reason why I am constantly trying so hard to lose weight.

I also believe that a relationship exists between the film *The Matrix*, social exchange theory, and myself. We watched the scene from the film in which Neo has to decide between swallowing the red pill or the blue pill. He has to decide between knowing the truth about life or going on with things as they are. I think that in making this decision, the ideas covered by the social exchange theory played a big part. At this point, Neo must have been weighing his options. He must have thought of the benefits and the costs of either choice. In the end, he chose to know the truth. For Neo, there was more to gain from this choice than there would be from the other. For him, knowing the truth was a benefit and not knowing was a cost. I think that this example applies to me and my issues with social anxiety.

When it comes to the choice between interacting with others and not interacting, like Neo, I weigh out my options. I will not take part in most forms of interaction unless I get something out of it, unless the benefits or rewards are high. Otherwise, it is not worth the anxiety that I go through over it. There is really no **altruism** in me when it comes to interacting with others! I will almost never speak to another person just for their sake or just for the sake of doing something nice or good. It just is not worth it to me when I weigh it all out in my mind. I will

not even say, "God bless you" to somebody when they sneeze! For me, saying that would involve a cost to me. That cost would be my anxiety. I would probably feel nervous for at least ten minutes after saying it while I thought about what that other person might be thinking about me. That is too big of a cost!

That pretty much sums up my micro-sociological analysis of my issues of poor body image and social anxiety. Now, let me look at these problems from the macrosociological perspectives of functionalism, conflict theory, and post-modernism. Note that macrosociological perspectives focus on the large scale characteristics of social structure and roles. We have already looked at the ways in which my person-to-person interactions have affected me and my issues of body image and social anxiety. Now, we will look at the effects of society as a whole. And, as mentioned previously, I am not the only person in the world suffering from these troubles. So, society must be at least partly responsible for all of this! My parents are not the only ones to blame! Their outlooks on weight and body type, as well as my own, have been influenced by the society in which we live.

The first macrosociological perspective I will make use of is **functionalism**. This perspective views society as a system of interrelated parts in which each part works together with others and no part can be understood in isolation from the other. Every part of society has a function to perform. In this way, society is almost like a living organism. Also important to the functionalist is the idea that society emerges from the consensual agreements based on **shared values** and **norms**. And, a shared value is basically a generally accepted standard of desirability used by functionalists to analyze how social systems maintain and restore equilibrium. I think that it is these shared values and norms which the members of a society are **socialized** to internalize which form the bond between the different

working parts of that society. Two major functional sociologists are Talcott Parsons and Robert K. Merton. Each makes some interesting arguments. For example, "Parsons says that people internalize the values of a society, that is, they make the social values of the cultural system their own by learning from other actors in the social system what is expected of them. In other words, they learn role expectations and so become full participants in society" (Wallace & Wolf, 28). I think that this idea can be illustrated by my experiences with viewing others in society and in the media who have perfect bodies. A perfect body plays a function for a woman in America, and women are faced with role expectations to perform that function. In order to become a full participant in society, it is expected of me to internalize that functional role and work towards acquiring it. Merton talks a lot about **manifest** and **latent** functions. These are the obvious and not so obvious punishments or gains that occur after certain actions. For example, "Merton cites Veblen's analysis of conspicuous consumption, the latent function being the enhancement of one's status in the eyes of the world" (Wallace & Wolf, 52). This is something that relates greatly to me. Consider, if I learn my expected role of being thin and then fulfill that expectation, certain latent functions will follow. Much like the conspicuous consumer, my status will also be enhanced in the eyes of the world.

In reading the book, *Tuesdays With Morrie*, by Mitch Albom, I found one truly important shared value which many people in our society seem to have lost sight of. That value is love. Functionalism has much to do with expecting the members in a society being motivated as well as bonded together by certain shared values. In our society, I feel that at one time these values included family, hard work, trust, loyalty, friendship and, again, love. However, I think that our value system has become rather corrupt. I do not think that these particular values are as important as they once were. In fact, I feel that

many of them have been replaced by the values of money, success, and even the perfect body. These are the things that our society has come to value. I am included here. This must be due to the fact that the part of society based around values is not functioning properly.

In the book Morrie Schwartz says, "Love each other or perish" (Albom, 91). This is an important statement. I believe that this is what is happening to me. I am not focused on loving myself or others, I am focused on attaining the perfect body and so I am perishing. I am encountering a great amount of anxiety due to the lack of caring for myself in my life. For me, becoming thin is an integral requirement for my **integration** into society. This is how I will be incorporated into the social order. It is my goal. And, a part of my efforts in **goal attainment** involves focusing on every flaw in my body, working out constantly, and restricting my diet. Love should be the most important **institution**, or mode of behavior instituted by the collectivity, but clearly that is not the case. In our society the **collective conscience**, the totality of beliefs and sentiments common to average sentiments, is not geared towards love. It is geared toward perfection. Our society values things like the perfect body and that is why I value the perfect body as well.

Now, I will consider the ideas of various **conflict theorists** and attempt to understand my mess from the point of view of this sociological perspective. Conflict theorists focus on the struggles in society for **power**. Those who hold this perspective believe that all social relationships are based around power relations. Further, conflict theorists see power as scarce, unequally divided, and essentially coercive. Where functionalists might be concerned with values, the conflict theorist is more concerned with **self-interest**. In other words, conflict theorists see people's actions and motivations as resulting from personal or collective need for more power, wealth, and status. Two

classical and contemporary conflict theorists are Karl Marx and C. Wright Mills. Mills was an important contributor to the Marxian ideas of conflict theory. Marxist conflict theorists emphasize economic factors in shaping social conflict, and therefore the concept of class is central to their analysis. "Class is defined in relation to property: in other words, whether or not one has property, and what type, is central to one's situation in life, and the sorts of classes that exist are crucial to the nature of a society" (Wallace & Wolf, 89). I think that this is true. Further, I believe that it can apply to my situation so long as one considers thinness as a property of the individual. Although this is not how usually Marxists define property, I think that is fair to consider thinness in terms of property relations due to the fact that it can be bought and sold. Services of trainers, dieticians, and different surgeries can all be paid for in order to achieve the perfect body. So, it is a form of property. And, I believe that if one acquires this type of property then she can move up in terms of class just as she could if she acquired a certain amount of money.

C. Wright Mills "shares Marxist and neo-Marxist theorists' concerns about alienation, the effects of social structure on the personality, and the manipulation of people by the mass media" (Wallace & Wolf, 111). As I mentioned previously, I think that the mass media has a great effect on people's desires for certain possessions, such as thinness. If something is advertised and put in people's faces day after day, of course it will eventually affect them and cause them to desire that item or that way of being. Society exerts a great amount of control over its members. If it were not for that control, perhaps I would not feel such a great desire to be thin.

I think that the movie *The Big One* produced by Michael Moore provides great examples of what can happen in a society that is highly motivated by power. In the movie, Moore interviews multiple big-time compa-

nies such as Nike and Payday. And, he finds that many of these companies are downsizing and relocating their factories overseas. Although they are making tons of money, companies like these feel the need to remain competitive in their industry. They need to stay on top and be the best. Michael Moore disagrees. He feels that companies like Nike and Payday need to rethink their values. They need to consider the people who are working for them. I feel that the movie *Tuesdays With Morrie* reinforces the ideas of Michael Moore. In this movie, Mitch Albom is first caught much like workers in or even bosses of those big time companies. Before his regular meetings with Morrie, Mitch is obsessed with work and money and success. Also like the heads of those big time companies, Mitch has forgotten what is really important, people and love. He has a serious case of "affluenza!" That film, *Affluenza*, definitely comes to mind when thinking about conflict theory and the needs of the people in these films for success and power in the form of wealth and material possessions. It is this success, this power as the conflict theorists would put it, which fuels all of the relationships and interactions that these people take part in.

I can completely relate to each of these films. Our society stresses success to such a high degree that it is hard to think about anything else. And, success is not only measured in dollars. Image is also an important part of success. For me, being on top, being successful and powerful has much to do with looking great. To have the perfect look and the perfect body is to be a part of a higher **class** in society. Such "**class consciousness**" or recognition of my class identity and the circumstances of my situation are not satisfying to me. I feel that I must take part in some sort of **adaptive upgrading**. I need to gain more control over my environment as well as my position in society. For me, this would involve radical weight loss. Thinness would give me a sense of **authority** or that sort of power which is attached to

the role of being the skinny girl in our society. I feel that this is necessary because currently my poor body image is affecting many of my social relationships. My poor body image makes me feel that I am fat and thereby belong to a lower class in this society. Therefore, I often feel caught in a power struggle which is often mentioned by conflict theorists. Because I believe that I am a fat girl, it is hard for me to interact with others who I feel have a better body than me. In situations where I have the best body in the room, I feel that I have the most power. And conversely, in situations where I feel that I am the fattest person in the room, I feel that I have the least power. This could be a huge cause of my social anxiety. Again, it is all about the society in which we live. If America was not such a competitive society, so obsessed with the attainment of power, I might not feel this way.

The final macrosociological perspective that I will use to explore my poor body image and social anxiety issues is the **post-modern perspective**. This is a view that looks at the ways that sociology and particularly sociological theories have developed in the latter part of the century. It is an intellectual movement that questions both the modern promise of science as a source of truth as well as the relationship of theory to knowledge. A couple of major sociologists in this area include Michel Foucault as well as Jacques Derrida. I think that the arguments of the postmodernists surrounding knowledge and its relationship to power in society are particularly interesting. When describing the thoughts of Foucault, the James Farganis writes, "The human sciences have taken human subjects and instead of empowering them with knowledge, they have made them the objects of inquiry and subjected them to norms and rules of appropriate behavior that have been legitimated by the idea of science itself" (423). Here, it seems as though Foucault is taking issue with the sciences. He seems to see scientists as having a certain kind of knowledge

which empowers them. And, I do not feel that Foucault sees scientists as deserving of this power. I could be wrong, but that is my interpretation. I think that the sciences were intended to be good for the people, but sometimes society does tend to take things out of their **natural state**. It distorts the basic goodness, decency, and equality that are natural conditions of human kind and turns everything into a kind of power struggle. I think that looking at things through the **sociological eye** brings into the open this unexpected reality that others might be afraid to see. Getting back to the statement about Foucault, I feel that the general public does take what scientists and doctors say to be true because they do hold a certain type of power over us. How many people second guess a diagnosis given to them by their doctor? Many people trust in the doctor's knowledge and his or her power. This could be a mistake. When it comes to my issues of body image, I also find myself looking to somebody that I feel has more knowledge than me and thus more power. I am looking to the norms of society surrounding body weight. Who comes up with these norms? Many times, it is our well-trusted doctors who dish out these norms. However, simply because something is said to be a norm does not mean that we need to go along with it. And, if I did not worry so much about these norms, maybe I would not care so much about being thin. It is okay to just be as I am.

Mitch Albom's book, *Tuesdays With Morrie*, contains many important aphorisms in relation to this sociological exploration. I think that he would agree with me and Foucault, at least as I have interpreted the latter's ideas, that knowledge should not put certain people in places of power as it currently does. In the book, Morrie Schwartz says, "Love is the only rational act" (Albom, 53). I think that this supports my previous statement. Clearly, Morrie does not put very much weight on logic or knowledge as we know it. To him, love is the most important thing in the world. I think that is really

great. It has really helped me to shape my own ideas on what is truly important. Love really is all that matters. Life is not about knowledge or possessions or power or being thin even. It is about loving yourself and the people around you. Once I came to this conclusion, I sort of forgot all about this poor body image issue. Becoming thin really lost a lot of its value to me. I think that instead of striving for these types of things such as material possessions, knowledge, and thinness, we should all really strive for what Morrie tells us to strive for, love. That is not to say that all of those things are completely unnecessary, however. They are nice things to have, but our lives should not be based solely around those things.

To conclude, although I do suffer from poor body image and social anxiety disorder, they are not completely my fault! Much of them have to do with many of the face-to-face interactions which I have been a part of throughout my life. I think that my parents and other family members have had a strong impact on the way that I view myself. Not only that, but society as a whole has affected me as well. If I did not live in such a materialistic, image-obsessed society, I might not feel the need to workout constantly and eat nothing but salads! Through writing this essay, I have seen both the micro as well as the macro effects that this society has had on me. And, you know what? It makes me angry. I like to believe that I am above the influence, but clearly I am not! This has been fairly eye-opening. So, what can I do to better myself? Are there specific steps that I can take to better my situation?

I cannot be sure, but I think that listening to the words of Morrie Schwartz could be a start. It has already begun to help me. I just need to get my priorities straight. Being super skinny should not be at the top of my list. Like Morrie suggests, love should be number one. I should concentrate more on my relationships with people and how important they are. Once I stop focusing so much on weight and looks, I can start focus-

ing on those people that I care about. I mean, it is important to pay attention to one's health, but not in such a superficial manner. I also feel that this will help me in terms of my social anxiety. I am so caught up in what people think about me that I cannot even talk to them. If my body and looks were not my top priority, maybe I would not think so much about people judging me. All I can do though is try and give out my love and then let it come in—another Morrie aphorism. Life is too short to worry about such menial things!

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