

Vadala 1

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Discrimination

Every time someone looks at you he is judging you subconsciously by evaluating your appearance. What do people see when they look at you? Do you judge people by the way they look, dress, or wear their hair? You should not judge people by their appearance, hair, clothes or skin color; appearances can be deceiving.

I know I have been judged by the image I project. My hair is long and I drive a 1968 VW bus. The police have pulled me over many times for little things that most people would never have been stopped for. The first time I was pulled over was when I was driving my sister home from renting a movie. A cop pulled me over because of a new law stating that one cannot drive anyone under the age of twenty for the first six months after he obtains his license. I had my sister in the car with me. She was nineteen at the time and was my sister, so I did not think anything of it. When he pulled me over he asked if I was still under my six months. I replied, "Yes."

He asked, "Why do you have a passenger under the age of twenty in your car?"

I politely replied, "Because she is my sister and she is nineteen."

The officer shouted back, "I don't care! The law says no one under twenty, no if's, and's, or but's!" I was shocked at the way that officer treated me. Stupidly, I went to court to try to fight it. When I got there the kid in front of me had been caught smashing car windows and had not paid all of his fines. He wanted a sixty-day extension in order to pay his fine. He was dressed in a suit and tie and had a flat top buzz haircut. His request was granted. I

turned to my dad and whispered, "Wow, this guy's nice. This should be easy." When I stood up and walked over to the stand and told him my story (by this time my sister was already twenty), he looked at me and said in a stern voice, "The law says no one under twenty--what is the problem?" I paid my fine and left.

The next time I was pulled over it was for a broken taillight. The fuse had blown on my bus. When the officer pulled me over I said in a thankful voice, "Hey, thank you for telling me. This is a thirty-three year old car and there is no light that comes on when a fuse goes, so I have no way of knowing." I was trying to be as polite as possible; he thought I was trying to hide something. He searched my car. After finding nothing, he wrote my ticket. It was a hundred and eighty-five dollar moving violation. He claimed if someone were to run into the back of my car they could have been seriously hurt. Most people I have talked to have received a fix-it ticket. Not me, the longhaired hippie. When I went to the DMV to have the ticket signed off to prove I had fixed the light, even the people there could not believe I had gotten a moving violation.

I was also pulled over for having no front license plates. I was treated like a criminal. The police officer pulled me out and sat me on the curb. He thought I had stolen the car so he did a huge background check on me and the car. There was another time when I was listening to some Bob Marley and Peter Tosh, wearing a Rasta beanie and some big cop sunglasses. I looked at him and he looked over at me and smiled and flipped his lights. He got me for having no back bumper. I had been restoring it to its original color, so I had it sanded and powder-coated in my back yard. The cop once again searched the car for drugs and illegal substances. I was pre-judged because of my hair, car, and the music that I listen to, just as some people are discriminated against because of their clothes and lifestyle.

Bill Waters lives in the Huntington Beach Pier Side Parking Structure. He is part of the P2 Crew (2<sup>nd</sup> floor crew). He has no other home. Most people think of homeless people as beggars and thieves. I do not. I do not judge people by their appearances. The day I met

Bill, I was working and he came up to me and asked if he could get a shirt for a discounted price because there was a hole in the armpit. I said, "Sure, usually it is 20% off, but since the shirt is already on sale for 50% off I don't think we can give it to you an additional discount." He looked discouraged, then told me that he lived under the pier:

My lucky day came a week back when a lifeguard woke me up and told me about a job opening. It was a janitorial position, in which I would clean out the restrooms at the beach. I was overwhelmed with joy. You see, most people won't even give me an application because of the way I look. Now I have a chance to prove myself. I want to have a clean shirt for the interview; I want to look sharp (Waters).

I soon realized he was not a slacker or a drug user, but just someone who was trying to get by. I bought him that shirt because I felt sorry for him. Later, I thought he might have been lying so he could get a discount. Much to my surprise, he came back a couple of weeks later and told me that his job was going great. He tried to pay me back, but I would not accept it. He told me that he had almost been arrested for sleeping on the beach and had had to move to the parking garage, but besides that life was good. The one thing I never forgot that day was that he came back and told me, "No matter who you are or how smart you are, you always have something to offer" (Waters). I asked him how he had ended up on the streets. He looked up angrily and I knew I had really hurt him. There was that moment of awkward silence and in a raspy voice he said, "Some people have good parents others have bad parents and a few have abusive ones. I ran away from mine because they did not deserve me" (Waters). I never talked about that with him anymore. I think he could have had a much better life if people had not viewed him as a drug user or bum. Maybe even someone would open up their home to him one day if they could look past his rags and dirtied face.

Bill was pre-judged because of his clothes, and the lifestyle he lived, just as some people are discriminated against because of their skin color. Prejudice is something that is taught. That is what makes it difficult to understand. The novel *To Kill A Mockingbird* is set in a small, southern town that is full of prejudice. Blacks in this novel were characterized as

"dark[ies], lying lazily in the shade and letting time pass [them] by" (Lee 124). This town has pre-judged everyone who is black. A black man is accused of raping a white woman. Everyone in the town says that justice must be done. A white lawyer, Atticus, is to defend the black man. He is accused of being a "nigger lover" for his part in the trial (Lee 57). He tries to teach his daughter about prejudice. Atticus tells his daughter, Scout, "You never really understand a person until you climb into his skin and walk around in it" (Lee 31). Atticus is trying to explain to his daughter that this person who is accused of this rape is going through something different than if he were a white person. Atticus is the only one who will defend this man. He wants his daughter to try to look at Tom from a different perspective, as a man, not just a black man. He wants her to live in his skin and feel the prejudice that he feels. We, of course, know if we read to the end of the book, that he is wrongfully accused because of the color of his skin. Unfortunately, our society judges people by the way they look. Here are some astounding statistics revealed by a study done on attractive people vs. unattractive people:

"Attractive

Six times more likely to be hired

Earn 12-16% more than unattractive people

Have 20-30 times more opportunities for dating and making friends

Unattractive

7 times more likely to be abused as children

4 times more likely to be laid off

5 time more likely to be convicted of a crime"(Jeffes).

What if you had been born unattractive? What would your chances be of landing a decent paying job? Your odds would probably not be as good as those of an attractive person. This is a form of discrimination you would have to live with your entire life.

We have got to start looking at the inside of people, their character and values, instead of judging them by their appearance. All the people who are used as examples in this paper, including myself, were unfairly discriminated against because of our appearance. We had done nothing wrong. We were all pre-judged because of the way we looked. None of us was what the others perceived us to be. Next time you are walking down the street and you look at someone, do not jump to any conclusions about him because of his appearance; get to know him first.