Social Justice from a point of view of an 8-year-old boy.

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Living in Color

Cover Art: Erzuli Says "FU Pay ME" by Marcia Jones
I express and show how I feel about my racial and social identities, and my privileges and oppressions from a point of view of an 8-year-old boy: I am like an 8-year-old boy alone in my bedroom, playing with the air and allowing my imagination to roam free, and not sharing my secrets and feelings with anyone. The universe is significantly large and challenging and overly complicated enough to understand myself, and everyone that surrounds me. I laugh without knowing why, I speak without understanding, and I look around and I only see pain.
In my opinion combined with my experiences gathered from, a Social Justice course, identity development is crucial to the personal growth of every individual, and navigating though the challenges that society gives to each individual can becomes tricky, the end result is in fact worth the work. As I reflect, I can clearly see in my life aspects of privilege and oppression; for example, I become very frustrated and angry with some friends and family members who, in my eyes, seem to be contributing to the problem of racism that we (society) have created. I am also angered by many institutions and societal values that are actively racist, because as a society we seem to be doing nothing to address these issues. American society seems to be composed of mostly white ideals at the time of inception, have created this monster of racism, and yet sit idly by as it destroys lives. As I reflect back on my personal experiences, I feel guilty and ashamed because I have been discriminated against, but I have also played a participatory role in this society of racism. I can vividly remember times, not so long ago, where I contributed to the social creation of racism.

Realizing that no matter how guilty or angry I am, these feelings are valid but not productive in addressing the issues of racism. Similarly, as I cope with the fact that I am Latino, I find myself increasingly seeking to define what it means exactly to be Latino and how this affects my experiences and interactions with others, especially as a Latino gay male with an accent. I reflect through journaling, critical thinking, and conversations inside and outside the classroom as tools to identify my identity, and the results are positively challenging; some realizations are more difficult for me than others, but I am still content that I am actively participating in this process.

Reality of Race of an 8-year-old boy
Like the 8-year-old boy I have been challenged to share my feelings and secrets and step outside my comfort zone. I have experienced many challenges when it comes to learning and comprehending the complexity of my racial and social identities, my privileges and oppressions. My experiences have brought positive and negative memories; memories that I will never forget. When the process of identity development and personal growth gets challenging I tend to go back to be the behaviors of the 8-year-old boy and hide from society.

The reality is that I live in a society where brown skin signifies that a person is a minority. I feel judged by the color of my skin and frustrated that people do not seem to want to take the time to get to know me as a person, but base their judgments on my skin color, hair, accent, etc.

As the 8-year-old boy I imagine an American society where Latino individuals are the majority, living in the richest part of the country, being represented in the government as well as business, and where the standard of beauty is more than my skin color.

Bell’s (1992) work challenged me to reflect on my own history and to reflect on what racism means, and to question myself: Where is the sense of the Latino community in the U.S.? How have Latino leaders and scholars have made an impact in the U.S.? I feel the U.S. society/communities are run mostly by the white. I do not know what it means to be white. I have a minimal understanding because of what I experienced, seen and read. I would never completely understand what it means to be another race, just like any other individual of different race than mine will never completely understand what it means to be a Latino.

The reality is that I live in a society where brown skin signifies that a person is a minority. I feel judged by the color of my skin and frustrated that people do not seem to want to take the time to get to know me as a person, but base their judgments of me solely on my skin color, hair, accent, etc. It seems unfair to me that I should be judged and then ostracized by many aspects of society simply
because I have brown skin. I often wish people could take the chance and look beyond my skin color to figure out who I am as an individual and then make their judgments based on my personality and personal attributes.

Many features of my life as a minority member of society are upsetting me for me, such as not being able to find food in the grocery stores that I am used to cooking and eating, finding a salon or a barbershop that can cut my rich and dark hair the way I like it. I do not like that my culture is discounted and viewed as unimportant, except for festivity purposes where alcohol is involved (e.g. Cinco de Mayo). Society acts unaware of contributions that Latinos have made to society which makes school uninteresting for me. I am uncomfortable many times because I feel that people look at me because I have brown skin, which is associated with ugliness and carries with it a stigma of being significantly less human than white people.

It bothers me that I do not see myself or other people like me represented in the media, the government, business, or in places of higher education because I feel that I do not have any real role-model. I want to have more individual to look up to and give me advice about how to succeed in this world, but I do not know where to find them.

Bell's (1992) work made me distinguish social racism in two different ways: being a realist and idealist. Social idealism is a fantasy because there are times I wish and hope that racism stops. Social realism however is reality because I know that racism will always exist. I live in both worlds of reality and fantasy. I was raised in a fantasy because I never actually advocated for and often ignored the issues and challenges that the Latino community faces because I believed that there was no social racism. In reality, I have been marginalized and oppressed just because of my racial group and physical appearance.

Water (1999) identified racial groups to be defined by physical attributes (skin color, hair texture, facial features, etc.), and ethnic groups defined by cultural attributes (shared language, behaviors, origins, etc.). I identify myself a Latino male with an accent. My brown skin, dark hair, brown eyes, and bone structure make me part of the Latino racial group as defined by the physical attributes associated with a racial group. My Mexican-American accent, my Spanish language, cultural traditions and behaviors make me part of the Mexican ethnic group as defined by cultural attributes within an ethnic group. My family, friends, culture, religion, and my education influence my ethnic identity and have created development and personal growth.

As I express and show how I feel about my racial and social identities, and my privileges and oppressions from a point of view of an 8-year-old boy, I will continue to reflect and write about “an 8-year-old boy afraid of coming out of the closet,” and the “privilege of an 8-year-old boy.” I encourage everyone to reflect on your personal experiences. How are you privilege? How are you oppressed? And, how do you oppress other individuals?

Cristobal Salinas Jr serves as the Multicultural Liaison Officer in the College of Design, and is Doctoral Student in the School in Education at Iowa State University. As the Multicultural Liaison Officer, he identifies, develops, implements and coordinates various educational, cultural, and social actives for students of color, faculty, and staff. Cristobal provides assistance and guidance in understanding issues of diversity in the College of Design, at Iowa State University, and beyond.

References
