

Problem Analysis Paper
Running Isn't Fun

My father has never forgiven me for discontinuing with running track. He probably never will. I guess the logic just doesn't make sense to him: to stop doing something your good at and to dislike something that you do well. He couldn't convince me that running was enjoyable enough for me to continue and I couldn't convince him that I considered it pointless to run if I wasn't chasing or being chased. I never wanted to admit that I had scarred when the white guy at school jeered "Run nigger run" as I passed him on the track. I remember shaking and not wanting to cry but not knowing what else to do. Was I supposed to start fighting him? I was much too reserved and shy to get rowdy, but was I suppose to yell to attract teachers and other black kids to the scene? That was the first time I had been called out of my name, and since it probably would not be the last, I knew I had to learn how to deal with it. I already realized I had been born with the characteristic features my society deemed [terminally] inferior, so overcoming any barriers in this world would be a perpetual challenge. I couldn't fight everyone that had a stereotype against me or that hated my features—so I *was* supposed to repress my hurt and anger and just walk away, right? It seemed like from where I was, I would always have to run to gain any ground and to catch up with the "privileged" ones of society. I would always have to be above average to show myself worthy of being in their accelerated classes, in their private schools, in their social circles. "No Daddy", I said that night, "running isn't fun".

It's amazing how much we try to repress within ourselves the things others consider wrong, bad, or unattractive. When I was younger, I noticed how the people on television and magazines were smiling, happy and looking-nothing-like-me, so I couldn't help but conclude that I was different in a way that wasn't good. Of course with skin the color of chocolate, repressing my race was never an option; and no matter how tomboyish I acted everyone always knew Kristie was a girl. My only solution was to compensate for my perceived "flaws" by modifying my behavior. I thought: I'll be the nicest and the smartest girl in school—that way others won't think black people are bad or ignorant... I'll hangout more with my brothers—that way I'll be more like "the guys" and I'll find out what guys look for in girls. I'd show low self-confidence

because if I was ever *too* confident then I'd be accused of being conceited and I'd accept being unattractive so it wouldn't hurt so much when someone said it. I repressed many feelings and became submissive because I could not afford to be mean or assertive to anyone. Like the guy in my high school math class declared, "Ugly girls have to have special skills to get attention, they have to be nice and know how to cook...they have to be Superwoman".

Many times we forget how childhood experiences (like the ones mentioned) influence the way we think and how we view ourselves. As we get older we tend to attribute our discrepancies to our current situations or to the people presently in our lives, failing to trace our dilemmas back to the time when we were the most vulnerable (when we were young). Most children don't often know how to recognize instances of prejudice or injustice, but no one has to tell them how to hurt or express sadness and disappointment when it happens. Experiences such as teachers prohibiting students of different races to play together, bigger kids bullying smaller kids, or students ignoring other students when outside of the classroom can potentially develop into self-esteem issues, which can manifest into identity crisis. The questions like: "Who am I and what am I?" become tormenting when alone in front of the mirror. The search for meaning becomes frantic where every achievement and every failure determines whether to smile or cry, live or die. Jake Lamar was cited for being "too white for black people and too black for white people". Gloria Anzaldua lived in "the Borderlands" not fully in the US or in Mexico, not fully Spanish or Indian, a "Chicana tejana-lesbian-feminist poet".

Our personal accounts are as different as each fragile snowflake, but for many of us repression has been the name of the game. As adults we realize we can't all do what we like, so we do what we must. We do the things that get us by from day to day. We lose those extra pounds that disgust our boyfriends, we increase our bust-size so we can display our bodies like trophies, we go in debt to purchase things we cannot afford in order to impress anyone, we endure foot pain and backache to wear shoes that make us a sexy 4-inches taller, and we overlook our friend's racist remarks so we'll be accepted into their group. A smile makes our day, a compliment builds us up, and we walk around satisfied with ourselves because we've received someone else's approval that we are ok. Perhaps this is why the "Who am I and what am I?" questions become so aggravating, because we really know we can never truthfully answer them.

For some, repression remains the cement in their lifestyle. They will do anything necessary to hide the features they were born with and they'll change as much as possible to

please others and to garner their affections. Others learn to accept it—their skin, their hair, their weight, their big lips, their personality, their culture, etc. Maybe it's because they can't afford to hide or make alterations and in all practicality they know "if ain't broke, don't fix it". Or maybe it is because they have become content with themselves, they've learned to love their individual uniqueness that sets them apart from everyone else. This learning doesn't come easy in a society that tells you (thru various mediums) that a person's outward appearance is more important than what is inside. No wonder why after accepting who we are, many of us then feel the need to validate our identities almost to the point of exploitation. We develop justifications as a backlash to whatever '-isms' we're fighting against. We get pretty creative too: "the blacker the berry the sweeter the juice...thin is in...phat [fat] stands for pretty, hot, and tempting...women are smarter than men..." We can go on for hours defending why we are the way we are and how that makes us better, when in actuality we are constructing our own prejudice to counteract a prejudice—essentially trying to convince ourselves that we are ok. Maybe living by this if-you-have-a-prejudice-against-me-then-I'll-have-one-against-you philosophy just levels out the playing field, or maybe not.

"Do you!" DMX said in one of his hit songs—a catchy cliché much easier said than done. How possible is it to “do you” when cultures are being sold in shopping malls and advertised in music videos? We are now living in a time when it's hip to be different and cool to be ethnic. So now, more than ever, identities are being flaunted and asserted. The aspects people oftentimes repressed when they were young are now being emphasized; as college campuses offer the prime centers for ‘identity experimentations’. There are so many variations and contradictions it can get extremely complicated trying to define our identity and sometimes it gets hard liking what we've become. But at the end of the day whether we're exposed or dressed, good or best in the east or the west—we are all different by nature and whether our differences are repressed or stressed we are the living justifications of ourselves, we need no further explanations.