



The Arts and the Resiliency Factor

Foster Youth and Identity Formation



✧ From the *Sacramento Bee*...

- Michael Crutchfield's suicide raises concerns about former foster youth who go to war...
 - In his emails he talks about boredom, heat, and fear, but most of all he talks about crushing loneliness—loneliness typical for many foster youth.
 - In the weeks before he shot himself, he tried to make contact with his family, but both phone numbers had been **disconnected**. No one wrote.



✧ The Guardian Scholars Program

- **Disconnected...** that's how one of our Guardian Scholars felt when he walked onto campus prior to the program's existence. He states...

*"If I would have had Guardian Scholars as a freshman,
I probably would have felt more at home...
It's a secondary family if you need support.
The people are very helpful, like a family would be."*



✧ The Guardian Scholars Program



- Provides a campus-based program with an integrated system of services to support foster youth in the successful completion of a college degree.



✧ Program Support

- What occurs when there is no program in place to support this population of youth? ...and,



✧ At-Risk

- Why are foster youth more at risk for feeling *disconnected*?



✧ The Barriers

- Experiences prior to placement in foster care contribute substantially to a youth's developmental delays.
- The longer youth are in foster care, the greater the number of home placements they receive.
- Youth in foster care change schools more frequently, have lower GPAs, earn fewer credits toward graduation, have lower scores on state testing, and are more likely to be in special education programs.



✧ The Resiliency Factor



- Resilience implies that people are able to negotiate significant challenges to development yet consistently “snap back” in order to complete the important developmental tasks that confront them as they grow.



✧ The Resiliency Factor

- Resiliency connotes movement...in other words, one's ability to move through adversity rather than remaining mired in it.



✧ With Resilient Behavior...

- Comes the ability to make connections, which will thwart situations of loneliness and isolation, as well as nurturing a resilient and pliable identity formation throughout one's life...avoiding tragic situations...



✧ Can Resiliency be Learned?

- The key to successful development is understanding ways to identify and nourish resilient capacities even in those who are still struggling significantly with a potentially overwhelming past, so...



✧ Resilient Capacities



- What are the mechanisms that spur ongoing resilient capacities?



✧ Capacity for Resiliency

- What are the core capacities that launch a person beyond their more fundamental struggles?
- Is this capacity inherent?
- Can it be learned or nurtured?



✧ Identity Formation Process

- Resiliency, like the identity formation process, continues to develop, evolve and grow...
- In other words, identity develops as one moves through childhood to adolescence to adulthood, again emphasizing the importance of movement rather than immobility.



✧ Identity and Society

- Individual identity depends on the support one receives from the collective sense of identity characterizing the social groups significant to an individual: class, nation, and culture.



✧ Identity and Society

- The identity formation process is not an individualistic pursuit; rather it is a dynamic collaborative effort between the individual and society in determining one's sense of self.



✧ Identity and Society



- Leading sociologist Jane Kroger stresses that because one's identity is primarily a product of societal discourse, a change in feedback about oneself from important others will precipitate a change in one's own sense of identity.



✧ Is Resiliency Biological?

- With this in mind, resiliency may not be DNA-coded; perhaps it can be learned, perhaps it can be nurtured.



✧ Nature vs. Nurture



- What nurtures resiliency?



✧ Shared Beliefs, Traits, and Myths

- Author Peter Stillman explains how individuals find security and self-confidence in shared common beliefs, traits, and myths...



✧ Furthermore...

- “The sharing of common symbols assures individuals that they are not alone, that their membership in the group is secure...it is not necessary to know these things consciously; it is enough to sense them somehow beneath the conscious level” – *Peter Stillman*



✧ Identity Formation

- Many sociologists believe that successful identity formation should be an active process whereby an individual controls or mediates various childhood identifications in order to form a unique self.
- However, adolescents may lack control of their identifications.



✧ Adolescent Identity

- In fact, Kroger describes how adolescents are likely to be embedded in, or subject to, others' opinions; in other words they are rather than have their relationships.
- Yet, by late adolescence, there should be a developmental shift that enables youth to reflect on and consider the opinions of others, but not be subject to them.



✧ Developmental Delays

- But for some individuals, the complexities of mediating these identifications or making the necessary developmental shift may arise from social discrimination, poor self-esteem, or disconnection from society or culture.



✧ Maladaptive Identity Formation

- Because enculturation takes place mainly during childhood, and is formed by the individual's family, any disruption during this time may leave an individual prone to other influences, which explains further the hardships foster youth must face.



✧ Maladaptive Identity Formation



- Furthermore, if there is not a sense of belonging during this period, *gaps* in one's sense of self may fall prey to other negative influences, causing psychological conflicts and maladaptive identity formation.



✧ Maladaptive Identity Defined

- “A maladaptive identity is when individuals base an identity on all the identifications and roles presented to them in their earlier development but deem those identifications as undesirable”
– *Jane Kroger*



✧ Identity and Myth

- Linguist Edward Sapir believed that common understanding of one’s societal environment evolves from the mythic side of culture – inherent, illusive, and not openly demonstrable – that stems from childhood.
- At the same time, author Craig Roque believes that one’s primary belief system is typically expressed in myth or cultural law.



✧ Empathetic Identification

- Myth may not be explicit in that it emerges slowly, by a process of empathetic identification, or **connection** with the other.



✧ What is Myth?

- 20th Century Italian poet Cesare Pavese defined myth as having its origins in childhood, as a memory that occurs once for all time:
 - “Myth is, in short, the shape of a fact that happened once for all time, and draws its value from this absolute uniqueness which raises it beyond the sphere of time and transforms it into revelation...for this reason it occurs in the beginning, as in childhood: it is timeless.”



✧ Nietzsche on Myth

- Nietzsche describes insecurity, which revolves around the potential loss of self, as the loss of myth in our lives:
 - “Man today, stripped of myth, stands famished among all his pasts and must dig frantically for roots, be it among the most remote antiquities. What does our great historical hunger signify, our clutching about us of countless other cultures, our consuming desire for knowledge, if not the loss of myth, of a mythic home, the mythic womb.”



✧ The Hero Myth

- In the universal hero myth, “The hero discovers the ultimate nature of the world. Symbolically, he discovers his ultimate nature. He discovers his true identity. He discovers who he really is.”
– *Joseph Campbell*



✧ Rites of Passage

- Campbell expresses this standard pattern of the mythological adventure of the hero as a magnification of the formula represented in an individual's rites of passage: separation, initiation and return...which is very similar to the developmental process an individual may experience.



✧ Universality

- The meaning of a cultural myth is understood universally, transcending eras and cultural arenas.
- Myth also helps an individual internalize their value systems; it represents a stable, or foundational part of the actual configuration of identity itself.



✧ Myth's Roots

- Myth stems from childhood and is more symbolic than behavioral, which explains its connection with the arts.
- In other words, myth is often reflected in beliefs rather than behavior.



✧ The Arts and Myth

- Ernst Cassirer, in his work entitled Language and Myth, believed that all works of art are entirely “bound-up” with myth. He also asserted that words were originally accorded to images and to every kind of artistic representation, especially poetic expression.



✧ Art, Symbolism, and Myth

- Carl Jung, the Swiss psychologist and psychotherapist, defined the “symbol” as an unconscious expression of a deep inner source of which we are aware, but unable to put into words. Consequently, the symbol is constantly challenging our thoughts and feelings, explaining why symbolic works are so stimulating.



✧ Art's Expressive Power

- Furthermore, certain types of symbolism are universally understood because their meanings occur in similar forms, with similar expressive power, right across cultures and eras.



✧ Mutual Myth and Art

- Jung explained this phenomena of "mutual" myth as nothing short of a mystery:
 - “Why it is that societies with no possible way of communicating with one another have created and passed down for centuries stories that touch upon the same vital questions and employ closely similar motifs (themes) and archetypes. All of us, through all time and across the seas, share in this symbolic way the life experience.”



✧ The Power of Art

- To demonstrate the power of art/myth to one's self-efficacy, I have chosen the following two scenes from the film The Shawshank Redemption.



✧ Mozart



- *“It was like some beautiful bird flapped into our drab little cage and made those walls dissolve away... and for the briefest of moments, every last man at Shawshank felt free...”*



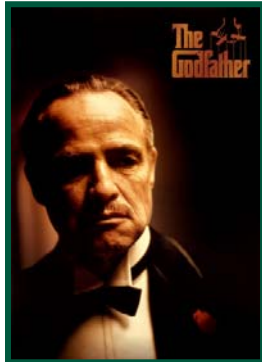
✧ Hope



- *“I had Mr. Mozart to keep me company... that’s the beauty of music, they can’t get that...”*



✧ Mythic Structures



- Mythic structures are derived not only from the symbols and metaphors of the language through literature, but they are also derived from other artistic expressions of the culture, such as film, art, music, etc.



✧ Art as Language

- One of the approaches used to explain the relatedness of the arts is to take the structural-semiotic approach, whereby the arts can be viewed as alternative language systems.



✧ Inspiring Resiliency

- I believe, mythic structures in the form of symbols and metaphors, could be utilized to facilitate resiliency. This would be accomplished by including literature, poetry, film, art, and music in a student's academic career, as part of an instructional pedagogy.



✧ Equation for success...

- **Art equals resiliency equals a thriving identity formation...**



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