3-20-2008

Beyond "Simply Understanding": Sociologically Reimagining and Reconstructing the Meaning of My Education

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Sociologically Reimagining and Reconstructing the Meaning of My Education

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Abstract: In our society, where people tend to have a very linear and individualistic way of thinking, I should have graduated college years ago, be married or about to get married, live on my own, or with my boyfriend, and have a full-time career. But none of that is happening! And I sense that people often feel the need to bring that up to me. Usually it's people I haven't seen for a while, like distant family or old friends from high school. The reality is that I live at home with my mom and my brother, work part time while taking a full course load at the University of Massachusetts (UMass) Boston and am surrounded by people who love and care for me, without many of whom I don't think I could survive. But I can't help feeling that a lot of people look at me like I am just doing what I am doing because I don't want to deal with the "real world"—like a "spoiled brat" who doesn't want to grow up. However, I have learned too much in my years in school to be satisfied with "simply understanding" (Gordon, 9). I believe that the social sciences need to be taken more seriously in academia not just as interesting subject matter, but also as a means of understanding the world in a political, economic and historical context. I agree with the *critical theorists* of the Frankfurt School that "people's ideas are a product of the society in which they live" and that what "intellectuals…should adopt is a critical attitude to the society they are examining" (Wallace and Wolf, 120). It is in the study and application of C. Wright Mills's sociological imagination that we can realize the importance of this.

In the beginning of life, when we are infants, we need others to survive, right? And at the end of life, when you get like me, you need others to survive, right? But here's the secret: in between, we need others as well.

—Morrie Schwartz, quoted in Albom (1997: 157)

The word "spoiled" has a lot of connotations, most of them negative. The Oxford Dictionary defines "spoil" as both "to harm the character of (a child) by being too lenient" and "to treat with great or excessive kindness, consideration, or generosity." And most times, at least in our society, it is followed by the word "brat."

It strikes me as rather humorous that our society can believe someone to be treated with "*excessive* kindness, consideration, or generosity." But of course, a society that stresses hard work, consumerism

and wealth cannot really value kindness, consideration or generosity. It is due to this dichotomy that I sometimes wonder if I am spoiled or just very lucky to have lived the life I have lived. My life has by no means been perfect, but I seem to have a way of bouncing back from the bad things that have happened in my life and make things turn out in a good way.

In our society, where people tend to have a very linear and individualistic way of thinking, I should have graduated college years ago, be married or about to get married, live on my own, or with my boyfriend, and have a full-time career. But none of that is happening! And I sense that people often feel the need to bring that up to me. Usually it's people I haven't seen for a while, like distant family or old friends from high school. The reality is that I live at home with my mom and my brother, work part time while taking a full course load at the University of Massachusetts (UMass) Boston and am surrounded by people who love and care for me, without many of whom I don't think I could survive. But I can't help feeling that a lot of people look at me like I am just doing what I am doing because I don't want to deal with the "real world"—like a "spoiled brat" who doesn't want to grow up.

When I began writing this paper, I focused on my packrat "problem," but now I see it as not only a problem, but also another insight into why I am the way I am. I am the biggest packrat I have ever known. I don't mean I keep things for a little while and then eventually throw them away, or keep really meaningful things in a few shoe-boxes to memorialize the "good old days." I mean that I am 99% sure that somewhere in storage I still have the wrapper from the gum I was chewing the first time I kissed a boy—in 1994. And that is probably wedged between an old bank statement and a pair of socks. Part of the reason I have so much stuff is that I have moved from my childhood home and back again a couple

times. So many of the stuff that I have are just leftovers from my childhood that I haven't gotten the chance to go through yet.

This may not appear that big of a problem at first glance, but as I prepare to graduate, move onto graduate school and enter the "real world" this problem looms in the back of my mind as I think about how much *stuff* I have, and that this *stuff* may represent the very core of my subconscious "rejection" of growing up and moving into the next phase of my life. I have also realized, while planning to write this paper, that this seemingly funny "problem" has connections to another habit in my life: failing to prepare for the future. Both of these habits seem to be related to holding onto the past or some sort of nostalgic attempt to keep things the way they used to be. Using the sociological imagination as a guide, in what follows I hope to analyze the interrelation of these in the framework of a focus on my educational/career goals and plans.

I graduated from high school in 1999. At that time I planned to go to the University of Connecticut (UConn) for four years, graduate, get a job, get married and have kids by the time I was 30. Well…that didn't quite happen as planned! I went to UConn for two years, took semesters off here and there, and technically (according to our **social norms** of post-high school education) should have been done with my undergraduate education by now. However, I am now 26 years old, four years into a romantic relationship, a "super senior" at UMB, living at home and scared to death of the next four years! The biggest question that keeps running through my mind is, "Am I scared because I'm not where 'I' want to be with my life, or because society tells 'me' I should be somewhere else?" Wallace and Wolf (2006) explain how George Herbert Mead's view on this effort in **self-interaction** is important: "The internal conversations one has with oneself are an essential part of the Meadian perspective because they are the means by which human beings

take things into account and organize themselves for action" (208). This question that I continue to ask myself does not only "organize myself for action" but also allows me to dig deeper into who **I** and **me** really are.

Mead explains that "the attitudes of the others constitute the organized 'me,' and then one reacts toward that as an 'I'" (Wallace and Wolf, 206). Because the outside world may perceive "me" in a certain way, "I" find myself working harder to defend my choices and prove that I am where I want to be. "The others" may see "me" as a person who is disorganized, messy, or emotionally attached, but I like to argue that "I" am just doing my own thing and who cares what others think? In researching my packrat tendencies, I have found that, yes, I may be holding onto the past in some way, but I am also allowing my true self to show through the seemingly unconscious ways I decide what to keep and what to throw away.

In the article "To Retain or Relinquish: Exploring the Disposition Practices of Packrats and Purgers," Coulter, et al. (2003) explain that "packrats and purgers have very different 'core beings,' value systems, perspectives about product meanings, and attitudes toward being future versus past focused, wasteful versus industrious" (42). Their research has hinted at a correlation between possessions and empathy. They have concluded that when "packrats" do eventually get rid of their stuff, it is either by donation or handed down to a friend or family member, to "ensure that they are remembered by the new 'caretaker'" (42). Packrats may be "past-focused," but it does not always mean we *dwell* on the past. I have learned to deal with my past, and I enjoy going through my old possessions and reminiscing while thinking about how my sense of self has changed over the years. In *Tuesdays with Morrie*, Morrie and Mitch discuss something very similar to this. While discussing the past and forgiving others,

Morrie says that "Love is the only rational act," and I agree. What I choose to keep is an act of **rational choice**, where I see the benefit of keeping certain things that remind me of those I love as much higher than the cost of throwing them away and possibly forgetting them.

Erving Goffman's analysis of the **self** focuses on resistance and creativity. He states that "our sense of being a person can come from being drawn into a wider social unit; our sense of selfhood can rise through the little ways we resist the pull. Our **status** is backed by the solid buildings of the world, while our sense of personal identity often resides in the cracks" (Wallace and Wolf, 236). I agree that I convey my uniqueness, my self, in the ways that I "resist the pull." I do not allow myself to become caught up in social norms that praise consumption and penalize frugality, which may be why I keep so many things! I like to keep things because I believe they will have some utilitarian value in the future, either by me or by someone else. I see no sense in buying something new when I have so many things that could be reused. Many people in our society find this strange because we put so much emphasis on detaching ourselves from emotion, adopting what Georg Simmel calls the **blasé attitude**, following a schedule of what we should be doing in some certain time in our lives, which often manifests itself in our consumption patterns. And as we "grow up," we're "supposed to" forget the things that brought us joy in our younger years because we're "supposed to" be focusing on the future.

I never realized it until coming to UMass Boston and learning about **relations of power** in many of my classes that my status as a woman in a patriarchal society such as ours has a tremendous impact on why I continue to ask myself the question of whether or not I'm "supposed to" be where I am in my life. I have experienced what Dorothy Smith calls the **line of fault** "be-

tween what [I] know and experience as [my] everyday life and what is official knowledge, as expressed in the symbols, images, vocabularies, and concepts of the patriarchal culture" (Wallace and Wolf, 294). I know many 26-year old male students at UMB and none of them seem to ask this question of themselves. It is in our society's collective unconscious that women around my age are supposed to be planning for marriage and children, along with having a successful career. While I am *thinking* about these things, right now I need to focus on finishing my undergraduate degree, and I am lucky enough to have a boyfriend who agrees! Smith explains this phenomenon as **bifurcation of consciousness**; she notes that when women do become involved in public life they still have to continue to pay attention to what is going on at home; we are expected to perform "traditional" roles as caregivers along with our "modern" roles as career women.

This issue becomes especially complex when people ask me what I go to school for and I tell them one or all of my interests, then find myself defending the social sciences I have come to know and love. I am double majoring in anthropology and social psychology, and enrolled in the environmental studies certificate program. I have come to expect to hear "What are you going to do with that?", along with a confused or disapproving look. This look has come to be a stimulus I have to constantly interpret in order to respond to in every situation. According to Wallace and Wolf, Herbert Blumer's "**symbolic interactionism** inserts a middle term into the stimulus-response couplet so that it becomes stimulus-interpretation-response" (Wallace and Wolf, 214). This theory stresses that many situations are interpreted differently by different people, and during these interactions I have a list of retorts lined up in my head, then I choose one or more depending on who asks the question or the situation we are in. This **face-to-face interaction**,

stressed by Berger and Luckmann's **phenomenological approach**, "is where the real action is" (Wallace and Wolf, 278).

Similarly, in "My Choice of a Lifetime: Finding True Love in a Sociological Imagination," UMass Boston student Katherine Heller uses this theory of symbolic interactionism to describe her "problem" of finding true love and states "love and a successful relationship are both terms that can be defined differently by different people. Perhaps I am too much into looking at my relationship in terms of how other people say a perfect relationship should be" (21).

In their explanation of **social constructions of reality,** Berger and Luckmann examine "the processes by which any body of knowledge comes to be accepted as 'reality'" (Wallace and Wolf, 277). We have been socialized to believe the "reality" that certain things need to be done in a predetermined span of time, a very **modernist** perspective, and it is during these conversations that I find myself the most uncomfortable with my position in life. Most times I just say, "Whatever I want," and leave it at that. I feel as though I can see and hear their thoughts: "Shouldn't she be working in an office somewhere? When is she going to grow up, get a "real" job and raise a family?" In our society it is somewhat acceptable for a woman to forgo having a family *if* she has a successful career already in place. It is during these uncomfortable moments, I am ashamed to say, that I succumb to what Charles Horton Cooley describes as the **looking glass self.**

Cooley defines this concept as being constituted of the following three elements: "the imagination of our appearance to the other person; the imagination of his judgement of that appearance; and some sort of self-feeling, such as pride or mortification" (Wallace and Wolf, 195). When people react to my educational/career goals (or perhaps my lack thereof in their view) I feel a mixture of anger, fear and defiance. I realize that I may just be imagining that they are

seeing me in a negative light, but I have become so used to this response that I cannot help but internalize it. I am angry because I truly enjoy what I am doing; I am fearful because I then begin to doubt the happiness I feel and see it as a cop-out or a "spoiled" emotion; and I am defiant because they don't know me and have no idea what I go through on a day-to-day basis. I feel as if these different emotions are fighting across the **front and back regions** of my everyday life and personality—using concepts drawn from Erving Goffman's **dramaturgical perspective,** pointing to the ways in which we present and conduct ourselves as if on and off stage. In the back region I am hiding my fear and anger, while in the front region I try to only display defiance or indifference. In "Why I Smoke: Sociology of a deadly habit," SUNY-Oneonta student Emily Margulies explains "the individual acts according to how he wants the **generalized other** to react to him. In order to call upon the desired attitudes of others we must present ourselves in a way that the symbols and attitudes we project will arouse the desired reaction in them" (3). This **impression management** is really tough for me because I would like to appear confident to those who may doubt my choices, but I can't help but be hurt by their lack of understanding.

Abraham Maslow's "holistic-dynamic theory" assumes that "people are constantly being motivated by one need or another and that they must at least partly satisfy lower level needs such as hunger and safety before they become motivated by love and esteem needs…Moreover, some people are driven by neurotic needs to perpetuate the status quo rather than to move in the direction of psychological health or self-actualization" (Feist and Feist, 493). I think that what some people may call "spoiled" relationships in my life have allowed me to satisfy my safety, love and esteem needs so I could become motivated by "cognitive needs," which are described as

"a desire to know, to solve mysteries, to understand, and to be curious…to find out how something works just for the satisfaction of knowing" (Feist and Feist, 502).

Many people in our society are driven by the "neurotic needs to perpetuate the status quo," as shown in the film *Affluenza.* Affluenza is a disease of consumerism that has been caused by the never-ending struggle to attain the "American Dream." It has symptoms such as exhaustion, anxiety, constant permanent dissatisfaction and fractured family lives. I do not feel these symptoms in my life, which is why I continue doing what I am doing. Perhaps by staying in school and "rejecting" the "American Dream" I am working to ensure that I am not motivated by consumerism's "neurotic needs."

When I am at school I really feel like I am in my element. My friends and family lovingly poke fun at me and call me a professional student, but the truth is, if I could be, I would! Learning new ideas and being validated on my own ideas is like a high for me. To me there are few things more rewarding than working really hard in a course and getting an A, or laboring over a paper for days and getting it back with affirming comments from a respected professor. These feelings are stressed by George Homans, a **social exchange** theorist whose first of five propositions, the **success proposition,** states that "for all actions taken by persons, the more often a particular action of a person is rewarded, the more likely the person is to perform that action" (Wallace and Wolf, 306). I am rewarded for my hard work with good grades, which in turn are rewarded with a scholarship, so I continue to do what I have been doing.

However, I didn't always feel this way about school. My first two years of college, at UConn, were an academic mess! I failed courses and received papers back with Ds or Fs on them. But the funny thing is, it was during that time that I also learned many of the things that make me the person I am to-

day. I didn't grow up in a house full of college graduates. In fact, neither of my parents went to college, but both were fairly successful in their careers and provided for my brother and me well enough. But I did grow up in a house full of encouragement and love. I made pretty good grades in school and was rewarded with high-fives and "I-knew-you-could-do-it," while a lot of my friends would get money or gifts when they did well. It was just a given that I would go on to college and continue to "live up to my potential." My experience at UConn didn't quite happen the way it was planned, and I look to the theory of **cultural capital** as an insight into my experience there and beyond.

Pierre Bourdieu argues that parents provide children with cultural capital. He believes "those from privileged homes have the attitudes and knowledge, especially cultural knowledge, that make the education system a comfortable, familiar sort of place in which they can succeed easily" (Wallace and Wolf, 113). Though my family was and continues to be very supportive of my educational career, I didn't fully understand the goal of my educational career until I was in college for a while around like-minded people. I was lucky enough to have had the money to go to a good college out of high school, but the environment was filled with kids who *had* grown up in a houseful of college graduates, and I could feel that in every class I attended.

I would like to quote an old journal entry I recently found—which I wrote during the summer after my last semester at UConn, in 2001—in order to highlight the change I went through at this time:

> …*Maybe the whole time I knew that I was there for reasons other than academia…I learned so much from the people I surrounded myself with. I've learned how to appreciate myself for who I am and not to focus on the things*

> *I can't change; I've learned that money is not all that matters in the world…it's nice to have a decent supply to have a good time with, but the goal of college is not to study something you don't like just to make a lot of money down the road. Money does not equal success. To be successful one must accomplish goals she sets for herself, not goals someone else has set for her, or goals she thinks she has to set to make others happy. I've learned that learning is one of the most stimulating activities one can pursue. I've learned to appreciate nature for more than a stomping ground for humans…I've found the therapeutic sensations of walking through the woods and finding different kinds of trees and staring in utter amazement at how they grow so strong and tall…sitting at a dam in the river and watching how the water stops flowing from a man-made device, or a stream with massive rocks causing rapids to gush toward a steep drop…*

In a way, I was taking a **phenomenological** approach and decided to "suspend or 'bracket' my learned cultural notions" (Wallace and Wolf, 262) to define my social situation. It was then that I took an oath to reject the disease of consumerism highlighted in the film *Affluenza* and concentrate on the non-material aspects of happiness. I refused to allow my life to be "taken up by caring for things instead of people" (*Affluenza*).

"**Phenomenology** asks us not to take the notions we have learned for granted, but to question them instead, to question our way of looking at and our way of being in the world…[it] asks us to assume the role of the stranger" (Wallace and Wolf, 262). I was assuming the **role of the stranger** at UConn because everything I was learning was new to me but "normal" to the people from whom I learned them. When I first got to Storrs I was very unhappy and home-

sick; I was a city girl stuck on a farm. In fact, there were so many girls with my name there that people just started calling me Boston. However, by my second year I had made such amazing friends that I did not want to leave! It was as if I had woken to a whole new world: from music to nature to animals to literature to science; the learning was never-ending with my friends. No matter where I went I was learning something. Walking or driving through the woods I learned about trees and soil, around the farm I learned about animals, at the clubs and in the dorms I learned about music. In retrospect it was by far one of the most intellectually stimulating environments I have ever been in. My **stock of knowledge** completely changed and enabled me to think of the world in a different way.

I never thought I would ever experience anything quite like UConn again. However, as strange as it may sound, due to the differing physical environments, I have felt almost the same way about my experiences at UMass Boston. Sure there are no dorms, or farms, or even much grass, but the people I have met here are equally as intelligent, interesting, and fun to be with. What is even better is that my courses and professors have also been a huge influence on the way I see and think about the world. I would have to say that the overall intellectual experience I have had at UMB has been a continuation of my first taste of such feelings at UConn. My personal enlightenment at UConn paved the way for my academic enlightenment at UMass Boston.

I think the main reason for the above is the overall academic tone at UMass Boston. I don't feel like a "nerd" or a "geek" when I spend hours on end debating scholarly issues with friends. SUNY-Oneonta student Emily Margulies explains this feeling in terms of **exchange theory** in her paper "Why I smoke: Sociology of a deadly habit." "People's interests find expression

in social groups. People are attracted to a certain group because of the perceived reward they may receive from the association. Sometimes just the association itself is the reward. Often times, it is not what people do together, but the fact that they do it with others that makes an experience enjoyable. Most human pleasures have their roots in social life" (5). I also feel very comfortable at UMB because many of the people I have met have had similar experiences: going to college after high school, taking time off, and then coming to UMB with a serious purpose.

However, it is those times that I am not at school that the trepidation sets in. In her paper, UMass Boston student Katharine Heller states "I can see now that some of my dilemma has come about due to the fact that society has been feeding me information about love and relationships that may be totally unrealistic but that I have come to internalize nonetheless" (25). Although Heller knows that many of the aspects of "love" she has been seeking have been socially constructed, she cannot help but be disappointed that she is not able to find it. In my situation, I know that society's focus on "hard science," business, or medical majors are also socially constructed; I cannot help but **internalize** the negative feelings people project on me.

In *Keeping Good Time*, Avery Gordon explains C. Wright Mills's idea of how "'The Social Role of the Intellectual' was to refuse 'the job' the institution offered and the position of the **scared employee**. The scared employee, ruled by a 'general fear…sometimes politely known as 'discretion,' 'good taste,' or 'balanced judgement,' remains mired in 'the job'—'the pervasive political sanction and censorship of most middle class intellectuals'" (9). The workers in Michael Moore's film *The Big One* are caught up in a similar situation. They had become so loyal to their companies that when they got fired they felt as though they were being betrayed by an old friend. Emile

Durkheim (Wallace and Wolf 2006) calls this a ***corporate voice***, where people end up pursing the interests of their company instead of their own. When that tie is broken they feel a sense of ***anomie***, or normlessness.

I have learned too much during my extended time at school to allow myself to work in a dead end job and become a "scared employee*.*" The reason I have stayed in school so long is because I have become fixated with the prospect of "changing the world," or at least doing some good in it. Another one of Morrie Schwartz's conversations with Mitch in *Tuesdays with Morrie* hints at this idea as well. When the young Morrie went to his father's factory and saw the way people were being **exploited** by the employer controlling the **means of production** intended to create **capital** he vowed he "would never do work that exploited someone else, and he would never allow himself to make money off the sweat of others" (Albom, 78).

I have learned too much in my years in school to be satisfied with "**simply understanding**" (Gordon, 9). I believe that the social sciences need to be taken more seriously in academia not just as interesting subject matter, but also as a means of understanding the world in a political, economic and historical context. I agree with the **critical theorists** of the Frankfurt School that "people's ideas are a product of the society in which they live" and that what "intellectuals…should adopt is a critical attitude to the society they are examining" (Wallace and Wolf, 120). It is in the study and application of the **sociological imagination** that we can realize the importance of this.

C. Wright Mills writes that the "first fruit of this imagination—and the first lesson of the social science that embodies it—is the idea that the individual can understand his own experience and gauge his own fate only by locating himself within his period, that he can know his own chances in life only by becoming aware of those of all individuals in his circumstances" (Mills 1959: 349). I now know that the period in which I am currently living—often described as "post 9/11" or in terms of global climate change—is situated in a particular historical, economic and political context that shapes the way I feel and act on a daily basis. Mills describes how for a long time "hard sciences" were the "common denominator of serious reflections" and that "other terms and other styles of reflection seem mere vehicles of escape and obscurity" (351). I think that the problem I am facing (feeling a certain way but being told by society that I should feel another way) is enmeshed in these old ways of thinking, and that the sociological imagination of the social sciences will soon become the norm. Then people will no longer ask me "what are you going to do with that?"

In "The Roots of Procrastination: A Sociological Inquiry into Why I Wait Until Tomorrow," UMass Boston student Jennifer Kosmas states "if we can become aware of our own social constructions, then we can also break out of the self-destructive habits by knowing ourselves" (1). In the film *Twelve Angry Men*, Henry Fonda's character appears to also reject the idea of "simply understanding" and instead employs many of the concepts we are learning in our theory course, such as being aware of social constructions and looking at a situation through the eyes of the other. Because of Fonda's character's strong **sense of self**, a man's life was spared and eleven other men became aware of their own socially constructed views and prejudices. This film highlights **symbolic interactionists'** theory that different people can interpret the same situation differently, and that getting "just the facts" is rarely as easy as it sounds.

Since I have started becoming serious about school (within the last 5 years or so) I have learned much about the world (and this country's place in it) that I never knew before. And many things make me so mad

that I just can't sit around and wait for them to change! Learning history in grade school and high school was nothing compared to what I have learned in college. I have this feeling as though I was lied to in those schools, and now that I am beginning to learn a little bit of the "truth" I am addicted to finding out more. The 'truth' I have learned is that there is no one "truth."

Knowing and understanding that there are other knowledges that exist and function in the world has been a complete eye-opener for me. I have realized how hard it is to see a way of life as just an **ideology** that was conjured by some political force to legitimate a certain agenda. We take for granted the notion that a certain society is "natural" when it is really a sociopolitically constructed perspective serving particular interests (class notes 11/9/07). We have been **socialized** to believe that our individualistic, capitalist, and "democratic" society is *the* way and all other societies should function as ours. However, some may say that ours is a heavily commercialized, media-driven society constructed to serve the interests of the "dominant group," the white upper-class males. The movie *The Matrix* is an allegory for this, where machines have constructed an illusory world to keep the human population docile. I used to feel like Neo in *The Matrix*, like someone who "accepts what [s]he sees because [s]he's expecting to wake up" (*The Matrix*). It was as if I had been stuck in "the world that had been pulled over [my] eyes to blind [me] from the truth" (*The Matrix*). Now that I have learned about ideologies other than those occupied by a "developed" capitalist society, I find that I am extremely empathetic to the plights of others and want to do all I can to fight social injustices. I would never have realized all this if I had not stayed in school for so long.

I think this empathy is the greatest connection between my self as a packrat and my self as a "professional student." I'm still not exactly sure where it came from, but I do know that the emotional attachment I put onto "things" is connected to the emotional attachment I feel toward many issues I have learned about in school. In fact, I never even sell back my school books because I feel like I will lose that information forever; even if I don't have the answer right away I know I can go to my office and look it up in one of my many books! The very act of selling back textbooks only strengthens the feedback loop of capitalism. Publishers of textbooks must realize that many students cannot afford these expensive books, and that students count on that extra cash at the end of every semester. So they make deals with college bookstores to buy them back at a fraction of the price, and then in turn resell them for more than that the next semester! This is not to serve the best interest of the student; it is to serve the best interest of the publishers and booksellers—to make more profit.

Our capitalist society blocks emotion, and when people internalize this blockage they become alienated from themselves and others. According to Wallace and Wolf, Marx believes **alienation** happens when "people view each other in terms of the narrow standards of the workplace rather than as full 'species beings'" (Wallace and Wolf, 88). Many people in the U.S. are so fixated on their work that they have no time or energy left to do the things they really like to do or to face the things they really need to face. In *Tuesdays with Morrie*, Morrie and Mitch have a discussion about forgiveness, and Morrie tells Mitch to "forgive everyone now; don't wait!" and that "the culture we have does not make people feel good about themselves. We're teaching the wrong things. And you have to be strong enough to say if the culture doesn't work, don't buy it. Create your own" (Albom, 36). Morrie impresses upon Mitch that emotion and the ability to convey it to one another is such an important part of being human.

Sadly, many of the "wrong things" we are teaching reinforce the idea that love and

emotion, or "*excessive* kindness, consideration, or generosity" (Oxford Dictionary) spoil people. The fact that I allow my emotions to guide my life and letting others know how much I love and appreciate them is how I have created my own culture, and I am going to try my hardest to continue making it that way and pass it on to others.

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