Child Labor and Father-Gods: A Cultural Complex of Public Schools in the United States

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Abstract. This paper works from a Jungian perspective to explore the unconscious dynamics of an authoritarian cultural complex at work in public schools in the United States. The paper exposes two areas of what Jung called the shadow archetype: the historical narrative of child labor during the industrial revolution as a traumatic societal event; and mythic images of the Greek Father-gods who buried, ate, or imprisoned their children. The working hypothesis of the paper is that the trauma of child labor operates as a social force, an unconscious archetypal pattern of authority and exploitation that is imaged and illuminated by the mythic narratives of the Greek Father-gods. Using depth psychological concepts and methods, the paper reveals how these repressed traumas create unconscious cultural attitudes that view children as commodities whose innate value and potential are sacrificed to feed the nation's economic power and growth rather than leading out the potential within each student. Kristeva's theories of abjection and subject in process provide psychoanalytic insights into how authoritarian cultural attitudes toward the education of children enslave students in a mandated instructive process that inflicts a kind of violence upon them. In conclusion, the paper suggests that the current system of education calibrated to standardized testing needs to broaden significantly to include transformative educative processes encompassing learning through the body, senses, feeling, intuition, and imagination.

Keywords: abjection, child; collective unconscious, cultural complex, cultural unconscious, education; personal complex, personal unconscious, public schools; subject in process.

Introduction

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the online learning experience of children and teachers across the country provided an opportunity for a closer examination of public school education in the United States. These reflections led to some troubling realizations. One of these realizations concerns the aridity of public schools, the term referring not to a lack

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of rainfall but to a system that inhibits broader possibilities of learning for development and growth. This paper explores the aridity in public schools from a Jungian perspective. Looking below the surface, into the unconscious dynamics at work in public school settings, it is possible to pinpoint the harm caused by objective teaching methods that subjugate students and their teachers to a system that renders children *body-learning disabled*—an educative experience that sidelines even dismisses the body, senses, feeling, intuition, and imagination as avenues of knowledge-making.

More particularly, this paper explores the contemporary Jungian theory of cultural complexes to understand a psychological dynamic contributing to the current dominance of objective teaching methods: the destructive presence of an authoritarian Father-complex. In what follows, I examine two aspects of the unconscious shadow of this complex: the historical narrative of child labor during the industrial revolution as a traumatic societal event; and mythic images of the Greek Father-gods who buried, ate, or imprisoned their children.

The working hypothesis here is that the trauma of child labor operates as a social force, an unconscious archetypal pattern of authority and exploitation that is imaged and illuminated by the mythic narratives of the Greek Father-gods. Using depth psychological concepts and methods, I show how these repressed traumas create unconscious cultural attitudes that view children as commodities whose innate value and potential are sacrificed to feed the nation's economic power and growth rather than leading out what is already within each student.

From a Jungian perspective, the effort to bring about needed change in the delivery of education in public schools begins by engaging with the "'shadow'" archetype, which C. G. Jung (1943/1966) described as "the dangerous aspect of the unrecognized dark half of the personality" (p. 96, para. 152). Traveling in this terrain, in what follows readers will learn and understand how a complex at work in the unconscious substrate of public schools creates and sustains *cultural attitudes* toward child learners and teachers that constrain a child's freedom to utilize the creative and knowledge-making powers of the body, senses, feeling, intuition, and imagination within the classroom.

Philosopher and psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva's theories regarding *abjection* and *subject in process* bring a vital perspective to our understanding of these cultural attitudes. Kristeva helps pinpoint the presence of a cultural attitude in public schools, one that limits students to a stifling role as labor producers. Through this psychoanalytic lens, we see how the system of public schools enslaves children and their teachers in the mandated instructive process that inflicts a type of violence upon them, namely the loss of time and creative freedom for embodied and imaginal engagement of transformative educative processes.

COVID-19 and the Problem of Educating Children From the Neck Up

During the lockdown forced upon the nation by the COVID-19 pandemic, the closure of school campuses and online learning was a radical adjustment for many. With the assistance of dedicated teachers inside virtual classrooms, parents and caregivers struggled to homeschool their children. As a caregiver for my grandchildren, I assisted them in navigating their online learning experience. Across the country, computer screens depicted checkerboards of video frames of children's faces. These images of "talking heads" portray

what Lawrence (2012) declared as "being educated from the neck up" (p. 10). For Lawrence, education from the neck up prioritizes rational processes of the mind, dismissing the body, senses, feeling, intuition, and imagination. From this perspective, the COVID experience of child learners and their teachers was a sign of the objective non-COVID education offered in the United States. This sign dramatically portrayed the extreme, one-sided emphasis of the objective teaching methods on standardized education, accountability through testing, and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math) curricula.

In the United States, with the enactment of standardized education, testing, and STEM curricula, educators are required to teach what the governing legislative policymakers dictate. Teachers and students are thus bound by the objective teaching methods of legislative policies that curtail opportunities for transformative learning that utilize the body, senses, feeling, intuition, and imagination. Caught in a learning paradigm that emphasizes memorization and test preparation, teachers lose creative freedom in designing and teaching curricula that support learning for each child's unique individuality and for that of a class (or even a school) as a group. Child learners are mandated to attend school, learn through memorization, and be tested on the objective facts of the standardized curriculum, losing the freedom to have at least some choices in the creative expression of their learning.

Other harmful effects of the objective methods used in public schools have been noted. For example, the results of the study in *State Standardized Testing Programs: Their Effects on Teachers and Students* include

> four prominent findings: (a) teachers and students feel a tremendous amount of pressure associated with high-stakes testing; (b) the pressure felt by teachers results in drill and practice type of curriculum and instruction; (c) the pressure felt by high-stakes testing is greater in disadvantaged schools and results in more drill and practice instruction; and (d) gifted and talented students feel pressure to perform well to bring up all scores oftentimes resulting in disengagement from the learning process." (Moon, Brighton, Jarvis, and Hall, 2007, p. v)

This pressure-provoking education mirrors Jung's (1946/1970) insight that "in the destruction of the individual and the increase of the fiction we call the State . . . the individual dwindles to a mere cipher" (pp. 225-226, para. 457). Linking Jung's thoughts with the focus on objective learning in public schools, the research shows that child learners and teachers embedded in the heritage of child labor are often reduced to mere numbers, agents of systemic objectivity driven to produce the correct numbers—high scores on standardized tests.

Establishing the Link Between Public Schools and the Jungian Idea of the Complex

Historically, laws requiring compulsory education of children were enacted to protect children's right to receive an education. However, these laws were initially attached to child labor reform laws. In this paper, I argue that these laws and other subsequent educational legislation cast the shadow of what Jungian psychology has called a *cultural complex*. Based on Jung's theory of psychological complexes at work in the psyche of an individual, a cultural complex refers to the presence and operation of "an emotionally

charged group of ideas or images" working at the level of the group (Sharp, 1991, p. 37). For Thomas Singer and Samuel Kimbles (2004), "cultural complexes are based on repetitive, historical group experiences which have taken root in the cultural unconscious of the group" (p. 7). "Group complexes," the two Jungian analysts added, "are everywhere and one can easily feel swamped by their affects and claims" (p. 7). Mostly, they added,

> these group complexes have to do with trauma, discrimination, feelings of oppression and inferiority at the hands of another offending group . . . Group complexes litter the psychic landscape and are as easily detonated as the literal land mines that scatter the globe and threaten life—especially young life—everywhere. (p. 7)

Singer and Kimbles formulated the modern Jungian idea of the complex applied to regional, religious, ethnic, racial, gender, and other groups from foundational work by Jungian analyst Joseph Henderson. Henderson (2018) used the term *cultural unconscious* to refer to the layer between the personal and archetypal levels of the collective unconscious. From a Jungian perspective, of course, the collective unconscious is described as "a structural layer of the human psyche containing inherited elements" that are "distinct from [the material in an individual's] personal unconscious" (Sharp, 1991, p. 35). The collective unconscious is the layer of the psyche where Jung (1954/1968) believed the archetypes—unconscious primordial and potential structures that become conscious through the materiality of images in one's lived experience—are thought to originate.

As we prepare to apply Jung's theory of the psychological complex to public schools, it is helpful to briefly describe a person's lived experience as a cluster of "'feeling-toned ideas' that over the years accumulate around certain archetypes" (Sharp, 1991, p. 38). Jung (1948/1969) stated that the constellation of a personal complex suggests a disruption in consciousness that can impede an individual's conscious functioning. Through his work with patients in psychotherapy, Jung (1948/1969) recognized complexes as fragments split from the individual's consciousness that exist as independent entities and behave autonomously within the personality. The etiology of a complex, he believed, is often trauma or an emotional shock that results in fragmentation or splintering into a complex (Jung, 1948/1969).

The Trauma of Child Labor and the Elements of the Authoritarian Father-Complex

During the industrial revolution, the trauma of child labor became a mainstay of economic development. Children experienced what amounted to enslavement as they labored in coal mines, textile mills, factories, canneries, and farms under harsh, unhealthy, and often abusive and dangerous conditions for long hours with little or no pay. The attitude of moral correctness toward child labor arose from the cultural framework of family members, including children, working together on the farm and in the fields. However, as large industries developed incorporating child labor, even very young children were cut off from family support to work alone without protection in these industries.

When the societal trauma of objectification and abuse inherent in child labor was recognized and legislated as morally abhorrent, the trauma split off into a cultural complex. Donald Kalsched (1996) called the psychological defense of trauma and the subsequent splintering into a complex a disassociation. If the trauma ends, with time, fading from memory, the psychological void left by the trauma can remain as an unseen phantom injury

(Kalsched, 1996). With Kalsched's work with trauma in mind, this research examines the psychological phantom of the dissociated and emotionally charged memory of child labor that haunts the cultural unconscious of public schools.

Kimbles and Singer (2004) developed cultural complex theory to assist in understanding the wounds of complexes that produce forces creating "conflicts between groups and cultures" (p. 1). According to Singer (2006, 2020), the characteristics of cultural complexes are their unconsciousness, autonomous functioning, and resistance to consciousness. The complex repeatedly occurs in the group psyche throughout its history. Furthermore, cultural complexes "collect experiences and memories that validate their point of view," promoting "simplistic and black and white" thinking and producing strong emotions or affects (Singer, 2020, pp. xxii-xxiii).

To understand and engage with the authoritarian Father-complex embodied in the public school system, it is helpful to briefly examine the elements Jung believed make up a complex. These elements include the *shell*, the archetypal core, and the strong affect that is constellated by the complex. For Jung, a psychological complex contains two parts. He called the first part the *shell*. The shell of a complex, wrote Edward Whitmont (1991), is

> largely shaped by childhood events, childhood traumas, difficulties and repressions and so can always be reductively traced to one's personal past and explained in terms of cause and effect. In fact they should always be experienced in this light first, for these associated patterns are the concrete manifestations of the complex in the here and now. (p. 66)

For example, one (there are many—both positive and negative) expression of the Father-complex is an individual who has problems with authority and the associated patterns of judgment, control, oppression, and restriction. These patterns reflect the childhood experiences of the individual's father that were imprinted in the shell of the complex within the psyche.

Inside the shell of the complex is an archetypal *core*. The core is where archetypal energy is constellated and released for the purpose of growth and transformation. From a Jungian perspective, the archetypal core of a complex is an image, which infuses the complex with meaning (Shalit, 2002). The archetypal core, rooted in the collective unconscious, manifests into consciousness as dream or fantasy images that "correspond to mythological motifs" (Whitmont, 1991, p. 73). In the next section, we examine the myths of the Greek Father-gods as the archetypal core of Father-complex of U. S. public schools.

The Core of the Father-Complex and the Turn to Greek Myth

Throughout history, mythic images and narratives provide a lens for viewing the archetypal roots of human experience. For Jung (1951/1969), psychology "translates the archaic speech of myth into a modern mythologem . . . which constitutes one element of the myth 'science'" (p. 179, para. 302). Here, Jung (1951/1969) acknowledged that the science of myth in psychology is the recognition of the ever-present "*living and lived myth*" in human experience (p. 180, para. 302) (emphasis in original).

James Hillman (1975) considered that Greek myths principally offer a polytheistic pattern that can "hold the chaos of the secondary personalities and autonomous impulses of a field, a time, or an individual" (p. 29). The polytheism of Greek myths also holds a cultural group's autonomous impulses. From this perspective, let us now examine the

Greek myths as modern mythologems found in the archetypal core of the Father-complex of public schools.

For the Greeks, according to Hesiod's *Theogony* (ca. 700 B. C. E./1988), the problematic ancestral heritage of the Father-complex began with the god Ouranos: After his children were born, Ouranos hid them in the womb of Gaia—the Earth. Kronos, the youngest son of Ouranos and Gaia, had the courage to revolt and cut off his father's genitals. Following his father in power, Kronos feared one of his children would overthrow him, so he devoured each child born of Rhea. However, when Zeus was born, Rhea hid her son and gave Kronos a swaddled stone to swallow as a substitute. In the tales of Zeus' progeny, the King of the Gods swallowed his pregnant wife, Metis, to prevent his own succession.

The heritage of a potential Father-complex of public schools lies in the bedrock of these Father-gods acting not in the best interest of their children but to retain power by swallowing or imprisoning them. Applied to public schools, the cultural complex is imaged by the father eating, consuming, or imprisoning his own children. The effects of the complex arising from the unconscious ground of the system's devotion to objectivity and the perpetuation of its own power include the circumvention of autonomy in children. As an archetypal image, the Father who eats or imprisons his children also portrays a sense of powerlessness and the loss of creative freedom that children and teachers experience within the system focused, as we have said, on objectivity, rote memorization, and test preparation. Along these lines, Cameron Graham and Dean Neu (2004) stated that "far from being merely a 'neutral' mechanism for measuring student achievement or teacher effectiveness, standardized testing helps align teachers, administrators, and even parents with such government goals as cost reduction and the vocational orientation of education" (p. 295).

Applying Jungian theory to the public school classroom, the complex swallows children whole, not by the teachers who struggle with them and for them, but by the policy-dictates of a Father "government" that prioritizes the rote memorization of facts over creative engagement with the meaning and context behind or within those facts. For children, the difference between the two approaches is profound. Evoked by the myth of the Father-god who eats or stifles his young, a learning approach dedicated to objectivity interferes with the cultivation of imagination and a student's embodied experience with what they are learning. This is crucial, for at some level, learning for a child is not just about history or physics but is also about who they are and what the arc of their soul might need to thrive.

It is a working theory of this paper that the needs of the soul have no place to be expressed or met in a system geared toward standardized testing. Similarly, from a classical Jungian perspective, a child's engagement with the Self is thwarted. Instead, children find themselves imprisoned in the hollow belly of standardized education. They are disenfranchised, or dissociated, from an empowering sense of their own autonomy. In public schools, children are enslaved to a system that circumvents transformative educative processes that go beyond standardized testing and rote memorization to include other vital ways of knowing, such as the body, the felt senses, feeling and emotion, intuition, and the imagination.

In Richard Mora's (2011) study of an urban middle school, when classes focused primarily on test preparation and practice tests, students reported "experiencing both a

disconnect from the act of learning and boredom," communicating a "sense of meaningless" in their education (p. 4). From this research, it seems clear that the sense of meaninglessness stifles creativity and leads to disengagement from the lifelong learning practice that philosopher, psychologist, and educator John Dewey (1916/2013) advocated (more on Dewey's educational philosophy below).

In *The Cultural Complex and Transformative Learning Environments*, Joanne Gozawa (2009) described the affects of the "stern Father image" within *transformative learning environments*, a dynamic we will define further in the next section (p. 119). By using the image of the stern Father, Gozawa (2009) examined the effects of the perfectionism of the Puritan-complex of the United States national culture within transformative learning environments. Extending Gozawa's (2009) premise that the image of the all-powerful Father is present in transformative classrooms, I propose that the Father-complex impacts public schools as a whole, which arguably are *not* transformative.

Child Labor, Compulsory Education, and the Shell of the Complex

As we said earlier, the shell of a psychological complex refers to the layer surrounding the archetypal core. With the group complex impacting public schools in mind, let us now consider how the shell of the Father God complex includes historical memories of child labor in the United States, child labor reform laws, laws for compulsory education, and the development of the public school system and its policies (see Fliter, 2018; Hindman, 2002; Sallee, 2004; Trattner, 1970; and Wood, 2020).

From a Jungian perspective, memories can manifest as images. In the case of child labor, there are thousands of documented images in the form of photographs by schoolteacher Lewis Wickes Hine. These photos re-presented and disrupted the normative cultural perception that children were a reasonable and justifiable form of labor. In *Child Labor in America: The Epic Legal Struggle to Protect Children,* John A. Fliter (2018) asserted that Hine's images created a new discourse that effectively transformed public sentiment regarding child labor, leading to reform legislation.

Psychologically, the history of child labor during the Industrial Revolution can be considered a collective memory embodied in the shell of the cultural complex of the public school system. The cultural attitude that normalized child labor shifted because of these images. However, the transformation of the cultural attitude toward children's education was incomplete because public schools retained, as their primary focus, the generation of a labor force for the current "industries" of science, technology, and engineering.

Familial and Cultural Heritage of the Trauma of Child Labor

The history of trauma is retained in families as well. Around 1913, at the age of 10, my grandfather experienced the trauma of child labor when his father bonded him to a farmer to settle a family debt. For more than a year, my grandfather lived away from home and the support of his family, working 10 to 14 hours a day in the fields until his labor paid the debt. During this time, my grandfather experienced physical abuse at the hands of the farmer that profoundly affected him with a deep wound that never seemed to heal. My grandfather rarely spoke about his time working as a child laborer or the impact of the trauma and abuse he suffered. The ordeal clearly impacted my grandfather's depressed mood, flashes of rage, and his use of alcohol as a way to self-medicate the unresolved trauma he experienced while working on the farm. For my grandfather, working as an

indentured laborer negated educational opportunities. He did not attend high school, for example. Caught in the mythological pattern of the father who eats his young, three of my grandfather's four children did not graduate from high school. My father was the only one of his siblings to do so.

To shift from a personal perspective, with complexes at work at the level of the group in mind, what might the collective repercussions be regarding the historical trauma of children treated as enslaved people in service to the economic growth of industry in the United States? Furthermore, for our purposes, how do we address the image of child labor in the context of the authoritarian Father-complex of public schools?

This paper's working theory is that the trauma of child labor acts as a social force that generates the archetypal pattern of authority and exploitation imaged by the authoritarian Father-complex. Psychologically, over the decades, the repression of this unresolved trauma created cultural attitudes that view children as commodities. Caught in the constricted confines of the complex, children are limited to serving society as a unit of work in service to the nation's global power and economic growth. Other factors, such as a child's psychological development and well-being, are de-emphasized or left off the priority list entirely. In such a setting, the simultaneous creation of child labor reform laws with laws establishing compulsory education of children becomes suspect—harmfully so. With these factors in mind, it is possible, if not likely, that the history of public schools and the enmeshed laws of child labor reform inflict trauma, the wound of which is carried within the unconscious psyche of the public school system. Psychologically, this unresolved trauma multiplies and becomes active in the group psyche, resulting in policies and legislation that tether schools to primarily objective-focused learning systems. Here we find the formation of destructive cultural attitudes and the implementation of educational policies that thwart and even prohibit the educative needs of students.

We can now look at the impact of the Father-god complex from a new angle. We are examining child learners and teachers as one cultural group and the system of education as another group, revealing how the authoritarian Father-complex—inextricably tied to the historical images of child labor and other potential memories—presents images and narratives of abuse of power that filter into the unconscious psyche of public schools. Powered by unconscious cultural attitudes, the power differential created by the authoritarian Father-complex continues with the accountability testing of standards in public schools.

In *Teaching by Numbers: Deconstructing the Discourse of Standards and Accountability in Education*, Peter M. Taubman (2009) outlined how public schools developed educational policies prioritizing government-mandated statistical accountability in standardized education and testing. Taubman (2009) referred to the implementation of standardization and accountability practices, particularly of the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), as the "audit culture" (p. 88). Furthermore, Taubman argued that the perception that these practices offer teachers greater freedom "masks the imposition of disciplinary practices of self-surveillance and self-regulation, practices that paradoxically strip teachers of their autonomy" (pp. 90-91). In other words, we can see reflected here, in the shell of an authoritarian Father-complex, the associated patterns of control, discipline, and judgment within the audit culture of public schools.

When did these patterns seep into the culture of children's education? The child labor reform law—Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA)—was enacted in 1938 "to ensure that

when young people work, the work is safe and does not jeopardize their health, well-being or educational opportunities" (2018, para. 1). In other words, the intention of the FLSA was to prevent children from being dehumanized and devoured by the industrial complex. Here, I am not referring to the industrial complex as a psychological complex but as a hegemonic conglomerate, as did President Dwight D. Eisenhower in his farewell address to the nation when he warned Americans to beware of the "military-industrial complex" (1961, p. 16). Clifford Mayes (2017) cited educational historian Lawrence A. Cremin, who "issued his prophetic statement that what he called the 'military-industrial-*educational* complex' of the 21st century would pose the greatest threat to the individual student and the historical, democratic purpose of public schooling" (p. 14). However, the same laws freeing children from the horrifying conditions of child labor within the industrial complex also mandate the compulsory education of children. The paradox is that the history of economic and political allowance for child labor in industry gave way to today's enforced education of child learners and teachers to produce workers for the same cause. As has been said above, it is my sense that the existence of child labor during the industrial age was a collective trauma, creating unseen and unaddressed unconscious shadow factors for child learners and teachers who enter the culture of public school.

For Jerald M. Liss (2013), professor of Special Education at Emporia State University, a shadow aspect of the current public school model involves the homogenization of standardized education

> around only the objective knowledge system . . . . Open only to uniformity, homogenized approaches to teaching and learning may result in the exclusion of the *subjective* knowledge system, which argues that diversity and heterogeneity are needed to produce educational creativity and innovation. (p. 557) (emphasis in original)

Similarly, Pengyu Gao (2013) stated that the labor-demanding economic model of education will not be sufficient to "meet the new social requirement for innovation demanding," requiring a system of education to generate creative people (p. 44). Together, Liss (2013) and Gao (2013) argued that the objective knowledge system of standardization does not foster creativity and innovation, something that subjective knowledge systems do well.

As we have said above, the limitations of creativity and innovation in standardized education impair the well-being of children and their teachers. We have looked at the impact of objective approaches to learning on students, particularly children. The shadow of standardization is harmful to teachers as well. In *The Pressure Cooker in Education: Standardized Assessment and High-Stakes*, Loren Agrey (2004) examined the damaging effects on teachers, who are "often distracted from a thoughtful consideration of students and unable to appreciate their individual gifts" (para. 10). Agrey added that many teachers leave the profession because of the "intense pressure" to have their students perform well on standardized tests (para. 10).

The Constellation of the Authoritarian Father-Complex in Public School Education

Psychologically, we have worked to understand how and why the intense pressure teachers experience in an objective system of learning is instigated by the authoritarian Father-complex that arises through the dictates of the federal government. Jung (1949/1967) gave

ample credence to the vital importance of the Father-complex in the ego-development of a child and the individuating adult when he stated that

> the child possesses an inherited system that anticipates the existence of parents and their influence upon him. In other words, behind the father stands the archetype of the father, and in this preexistent archetype lies the secret of the father's power, just as the power which forces the birds to migrate is not produced by the bird itself but derives from its ancestors. (p. 321, para. 739)

Jung (1949/1967) also asserted that the influence of the father within a family could, remarkably, "last for centuries" (p. 303, para. 695). Here, Jung was concerned with the father-image at the personal and familial level. At the cultural level, Gozawa (2009) wrote that the father image is "inherited from the culture's experience over the ages of father and fathering" (p. 119). She explained how, even within transformative learning environments, where nonrational and relational ways of knowing are valued, the cultural image of the stern Father image triggers a complex. When this happens, Gozawa (2009) explained that educators may unconsciously impose upon students the cultural value for rational processes of knowing.

Like Gozawa (2009), Alexandra L. Fidyk (2016a, 2016b), in *Unconscious Ties that Bind—Attending to Complexes in the Classroom* (Part 1 and Part 2), recognized the "debilitating cultural complexes" students and teachers bring into the classroom that impacts relationships and learning (p. 182). Although not directly referring to the authoritarian Father-complex, Fidyk (2016a) did speak of an attribute of fundamentalism that "arises where no in-between spaces exist. . . .[W]hat is needed is an orientation that develops and supports another center of authority—one where transition space and play are valued along with an attitude of openness and mutuality" (p. 190).

Gozawa's (2009) and Fidyk's (2016a, 2016b) research tangentially supported the assertion that pedagogical environments—transformative or not—constellate cultural complexes. In adding to this line of inquiry, I sense that the public school system, viewed as a collective psyche, constellates cultural complexes, affecting the system's attitude toward child learners and teachers in the destructive, toxic, and traumatizing ways we have been discussing.

When a complex is "triggered, activated, [or] constellated," the emotional charge manifests as a strong affect—what Shalit (2002) has called "an exaggerated emotional response" (p. 35). At a group level, the constellation of a cultural complex powered by unconscious affect takes hold of the group's collective psyche (Kimbles & Singer, 2004). Jungian theorists continue to explore how these "powerful affects [and] dogmatic ideas" lead to violence (Singer, 2006, p. 206).

From a Jungian perspective, we can consider images and narratives of child labor as a collective trauma imprinted as an unconscious pattern on the public education system's cultural identity. This identity perpetuates and reinforces the priority of developing a workforce to strengthen the nation's economic power. As we have said, the cultural identity of public education that narrowly sees students as labor producers serves to enslave children and teachers, inflicting a type of violence against them.

In examining these dynamics, a new question comes to mind: What, precisely, is the type of violence perpetrated against children in public schools?

Standardized Testing: Objective Problem and Imaginal Solutions

Examining public schools through the lens of the "father knows best" cultural attitude of the authoritarian Father-complex helps to pinpoint the violence inflicted by objective learning methods. I suggest that the "father knows best" attitude drives policymakers' legislation of educational mandates inflicted upon child learners and teachers. One outcome of this cultural attitude bearing down on child learners and teachers is the federal government's rallying cry of "No Child Left Behind" (NCLB), a program enacted by Congress in 2002. As a material manifestation of the authoritarian attitude that sees children as commodities, the No Child Left Behind Act created accountability through mandated standardized testing that, in return, qualified public schools to receive federal funding. Although NCLB was replaced by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015, monetary remuneration for testing, although modified, still applies.

Another federal report, *U. S. Department of Education's Standards, Assessment and Accountability* (October 2019), states that the directive for standardized education is measurable accountability that demands the achievement of high standards for all students (Program Overview, para 1). Moreover, the *Progress Report on the Federal Implementation of the STEM Education Strategic Plan* (October 2019) states that its mission is to produce a "workforce" and "strengthen our national security and grow our economy" (p. 1). Conspicuously absent from these reports is attention to a child learner's individuality and expression of the value of children's psychological development and well-being.

In *A Study in Jungian Pedagogy: The Archetypal Hero's Journey in Teaching and Learning,* Mayes' (2010) theory of archetypal pedagogy presented transformative education in the classroom as a psychospiritual experience of growth and development for both learners and teachers. Mayes (2010) argued that only technical training is measurable by standardized tests and cannot measure the "intangible, unquantifiable, and delicate transformation of consciousness and emotion that *transformative education* promotes" (p. 41) (emphasis in original).

Psychological Type and the Formation of a Cultural Complex

From an archetypal perspective, Mayes (2010) wrote that transformative education is broadly defined as ways of knowing that incorporate Jungian and other notions of learning that are missing in standardized education. These notions include holistic approaches that give ample credibility to the processes of the embodied unconscious psyche—the symbolic function, imagination, and Jung's four psychic functions of sensing, thinking, intuition, and feeling. Except for the thinking function, these ways of learning are largely missing in standardized education due to the subject/object split that has reduced education to primarily the rational thinking function.

In *Psychological Types*, Jung wrote about the danger of prioritizing one function over the others. In a passage on Friedrich Schiller's attempt to differentiate the different typological attitudes, Jung (1921/1971) traced a cultural shift relevant to our inquiry into the presence and operation of the authoritarian Father-god complex at work in public schools. In this context, Jung's thoughts are worth quoting at length:

> Just as the ancients, with an eye to individual development, catered to the well-being of an upper class by an almost total suppression of the great

> majority of the common people (helots, slaves), the Christian world reached a condition of collective culture by transferring this same process, as far as possible, to the psychological sphere within the individual himself raising it, one might say, to the subjective level. As the chief value of the individual was proclaimed by Christian dogma to be an imperishable soul, it was no longer possible for the inferior majority of the people to be suppressed in actual fact for the freedom of a more valuable minority. Instead, the more valuable function within the individual was preferred above the inferior functions. In this way the chief importance was attached to the one valued function, to the detriment of all the rest. (pp. 71-72, para. 108)

In this passage, Jung was determined to put his finger on the harm caused by a one-sided reliance on a dominant attitude. "Psychologically," he continued,

> this meant that the external form of society in classical civilization was transferred into the subject, so that a condition was produced within the individual which in the ancient world had been external, namely a dominating, privileged function which was developed and differentiated at the expense of an inferior majority. (p. 72, para. 108)

For Jung, "the disadvantage of . . . [the] transfer of the old mass enslavement into the psychological sphere" entailed the enhancement of collective culture and the degradation of individual experience (p. 72, para. 108). "Just as the enslavement of the masses was the open wound of the ancient world, so the enslavement of the inferior functions is an ever-bleeding wound in the psyche of modern man" (p.72, para. 108). "The privileged position of the superior function," Jung concluded, writing now from his own experience of modern European culture,

> is as detrimental to the individual as it is valuable to society. This detrimental effect has reached such a pitch that the mass organizations of our present-day culture actually strive for the complete extinction of the individual, since their very existence depends on a mechanized application of the privileged functions of individual human beings. It is not man who counts, but his one differentiated function. (p. 72, para. 109)

Psychologically, it is easy to apply Jung's ideas on the gradual cultural exclusion of the inferior function to the harm caused by systemic educative methods focused exclusively on objectivity. In making this connection, it can be said that the dismissal of sensation, feeling, and intuition, along with the imagination, is the ever-bleeding wound of public schools. Arguably, Jung's statements describe public schools, where the organization of the public school system extinguishes the individualities of children and their teachers.

Jung's position regarding the extinction of the individual in favor of the collective compares to Paulo Freire's (1968/2018) compelling image of standardized education in his "'banking' concept of education," in which teachers make "deposits" into the minds of their students (p. 72). In Freire's view, the "'banking' concept of education" empowers the "oppressors" who domesticate and dominate citizens to a particular reality that serves the oppressors' agenda (p. 75). "The capability of the banking education to minimize or annul the students' creative power and to stimulate their credulity serves the interests of the oppressors, who care neither to have the world revealed nor to see it transformed" (p. 73). "The banking approach masks the effort to turn women and men into automatons—the

very negation of their ontological vocations to be more fully human" (p. 74). Antithetical to transformative learning environments, Freire's powerful image of turning students into automatons for the collective culture reads like a science fiction novel—the very type of authoritarian control George Orwell, Hannah Arendt, and others have written about. As we saw earlier, Jung (1921/1971) was working on this same ground when he described the over-reliance on a dominant psychological attitude as "the ever-bleeding wound in the psyche of modern man" (p. 72, para. 108).

John Dewey and the Democratic Classroom

In *Teaching and Learning for Wholeness*, Mayes (2017) stated that "optimally, each individual *is* an ever-evolving act of teaching and learning in emotionally responsible, ethically subtle, and ever-emergent *I-thou* encounters with other similarly engaged individuals, not *I-it* master/slave non-relationships, in which a person [group or system] is dominating another" (p. 21) (emphasis in original). Unfortunately, due to the oppressive banking system of education, the *I-it* dynamic Mayes referred to exists between the "I's" of children and teachers and the "it" of the public school system.

Where did we derive the current philosophy of this "I-it" or "science fiction" narrative in public school education? For educationalist Richard Gibboney (2006), Edward Thorndike's mechanistic and scientific approach to education with its emphasis on measurement "dominated the last half of the 20th century in so-called school reform. With the signing of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act in 2002, Thorndike's ghost marched at the head of the reform parade" (p. 176). Gibboney (2006) quotes educational historian Ellen Condliffe Lagemann: "One cannot understand the history of education in the United States during the twentieth century unless one realizes that Edward L. Thorndike won and John Dewey lost" (p. 170).

Steeped in a deeply-etched belief in the advantages of plurality and democratic principles, educational reformer John Dewey believed that schools and society needed reconstruction to avoid the harm and problems caused to diversity and imagination by learning approaches that over-value objectivity and the homogeneity of standardized testing. In *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education*, Dewey outlined his philosophy for education reform. For Dewey (1916/2013), an important measure of a system of education is how well it generates a desire for continued learning throughout a person's life. In Dewey's view fostering a desire to learn is directly related to constructing the pluralistic and democratic classroom he thought served this end. In the democratic classroom, Dewey believed, the ideal is for child learners and teachers to view themselves as members of a social group that allows for freedom in sharing interests and collaboration. A democratic learning environment is potentially transformative because each student has a sense of empowerment to exercise the liberty of creativity in the decision-making process for curricula choices.

Tatiana Chemi (2018) linked democracy with creativity: "The ability to think creatively is based on liberatory practices that ask questions about the world, about one's self (self-criticism), or about cultures" (p. 451). Furthermore, Chemi (2018) stated that

> dualistic separations of mind and body . . . have led to disengagement and massification. The benevolent dictator in the role of teacher is expected to be mindless of his or her body and emotions, to be in control, and to educate free spirits to democracy and creativity. The problem is that this objectified

> teacher cannot either feel engaged or engage learners in authentically creative and joyful learning processes. (p. 456)

Feminist theorist, educator, and social critic bell hooks (1994) stated that when a classroom engages in a holistic learning model as a "practice of freedom," students and teachers "grow and are empowered by the process" (p. 21).

With the seemingly obvious advantages of what I have called a transformational learning experience in mind, why did Thorndike's mechanistic approach to education win out over Dewey's democratic and holistic approach? Based on cultural complex theory, one reason to consider is that the mechanistic approach aligns with the images of industry. Industrial images of automatic machines, conveyor belts, assembly lines, and mass production for the profit of large corporations correspond with the felt experience and impact of standardized education on both students and teachers. These images of oppression resulted in educational mandates that incessantly and unrelentingly gear children to meet the quality standards of an educational industry that seeks to produce the workers that will support the profits of large corporations currently dominated by technology. As stated previously, Jung (1946/1970) recognized how the dominance of the "State" [public schools] reduces individuals [children and their teachers] to mere numbers (pp. 225-226, para. 457).

Reducing teachers and children in public schools to mere numbers is one image generated by the system. In the following section, Kristeva's psychoanalytic theories offer other images that help illuminate the dynamics of an authoritarian cultural complex at work in the system of public schools.

Kristeva's Theory of Abjection and Subject in Process

Julia Kristeva's (1980/1982) theories of abjection and subject in process mesh nicely with the lifelong unfolding of the personality Jung called individuation and portray a bleak reality: children and teachers trapped in a public school system that thwarts imagination and the ability of teachers to stimulate and nourish students' potential. Applying Kristeva theories to the public-school setting offers meaningful insights into cultural attitudes toward children and their education.

In *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, Kristeva (1980/1982) wrote that the abject is neither subject nor object but a "twisted braid of affects and thoughts" (p. 1). Kristeva claimed that "there looms, within abjection, one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside" (p. 1). Kristeva described food revulsion as the most basic and archaic form of abjection. The bodily sensations of gagging, retching, vomiting, and spitting out food are an individual's rejection of assimilation (Kristeva, 1980/1982). Rejecting that which is abject has paradoxical implications for an individual rejecting, expelling, and spitting herself out—namely, this supports her efforts to establish her identity (Kristeva, 1980/1982). Psychologically, Kristeva's theory of abjection informs how children are perceived as other, foreign—abject—a notion significant to describing the cultural attitude toward children generated by a cultural complex of public schools. In addition, beyond the individual response of abjection, there is abjection as a cultural rejection of that which is judged to disrupt "identity, system, order"—those that do "not respect borders, positions, rules" (p. 4).

Anne W. Anderson (2018) explored the dynamic of abjection in a school setting in her commentary on two children's books: Miriam Cohen's (2006) *First Grade Takes a Test* and Andrew Clements' (2004) *The Report Card*. Both texts reveal a type of horror story in which children and their teachers are trapped in "a web of abjection, one in which the meanings of teaching and learning have collapsed" because of standardized tests (Anderson, 2018, p. 20). Anderson (2018) claimed the two books depict adults acting in accordance with the institutions of education, and legislative agencies are also "caught in the same web [of abjection] created by the agencies and institutions they serve" (p. 20).

A second theory developed by Kristeva relevant to our inquiry into the cultural complex at work in public schools is the *subject in process*. In *The Subject in Process*, Kristeva (1988) built on the Lacanian notion of the subject as a divided unity, or a "unitary subject" desiring significance. In her French usage of the word, Kristeva defined *significance* as an activity toward meaning, a definition that meshed well with her notion of signifying (p. 134). For Kristeva, this divided unity appears from the space of lack, emptiness, or nothingness. Inna Semetsky (2015) recognized that "Kristeva's notion of subject in process problematizes education with its habitual emphasis on 'product'" instead of meaning derived through the process of signifying (p. 1069). In other words, teaching engaged from the perspective of "subject in process" makes transformative education possible and counters the commodification of children in public schools.

In *Crisis of the Educated Subject: Insight for American Education*, Lynda Stone (2004) contended that the natural human propensity is to be subjects in process. Stone argued that rather than engaging students as subjects in process, current educational reform legislation creates "educated subjects" and "may well perpetuate undue educational and societal harm" (p. 104). From a Jungian perspective, the harm caused can be seen as the propagation of students as subject to an authoritarian cultural complex.

This Portrait of Public Schools: Going too Far?

It is possible that drawing from mythological images of father-gods and historical narratives of child labor stretches the credulity of some scholars. It is also possible that this investigation into the authoritarian complex at work in the system of public schools allows for a perspective that arises through a depth psychological approach that counters the myopic view of standardized education. As we have established, the myopic view esteems high test scores, counting the regurgitation of facts as a priority for children's education.

Those who are open to transformative learning face great challenges. For however much value is placed on children and their education, the stifling status quo of homogeneity and standardized testing frames young learners as commodities whose role and purpose are to further the goals of the labor system they are prepared and, by limiting choices, forced into.

Given all that has been said, it is not a stretch to suggest that the United States does not prioritize the personal freedoms of child learners and their teachers—and thus fails to support the nurturing of psychologically healthy individuals. From a Jungian perspective, what is needed is for individuals and groups to engage with shadow in service to soften psychological complexes that prevent transformative learning approaches from being birthed and implemented.

There is essential literature supporting this psychological work. One outstanding text is Sukey Fontelieu's *The Archetypal Pan in America: Hypermasculinity and Terror.*

In a passage exploring what this scholar called "the Puritan birth of American exceptionalism," Fontelieu (2018) cited Jungian analyst Andrew Samuels, who has argued "for the practicality of applying psychological methods to social and cultural issues" (p. 14). This process, Fontelieu (2018) wrote, citing Samuels, involves "finding out the history of whatever problem is under scrutiny, including the myth or myths which attach to the problem" (p. 14).

Accepting this invitation, Fontelieu (2018) highlighted the Puritan practice of shunning. "The idea that the Puritans were the elect and the people closest to God," Fontelieu (2018) wrote,

> was originally protected through the defense of shunning. Puritans would have nothing, or as little as possible, to do with others who did not share their exact beliefs. Puritans brought on, [and] even encouraged the disdain and persecution they suffered for their beliefs . . . For a Puritan, to be hated by "reprobates" was a sign that they were of the elect. Tantamount to a psychological defense system, shunning protected the Pilgrims' beliefs by blocking out other belief systems and the necessity of trying to understand why others disagreed with their vision of reality. (p. 15)

In her look at what she called a "nascent anxiety complex in America," Fontelieu (2018) described the destructive and sometimes violent manifestations of American exceptionalism (p. 15). Built upon attitudes of entitlement, the national character of the United States unconsciously supports laws and systems that "can allow or simply overlook many behaviors that are actually exceptionally dangerous" (p. 15).

Conclusion: Students and Teachers Trapped Behind the Lines of an Objective Education

Shifting from the attitude of exceptionalism in the United States to the context of public schools, a case has been made in this paper that the congressional enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act and other subsequent legislation and policies are examples of a cultural attitudes that are harmful, destructive, and exceptionally dangerous to students, teachers—and, by extension, to the functioning and vitality of the systems that structure U.S. society.

Although many students undoubtedly find fulfillment in fields supported by their early STEM education, in these restricted categories, many others do not. The educators, who prefer the expansiveness of transformational approaches to learning, have little choice but to try to subdue the archetypal longing for healing and wholeness through the pursuit of careers that demand objectivity. Denied educational and vocational opportunities in the humanities, arts, and social sciences—fields that do not serve the corporate-economic machine fueled in part by the authoritarian complex at work on a systemic level—educators find they cannot experience the psychospiritual sustenance of transformative education. Thus thwarted, teachers and students, along with the administrators who would prefer to provide transformational approaches to learning, remain trapped in a public school system of enslavement.

Contributor

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