

Practical textual/cultural analysis: some secrets revealed

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international / philosophy / opinion/analysis

Back at the academy we were given a broad range of material from various cultures to analyse. This material included comics, magazines (from technical, through to fashion and homemaker), political and military reports, movies, religious texts and other published material common to a particular culture. We were then asked to analyse the material and assess the current state, direction, weaknesses and strengths of that culture.



See if YOU are able to determine dominant characteristics of the culture in which the following report was produced. I'll give you a hint; dogs are simple beasts that only require a pat on the head (recognition) and simple rewards in order for them to slave endlessly for their masters, even unto to death!

Pay particular attention to the criterion used to assess well-being and what is considered of critical 'value.' The 'patients' are mid-level (soldier/slave) financial consultants, brokers and merchants.

After a dispassionate, objective deconstruction – paying special attention to those factors that are considered to be disastrous/negative by the 'losers' -- ask yourself whether a society based on such flimsy, superficial values is tenable in the long term!

America was culturally and philosophically bankrupt long before it became financially/materially bankrupt. Few locals are able to face the fact that America's fundamental structure/ideology has FAILED! Translating that failure into society at large takes a little longer; nevertheless, reality dictates it is time for a NEW PARADIGM. Corpses cannot be revived; reject those that make claims to the contrary.

Finally, I would suggest viewing a few sunrises and sunsets; a little night-sky gazing may also assist in gaining some real perspective on existence and apprehending the REAL values of life. Good luck, Joe America!

From the New York Times:
December 15, 2008

A Crisis of Confidence for 'Masters of the Universe'

by Prof. Richard A. Friedman

Meltdown. Collapse. Depression. Panic. The words would seem to apply equally to the global financial crisis and the effect of that crisis on the human psyche.

Of course, it is too soon to gauge the true psychiatric consequences of the economic debacle; it will be some time before epidemiologists can tell us for certain whether depression and suicide are on the rise. But there's no question that the crisis is leaving its mark on individuals, especially men.

One patient, a hedge fund analyst, came to me recently in a state of great anxiety. "It's bad, but it might get a lot worse," I recall him saying. The anxiety was expected and appropriate: he had lost a great deal of his (and others') assets, and like the rest of us he had no idea where the bottom was. I would have been worried if he hadn't been anxious.

Over the course of several weeks, with the help of some anti-anxiety medication, his panic subsided as he realized that he would most likely survive economically.

But then something else emerged. He came in one day looking subdued and plopped down in the chair. "I'm over the anxiety, but now I feel like a loser." This from a supremely self-confident guy who was viewed by his colleagues as an unstoppable optimist.

He was not clinically depressed: his sleep, appetite, sex drive and ability to enjoy himself outside of work were unchanged. This was different.

The problem was that his sense of success and accomplishment was intimately tied to his financial status; he did not know how to feel competent or good about himself without this external measure of his value.

He wasn't the only one. Over the last few months, I have seen a group of patients, all men, who experienced a near collapse in their self-esteem, though none of them were clinically depressed.

Another patient summed it up: "I used to be a master-of-the-universe kind of guy, but this cut me down to size."

I have plenty of female patients who work in finance at high levels, but none of them has had this kind of psychological reaction. I can't pretend this is a scientific survey, but I wonder if men are more likely than women to respond this way. At the risk of trading in gender stereotypes, do men rely disproportionately more on their work for their self-esteem than women do? Or are they just more vulnerable to the inevitable narcissistic injury that comes with performing poorly or losing one's job?

A different patient was puzzled not by his anxiety about the market, but by his total lack of self-confidence. He had always had an easy intuitive feel for finance. But in the wake of the market collapse, he seriously questioned his knowledge and skill.

Each of these patients experienced a sudden loss of the sense of mastery in the face of the financial meltdown and could not gauge their success or failure without the only

benchmark they knew: a financial profit.

The challenge of maintaining one's self-esteem without recognition or reward is daunting. Chances are that if you are impervious to self-doubt and go on feeling good about yourself in the face of failure, you have either won the temperamental sweepstakes or you have a real problem tolerating bad news.

Of course, the relationship between self-esteem and achievement can be circular. Some argue that the best way to build self-esteem is to tell people at every turn how nice, smart and talented they are.

That is probably a bad idea if you think that self-esteem and recognition should be the result of accomplishment; you feel good about yourself, in part, because you have done something well. On the other hand, it is hard to imagine people taking the first step without first having some basic notion of self-confidence.

On Wall Street, though, a rising tide lifts many boats and vice versa, which means that there are many people who succeed — or fail — through no merit or fault of their own.

This observation might ease a sense of personal responsibility for the economic crisis, but it was of little comfort to my patients. I think this is because for many of them, the previously expanding market gave them a sense of power along with something as strong as a drug: thrill.

The human brain is acutely attuned to rewards like money, sex and drugs. It turns out that the way a reward is delivered has an enormous impact on its strength. Unpredictable rewards produce much larger signals in the brain's reward circuit than anticipated ones. Your reaction to situations that are either better or worse than expected is generally stronger to those you can predict.

In a sense, the stock market is like a vast gambling casino where the reward can be spectacular, but always unpredictable. For many, the lure of investing is the thrill of uncertain reward. Now that thrill is gone, replaced by anxiety and fear.

My patients lost more than money in the market. Beyond the rush and excitement, they lost their sense of competence and success. At least temporarily: I have no doubt that, like the economy, they will recover. But it's a reminder of just how fragile our self-confidence can be.

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<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/12/16/health/views/16mind.html>

Cleaves Alternative News. <http://cleaves.lingama.net/news/story-1358.html>