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Artistic Production Processes as Venues for Positive Youth Development

Erica Rosenfeld Halverson

> That's what I think artists do. They struggle with their pieces, with what their pieces are about. They struggle with who they are and how they're going to show themselves.
> — *Street Level Youth Media Participant, Summer 2008*

Adolescence is traditionally framed as a developmental time dominated by conflict, moodiness, and risky behavior. While most developmental psychologists have rejected the framing of adolescence as a universal and inevitable time of "storm and stress," some agree that adolescence is "more difficult in some ways than other periods of life and difficult for adolescents as well as for the people around them" (Arnett, 1999, p. 319). The *positive youth development model* focuses on the idea that, "when given adequate resources young people acquire and put to use constructive capacities that allow them to make a positive contribution to the civic realm" (Youniss & Hart, 2005, p. 73). Viewing adolescence as a time of promise as opposed to a time of risk has the potential to remake the way we understand the nature of development and our role as researchers and educators in supporting the development of young people.

The study of learning environments that support positive youth development is a growing field in the United States (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1992; Larson, 2000; Lerner & Benson, 2003; Mahoney, Larson, & Eccles, 2005; Roth, Brooks-Gunn, Murray, & Foster 1998). Considering positive development shifts the focus from the study of problems and failures to the study of trajectories that promote productive outcomes for adolescents and leaves open the possibility that "all young people have the potential for successful positive development" (Lerner, 2005, p. ix).

The positive youth development model is particularly relevant to adolescents from marginalized communities. In addition to challenges faced by all adolescents, these youth must also navigate identities between multiple cultural worlds. Typically these challenges are seen from a deficit perspective as a conflict between native cultural models and universal developmental expectations (Lee, Spencer, & Harpalani, 2003). A positive development approach reframes this deficit model. Margaret Beale Spencer's (1999, 2006) PVEST[1] ecological model, for example, presents development as a series of stressors and coping responses. Some stressors are developmentally universal (e.g., changes in parent–child relationships during adolescence) while others are contextually and culturally specific. Positive development does not require individuals to reject cultural ways of being in order to achieve mainstream success. Rather, positive development involves the construction of *adaptive* coping responses that yield emergent identities: "Emergent identities define how individuals view themselves within and between their various contexts of development" (Lee et al., 2003, p. 9). Spencer's model for development, coupled with the study of learning environments that support emergent identities, has paved the way for a new approach to understanding adolescent identity development in context.

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[1] Phenomenological variant of ecological systems theory.

Educators must consider how learning environments can structure experiences to produce desired learning outcomes. In this paper, I describe one type of learning environment where youth have the opportunity to construct adaptive, emergent identities—a *dramaturgical* process that structures the telling, adapting, and performing of personal narratives (Halverson, 2007, 2008; Wiley & Feiner, 2001). Using my own research on the dramaturgical process over the past 7 years, as well as other empirical studies documenting this type of work, I argue that the dramaturgical process is a powerful learning environment for understanding positive youth development. I begin by reviewing the literature on the positive youth development movement in youth-based organizations, and specifically the role *identity* plays as a construct in this movement. I then describe how the practices of arts-based youth organizations can be analyzed in terms of four key elements of positive youth development models:

- Positive development in art making involves a *dramaturgical process*—the telling, adapting, and performing of narratives of personal experience (Halverson, 2005, 2007; Wiley & Feiner, 2001).

- Participating in the dramaturgical process facilitates youth in *exploring possible selves* (Markus & Nurius, 1986).

- Participating youth often engage in *detypification* (Jenness, 1992), a mechanism for affiliating with a traditionally stigmatized identity in a positive way.

- Participating in the dramaturgical process can support both individualistic and collectivistic conceptions of identity (Triandis, 1995). The choice of orientation shapes the way youth work to create autobiographical art (Halverson, Lowenhaupt, Gibbons, & Bass, 2009).

I conclude by discussing why making art, particularly autobiographical art, provides a viable learning environment for the positive development of adolescents.

Positive Identity Development in Youth-Based Organizations

Researchers, practitioners, and policy makers note the failure of mainstream institutions to provide a diverse population of youth with opportunities to develop and learn (Heath, 2004). As a result, some of these researchers, practitioners, and policy makers have turned to youth-based organizations (YBOs) as places that facilitate positive developmental trajectories for youth (Hansen, Larson, & Dworkin, 2003; Hirsch, 2005; Mahoney et al., 2005; Perret-Clermont, Pontecorvo, Resnick, Zittoun, & Burge, 2004). Evaluative studies such as those conducted by the Harvard Family Research Project [http://www.hfrp.org] and the National Research Council (2000, 2002), as well as empirical research studies (e.g., Hansen et al., 2003; Hirsch, 2005; Roth et al., 1998), have described how YBOs provide developmentally supportive experiences and have documented positive outcomes for participating youth. One key outcome of participation is adolescents' use of these organizational experiences for identity development and exploration, including personal exploration, self-knowledge, identity reflection, and a sense of belonging to a community with clearly defined identity markers (Hansen et al., 2003; Perret-Clermont et al., 2004; Tannock, 1998). In one study of successful programs for youth, Roth et al. (1998) described YBOs as "developmentally appropriate programs designed to prepare adolescents for productive adulthood by providing opportunities and supports to help them gain the competencies and knowledge needed to meet the increasing challenges they will face as they mature" (p. 427). Researchers have identified a breadth of developmental outcomes for youth who participate in YBOs including:

- Skill acquisition, including physical, emotional, interpersonal, and cognitive skills (Hansen et al., 2003; Heath, 2004; Larson, Hansen, & Walker, 2005);
- Initiative, the motivation to complete, and sustained engagement in a series of activities (Larson, 2000; Larson et al., 2005);
- Risk taking (Heath, 2004; Hirsch, 2005);
- Language development (Heath, 1998, 2004; Larson et al., 2005; Soep, 2006); and
- "Identity work" (Hansen et al., 2003), including personal exploration and the development of a sense of community identity, of belonging to a group with clearly defined markers (Resnick & Perret-Clermont, 2004; Tannock, 1998).

This last outcome is of specific interest to my work on youth participation in arts organizations and the dramaturgical process.

The Role of Identity

Identity occupies a central role in developmental accounts of adolescence (Arnett, 1999; Lee et al., 2003). Many models for identity development involve disidentification, where youth must push against a way of being (usually cultural) in order to succeed. This is particularly true for adolescents from non-dominant groups whose identity development is described as rejecting native cultural ways of knowing and being in favor of mainstream practices (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Steele, 1997).

Positive youth development requires seeing adolescence as a resource to be harnessed rather than an obstacle to be overcome. It requires seeing multiple routes into "normative" behavior, rather than labeling as pathological every route that does not follow the mainstream model (Lee et al., 2003; Spencer & Markstrom-Adams, 1990). Margaret Beale Spencer (1999, 2006) described *emergent identities* as ways of being that function as responses to stressors placed upon individuals as they learn to function in the world. Emergent identities provide new resources for coping with stressors in unanticipated ways. The goal for interventions with adolescents is to provide opportunities for the development of these emergent identities rather than to simply supplant the ways of being native to cultural communities.

The Role of Arts-Based Youth Organizations in Identity Development

Researchers find that arts-based youth organizations are particularly valuable for supporting adolescents as they engage in identity processes (Heath, 2000; Ball & Heath, 1993; McLaughlin, Irby, & Langman, 1994; Worthman, 2002). According to Hansen et al. (2003), "adolescents' use of youth activities for identity work is widespread" (p. 48). Around the world, youth arts programs such as the National Youth Arts Programme in Ireland, the National

Association of Youth Theatres in England, and Carclew Youth Arts in Australia are widely recognized as spaces that promote positive youth development. Arts organizations make space for multiple pathways toward positive development, opening up the possibility that adolescents can engage with their personal and cultural resources in constructing identity, rather than rejecting these resources in order to become successful adults. This is particularly relevant for marginalized youth who often feel alienated from mainstream institutions and therefore do not have access to a connection between their cultural resources and the institution's expectations (Resnick & Perret-Clermont, 2004).

Positive Identity Development and Participation in Art-Making Processes

The positive youth development movement has opened up the possibility of viewing adolescence not as a time of "storm and stress," but rather as a time of engaging with cultural ways of being. In my work, I am interested in understanding *how* positive identity development happens—in particular, I am interested in the relationship between art-making processes and development. Some arts-based organizations have specific features that support positive development for youth who feel marginalized from mainstream institutions. As Wiley and Feiner (2001) have described: "One of the central goals of community-based theatre has been to increase opportunities for marginalized or oppressed groups to represent themselves and the world around them as a means of asserting their own identity" (p. 122). In the remainder of this paper, I draw both from my own research with organizations that work with youth to make art about their stories of their lives and from others' work on participation in art-making processes and the importance of these contexts for identity development.

Arts-Based Youth Organizational Practices and the Dramaturgical Process

The dramaturgical process is the *telling*, *adapting*, and *performing* of narratives of personal experience (Halverson, 2005, 2007, 2008). Each of these three phases—telling, adapting, and performing—is a unique aspect of the art-making process; taken together, they capture the basic structural features of how youth engage in a narrative and performance process. Initial research on the dramaturgical process has focused on the theatrical art form (Halverson, 2007; McLaughlin et al., 1994; Wiley & Feiner, 2001; Worthman, 2002). At the Albany Park Theater Project, for example, co-founders Laura Wiley and David Feiner described their work with youth as "conceiving, scripting, and staging a performance" (p. 125). More recently, research has expanded to digital art-making spaces, specifically digital storytelling (Hull & Katz, 2006; Nelson, Hull, & Roche-Smith, 2008) and filmmaking (Fleetwood, 2005; Halverson & Gibbons, in press; Halverson et al., 2009; Mayer, 2000). The dramaturgical process serves as a live space for identity exploration and presentation, specifically around issues of identity relevant to the participating community.

Telling stories. In typical YBOs, adult facilitators ask youth to talk about or gather information on true events or stories based around a personal experience or a more general issue or prompt (e.g., "tell us about a time you hid something"). In some cases, having a story to tell is a prerequisite for entry into the organization—youth are asked to talk about the story they want to tell in a competitive application process (Halverson & Gibbons, 2010). Methods for telling stories range from individual, private writing time, to prepared oral presentations, to whole group improvisational storytelling sessions. The stories told in these spaces then serve as the basis for production in one of two ways: (a) each participant produces an individual piece of work or (b) groups of participants work together to construct an artistic representation of an individual's narrative. At Reel Works Teen Filmmaking, all participants were expected to produce a three-act, short-form documentary based on a personal experience or issue that was important to them. By contrast, at the About Face Youth Theatre, youth and staff participated in "script summits," meetings where they examined the stories that had been told, determined the predominant themes that emerged from those stories, and then chose narratives that best represented those themes to be scripted for performance (Halverson, 2007).

Adapting stories. Adaptation involves transforming personal narratives constructed during the telling stories phase into artistic representations. Youth must express the core ideas of their stories using the tools of the artistic medium in which they are working. In a digital story, for example, adaptation involves creating a script and choosing images and music to accompany the script (Hull & Katz, 2006; Nelson et al., 2008). Adaptation in documentary filmmaking is a process of editing down a large corpus of raw footage, creating transitions between scenes, and determining how the different modes of film interact with one another (Halverson, in press; Halverson & Gibbons, 2010).

Whether or not the process is individualized also shapes adaptation. In organizations where youth produce their own art, representational decisions are made individually with assistance from mentors and feedback from peers. At the Street Level Youth Media Summer Arts Apprenticeship Program, youth chose a medium—sound, video, or graphic design—and used that medium to create a piece around the theme of identity. In organizations where youth work in groups, these groups must "arrive at the desired method of representation" (Wiley & Feiner, 2001, p. 127) through extended negotiations around how to maintain the integrity of the individual's narrative or thematic idea while simultaneously communicating values that are important to the whole group (Fleetwood, 2005; Halverson, 2007). A key feature of group adaptation processes is attention to the exact words the youth used in their original storytelling sessions (Halverson, 2007; Wiley & Feiner, 2001). In both individual and group processes, adaptation is iterative; changes are made to theatrical scripts as youth rehearse and determine "what works" and filmmakers produce rough cuts of their pieces that they offer up for critique before they settle on a final product. Attention to how external audiences will receive the product is always at the forefront of conversations (Halverson, 2008; Halverson et al., 2009; Heath, 2004; Wiley & Feiner, 2001; Worthman, 2002).

Performing stories. The entire process always culminates in public performances where participants showcase their work to an external audience. Sharing a representation of a personal narrative is a crucial component of constructing and representing identity. Identity is a social construct—one that takes on meaning in shared social spaces. Constructing and sharing an artistic representation allows youth to realize the power and value of what they have built. The final product takes many forms, including a full theatrical production, a film screening, an art gallery installation, or the public sharing of products through social networking websites.

In plays, it is unusual for storytellers to appear as themselves (Halverson, 2005); in documentary-style films and digital stories, it is unusual for youth *not* to appear as themselves. The final performance is a necessary component of the process, and while it represents a small portion of time spent on the dramaturgical process, attention to the final performance and the audience for that performance occupies a central place throughout.

Exploration of Possible Selves

One primary mechanism for youth to engage in positive identity development is by exploring possible selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Possible selves represent individuals' ideas about becoming, both desired and feared; they are a link between cognition (how I see myself) and motivation (steps I need to take in order to get there), connecting past, present, and future conceptions of self. A productive exploration of possible selves involves balancing the desired and the feared, simultaneously acknowledging what we wish to become and what we are afraid of becoming (Oyserman & James, 2008).

The dramaturgical process is well suited to providing adolescents with opportunities to explore possible selves. In a very direct way, this is accomplished when youth perform others' stories for a public audience. In their description of Teen Talk, a theatre program run through a boys and girls club, McLaughlin et al. (1994) took readers through the journey of one actress over the course of a given performance:

> During the next half hour Rosa is, in turn, a pregnant mother, the bereaved friend of a drunk-driving victim, and the child of abusive parents. When not portraying one of these characters she takes her turn as both backdrop and stagehand while other players act out scenes. (pp. 76–77)

Rosa had the opportunity to experiment with selves she may never have imagined for herself. What would it like to be a teen mom? Rosa was able to step into these shoes without actually having to go through with a pregnancy. The ability to experiment with different ways of being with limited social consequences—what McLaughlin et al. (1994) described as "the chance to glimpse alternatives" (p. 107)—is an integral part of performing others' lives.

Wiley and Feiner (2001) described how one of the youth participants of Albany Park Theater Project, physically hampered by her battle with multiple sclerosis, had the opportunity to try on a different kind of physical self: "She relished the opportunity to shed her reputation as a klutz, and the rest of the group supported her in taking on the challenge of adapting a role with few lines of dialogue but tremendous physical presence" (p. 128). And while she may always maintain her identity as a person with a disability, the dramaturgical process allowed her to also see herself as someone who could express herself physically and be taken seriously.

Oyserman and her colleagues have suggested that exploring possible selves may be more problematic for youth who feel marginalized in mainstream contexts (Oyserman, Bybee, & Terry, 2006; Oyserman, Gant, & Ager, 1995). In their work on African American adolescents and school achievement, they found a strong disconnect between these youths' conceptions of what successful selves might be and their attainment of, or even experimentation with, these selves. For these youth, they argued, there is more to positive development than simply exploring: "Thus, though sometimes conceptualized as a psychosocial moratorium in which a limitless array of identities are 'tried on,' adolescence seems to involve a general restriction of alternatives for many youths" (Oyserman et al., 1995, p. 1216). The implication, then, is that youth who struggle in traditional settings need external support for the development of possible selves in adolescence that lead to positive outcomes (Kao, 2000; Oyserman & James, 2008).

About Face Youth Theatre (AFYT) works with youth who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ), a population whose developmental challenges include learning to manage a stigmatized identity (Halverson, 2005; Hetrick & Martin, 1987). LGBTQ youth are likely to be classified as needing additional support for the development of positive, possible selves in adolescence. Participation in the dramaturgical process seems to serve that function for them. As in the two previous examples, at AFYT youth literally take on the identities of different people over the course of a theatrical production. In so doing, they have the opportunity to try on multiple selves without truly taking on all of these identities in their real lives outside of the play. For a gay male youth who took on the role of a transgendered member of AFYT, becoming this unlikely and previously unimagined persona was liberating. In an interview, he described the feeling: “It’s like putting on, it’s a whole—like I have different bits and pieces of me, of course, but like it’s a whole different thing that happens on stage, like it’s so liberating” (Halverson, 2005, p. 86).

Much of the research on exploring possible selves and youth from marginalized communities has focused on the disconnect between academic and social selves. Since context plays a huge role in cuing the availability of possible selves, youth from communities that do not seem to construct positive, attainable identities around academic achievement appear to need external intervention in order to open up these possibilities (Oyserman et al., 2006). Looking at the dramaturgical process as a mechanism for exploring possible selves paints a different picture. In this process, possible selves are cued by others’ narrative experiences and by the act of developing one’s own narrative into a public performance. One youth participant in Street Level Youth Media created an audio installation piece that chronicled her experience as a survivor of physical abuse. By engaging in the dramaturgical process, she came to represent herself as a survivor and created a survivor identity that could be shared with others. Along the way, she learned that she was not just a survivor but also an artist and a communicator with something powerful to say—a self that became possible not through an external, academic intervention, but rather through the process of creating an artistic representation of her own experiences.

Adolescents and Detypification

Jenness (1992) defined *detypification* as the redefining of a social category such that it is no longer based on stereotypical assumptions. Detypification points to the co-development of an individual’s increasingly nuanced understanding of a social category (such as *lesbian* or *African American*) and that individual’s willingness to place him or herself within this category. Jenness’s argument is rooted in the work of sociologists who posit that individuals make sense of their social worlds through perceiving and structuring categorical types, called typifications (McKinney, 1969). As a sense-making system, we construct typifications for everything in the world around us, including people (Schutz, 1962). The developmental process of detypification is typically sparked by a *crisis event*—that is, an event that forces an individual to rethink his or her place within a given social category (Jenness, 1992).

Jenness’s initial conceptualization of detypification was based on her research with women who adopted positive lesbian identities. While her focus was on lesbian women as a specific population with unique developmental needs, detypification as a process for positive development is applicable to other populations. Cross (1994) compared his Nigrescence model of "becoming black" to the LGBTQ coming-out process. In Cross's model, a positive sense of black identity is developed as an individual experiences an event or series of events that "shatter the person's current feeling about himself/herself and his or her interpretation of the condition of blacks in America" (Cross, Parham, & Helms, 1991, p. 324). These encounters are similar to Jenness's crisis events and can therefore be understood as instances of detypification.

Expanding more broadly to the general adolescent population, Brown, Mory, and Kinney (1994) described the characterizations adolescents make about peer crowds as *caricatures*, which are similar to typifications. The construction of typifications or caricatures is one of the ways adolescents begin to build a social identity, which Newman and Newman (2001) described as "a precursor to and an explanatory variable in the formation of individual identity" (p. 516). Caricatures (or typifications) precede the construction of nuanced understandings of social groups and individuals' places within those social groups, as the social group "acquires increasingly concrete and precise meanings, positive connotations, and personal applicability" (Jenness, 1992, p. 66).

I argue that detypification provides a valuable construct for understanding adolescent identity development in arts-based youth organizations. In detypification, an individual calls into question the membership characteristics of a social identity category. The dramaturgical process provides support as youth work to build alternative representations of themselves as individuals and as members of communities. When adolescents engage in the dramaturgical process, their experiments with identities can provide distance on the membership criteria of their current identity roles. For example, Nicole Fleetwood (2005) described how African American youth created "racialized," stereotyped self-identities in the digital video production process as they made cinematic choices that involved the use of visual tropes—stereotyped images that make their social identities easily identifiable to an external audience. The decision to include visual tropes—for example, an image of African American teenage boys on a basketball court—is a controversial one for youth filmmakers who struggle with how to represent their "real" experiences. These experiences may be considered a cliché or stereotype, yet they are also relevant to their lives as individuals. This juxtaposition allows adolescents to see how they do and do not fit the stereotypes they create, thereby detypfying the social category and their relationship to that category.

In *Mission Tales*, a film produced by the Media Education Center (MEC), one plot line centers on "the tropes of hostile immigrant store owner and unruly but victimized black youth . . . the [youth producers] justified their reliance on these tropes with the argument that the story was based on actual experience" (Fleetwood, 2005, p. 167). Fleetwood pointed out that in creating these images, youth producers were reifying stereotyped notions of immigrants' racist attitudes toward African Americans and African Americans' intolerant attitude toward immigrants. However, youth used the art-making process to make more sophisticated and complex—or detypify—the interaction between these characters: "Yet, at the same time, the MEC producers [attempted] to disrupt the trope by allowing the spectator access to [the black youth character's] thoughts and, most importantly, by stopping [him] from enacting racial and xenophobic violence against the owner" (p. 168). Detypification as a process suggests that in order to construct an identity that includes a marginalized social category, individuals must work toward complicating and destigmatizing the social category while at the same time beginning to see themselves as members of the group associated with that category. The digital video production process involves the construction of typified representations of the marginalized social groups to which they belong, juxtaposed with more idiosyncratic personal experiences. By combining typified images of social identities with individual narratives of personal experience in one artistic product, youth actively explore the relationship between how they see themselves, how others see them, and how they fit into their communities (Halverson, 2008).

In all theoretical accounts of detypification, the process is sparked by a crisis event (Cross, 1994; Jenness, 1992; Lee et al., 2003). For members of the About Face Youth Theatre (AFYT) simply participating is a form of personal identity disclosure; by becoming a member of AFYT, youth label themselves as part of the LGBTQ youth community. For most of these youth, being a part of AFYT means developing an understanding of this social category *and* representing this understanding to a public audience. This audience often includes friends and family as well as other youth and their families dealing with similar issues.

This relationship between social typification and individual experience could not be accomplished without the designed environment of the YBO. Youth arts leaders construct the activities of telling, adapting, and performing so that participating youth will consider this relationship in the course of their work. For example, adapting a personal narrative into a piece for public performance allows youth to explicitly construct complex representations of LGBTQ youth identities. In creating scripted versions of individuals' narratives, youth make representational decisions that involve maintaining the integrity of the original stories while constructing a portrait of the LGBTQ community. For one group of youth, the adaptation process involved incorporating the sexual identity of the characters into the play without conflating sexual activity and sexuality. The adaptors understood sexuality to be one of several core features of their membership in the LGBTQ community. The challenge, as they saw it, was to make sure the audience knew the characters were gay without creating a sexual relationship that did not exist in the original narrative (Halverson, 2007). The resultant script was a multi-voiced account that incorporated both the storyteller's and the adaptors' perspectives. The characters in the play represented LGBTQ youth from the adaptors' point of view, but still represented the specific individuals chronicled in the original narrative. In crafting performance-based narratives that represent the lives of AFYT youth, the adaptors created detypified LGBTQ youth characters who have recognizable features as members of this community.

Construction of Individualistic and Collectivistic Identities

The dramaturgical process can be used to support identity as a feature of individuals or identity as a member of a community. Spencer and Markstrom-Adams (1990) suggested that the dominant model for identity development that places the individual at the center "serves as a convenient heuristic device for understanding identity processes for Anglo youth, [but] there remains a dearth of conceptual formulations for these processes among American minority youth" (p. 304). As with many developmental processes, the assumption is that the model developed to describe the way mainstream youth experience the construction and presentation of identity will automatically translate to youth who struggle in traditional settings. Dramaturgical processes can allow adolescents to experience identity as developed either in opposition to or as an expression of a community. Public performance can then be used to provide adolescents with opportunities to reflect on the cultural models that guide initial identity representations.

A comparative analysis of the purpose, process, and products of two youth media arts organizations suggests that the way these two organizations conceive of and carry out their work shapes how identity development as a construct is understood (Halverson et al., 2009). At Reel Works Teen Filmmaking in New York City, identity development is about the development of individuals—how they see themselves, how others see them, and how they fit into the communities to which they belong. The organizational mission, the way organizational leaders describe their work, the process of making films, and the films themselves all point to the positive development of individuals as a primary, overarching outcome of participation. While the communities to which these youth belong have a prominent role in both the process and the products of digital art making (Bing-Canar & Zerkel, 1998; Mayer, 2000), the unit of change is the identity development of individual members of these marginalized communities. This individualized conceptualization of identity is consistent with other research on the dramaturgical process and its role in identity development (Fleetwood, 2005; Hull & Katz, 2006; Wiley & Feiner, 2001; Worthman, 2002).

By comparison, the dramaturgical process at In Progress challenges the inevitability of putting individuals at the center of identity development. Based in St. Paul, Minnesota, In Progress runs a program called *Ogichidaakweg*, designed for Native American youth living in the Anishinaabe reservation communities in Minnesota. Parallel evidence from this organization indicates that the concept of identity development as an individual process is not universal, nor does it have to be the focus of artistic processes through which youth represent their life stories. At In Progress, youth participants are inseparable from the Anishinaabe communities to which they belong; and this is reflected in the dramaturgical process. As the artistic director noted about the final products:

> Not only are you getting the story of the individual artist, but it also has this indigenous sense in that it is a collective story of the community and of the people, and of the timelessness of a lot of the stories that are within here.

The mission of In Progress indicates that community identity development and preservation is a viable goal; the way organizational leaders understand the dramaturgical process indicates that individuals construct identities in service of the community. What is being constructed, then, is a community identity—the way a community sees itself, the way others see it, and the way this community fits into the larger society.

In Progress and Reel Works support distinct conceptualization of identity: (a) an interdependent, collectivist construct and (b) an independent, individualized construct (Triandis, 1995). Typically, the unit of analysis for conceptualizations of identity is at the person level (e.g., a person has either a collectivist or an individualist orientation toward identity) or at the national level (e.g., Americans are individualist and Japanese are collectivist; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Here, I take the *organization* as the unit of analysis. Unlike previous research that has described organizations as conduits for the typical U.S., individualistic orientation toward identity (Kim et al., 1994), a comparison of Reel Works and In Progress indicates that organizations have their own conceptions of identity based on the communities in which they are situated, conceptions that are then reflected in how they construct the dramaturgical process. Understanding this relationship helps us to develop more sophisticated models of adolescent identity development, particularly for non-mainstream communities that have often been saddled with dominant cultural models that do not quite fit.

Why Making Art Matters

In this paper, I have argued for a shift in the way we think about youth development broadly, and identity, specifically. Instead of viewing adolescent development as a time of risk, and identity as something that requires undoing in order to achieve success, I theorize development as a time of promise, supported by organizations that provide adolescents with opportunities for sustained engagement in activities that matter to them. Spencer's (1999, 2006) ecological model captures this positive perspective, highlighting the role identity plays in promoting a non-deficit approach to development, particularly for marginalized populations. The work youth do in arts organizations lends itself well to reframing adolescence as a time of promise. Specifically, art-making processes allow adolescents to construct identities that engage their cultural and social resources, rather than requiring that they reject cultural ways of being in service of attaining positive, academic identities (e.g., Oyserman & James, 2008; Steele, 1997).

The dramaturgical process is not a naturally occurring phenomenon; it is a set of activities structured by artists to engage youth in telling, adapting, and performing their stories. Adult facilitators create a learning environment for adolescents to participate in all parts of the dramaturgical process, from story gathering to adaptation to rehearsal and performance. The process—telling, adapting, and performing stories—captures the features of a set of learning environments designed for youth to produce autobiographical art. It is more specific than the work of all arts organizations but general enough to stretch across artistic media, to see what is common across production-based media that are typically treated as independent art forms. Not only, then, does the dramaturgical process reveal the way positive identity development is structured for youth, but it also suggests what positive developmental experiences can be designed *for*. We can actively construct learning spaces where youth learn to construct positive identity through the art that they make.

We do not have definitive models for how identity development occurs. We do not even have consensus about whether identity is a characteristic of individuals, communities, or both. Rather, we use organizing metaphors such as *exploring possible selves* and *detypification* to describe how young people move toward a metacognitive understanding of how they see themselves, how others see them, how they fit into their communities—and how these conceptions do and do not fit together. The dramaturgical process supports all of these metaphors for describing this construct we call *identity*. The process of telling, adapting, and performing narratives of personal experience is fundamentally about constructing a representation of self, whatever "self" may be. The representations of self that are created are hybrid representations, built as youth combine their individual voices with others as they consult with community members about their own work, adapt others' words, and take on others' personae. The resultant pieces of art are "representative of something beyond the self" (Heath, 2004, pp. 68–69), living pieces of work against which youth develop a sense of self, whether it be individualistic, collectivistic, or some combination of the two.

The study of the dramaturgical process is an extension of the positive youth development movement with a focus on how specific activities promote positive development, particularly for marginalized populations. For youth who feel marginalized from mainstream institutions, the dramaturgical process has the potential to be especially effective in empowering them to construct and express positive identities in a public forum. Cross (1994) implied that when African Americans encounter a change event in their identity development process, they are primed for engagement in dramaturgical work: “This high energy literally compels the person to seek self-expression, leading to poetry, art, or in more vulgar expressions, fantasies about the defeat and destruction of one’s enemy” (p. 122). I would urge readers who work with stigmatized youth populations to develop positive developmental trajectories to consider the potential of the dramaturgical process in fostering positive identity development.

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