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Vanessa was adopted when she was 1-year-old by her adoptive parents along with her biological brother and sister. Even as adoptive parents, they spend most of their time at work and use a more hands-off, “passive” parenting approach. Vanessa and her siblings have never met or contacted their biological parents. To her knowledge, Vanessa’s biological dad died from a drug overdose, and her mom is in and out of rehab. Vanessa’s older sister, Emmy, dropped out of high school without a G.E.D., moved in with her boyfriend and got pregnant at an early age. Their younger brother, Norman, suffers from mild attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and is constantly running into problems with the law.

Vanessa is currently a high school junior. At school, Vanessa has trouble finding motivation and does not excel academically in her classes. She often finds that she should visit the tutoring center for subjects that she finds herself bored in, such as English, science and math. Instead, she pays students in class to complete her homework or write essays for her. Her grades are usually C’s and D’s and she has not even thought about applying for college or done any career exploration. Instead of gravitating towards friends that are more studious and are concerned with her academic and emotional wellbeing, Vanessa finds herself getting along easily with the outcast group. A reoccurring problem that she finds herself facing often is that people around her take her for granted. She also finds that she does not know how to be a “good friend.”

During the last semester of her junior year in high school, Vanessa meets Erin, a girl in her class that sits in front of her and is willing to help her with her paper. Over the course of the year, they become close. Erin is social, smart, and motivates Vanessa to study harder. Vanessa finds that is able to do better in class through Erin’s friendship but constantly struggles with herself on her low self-esteem issues and comparing herself to others.

Part 2 – Connecting Theories and Constructs:

Vanessa's role as an adopted child plays largely on her cognitive development and her relationships with others. Vanessa's adoptive parents can be seen as having an Authoritarian and somewhat Neglecting-Uninvolved style of parenting (Broderick, 2010, p. 159). Both styles of parenting involve the child to develop little and low self-esteem. Another factor of Vanessa's early lack of interest in school and slower cognitive development may be because of her adoption at age 1, the age where infants are at Piaget's Sensorimotor Stage. By this stage, infants' behaviors are guided more by representational thought (Broderick, 2010, p. 11).

Another theory that could be highlighted by Vanessa's low academic motivation is Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory. Due to the absence of her biological parents raising her effectively, Vanessa's zone of proximal development may have developed later on instead of earlier in life and the lack of scaffolding may attribute to the impact of her education. Additionally, Vanessa was most likely an insecurely-attached or disorganized-disoriented attached baby. Bowlby's attachment theory is described as "the infant's connection with the primary caregiver as his first attachment relationship" (Broderick, 2010, p. 123).

The attachment theory is pivotal to Vanessa's growth and functioning in the world. It also indicates "whether they can form meaningful, connected relationships with other people, and affects how they see the world and their place in it" (Davis, 2018).

Vanessa's self-perception is also low. The text makes the following statement about a child's own competence:

As you might expect, maltreated children perceived themselves as less competent than children who had no history of abuse or neglect. But maltreated children with a reciprocal friend showed substantial gains in self-esteem. (Broderick, 2010, p.199).

Due to Vanessa's insecurities about her academics and lack of stages in friendship development, the Looking Glass Self is developed. This theory, coined by Charles Cooley, is a process of self-development and states that "our self-representations are shaped and given affective valences by the significant people in our lives" (Broderick, 2010, p. 150). Her friendship with Erin is new and challenging to Vanessa, and her self-doubt and lack of self-esteem comes from her perception that others (such as her classmates and peers) do not see her as studious or inclined to succeed. This perception is also in sync with the Industry vs. Inferiority stage of Erikson, which states that the child will develop a lack of competence as a negative outcome (Broderick, 2010, p. 10).

Not only does her social surrounding affect her development, but Vanessa is seen to struggle in the Industry vs. Inferiority, Identity vs. Role Confusion, and Intimacy vs. Isolation stages in Erikson's Psychosocial Stages of Development (Broderick, 2010, p.10). Modeling takes place when Vanessa turns to both her outcast group of friends as well as her friendship with Erin. The text states modeling as a type of learning when one person "observes another (the model) performing some behavior" (Broderick, 2010, p. 13). Once she accepts Erin's assistance and models Erin's behavior of getting her schoolwork done, she experiences feeling more motivated. Vanessa experiences the Identity vs. Role Confusion stage when she sees her different identities at home with her siblings, at school with her outcast friends, and with Erin. She struggles with the challenges of peer pressure and who she desires to be. During the Intimacy vs. Isolation stage, Vanessa believes that she may not deserve the love and caring that Erin has shown her in her friendship, as what Vanessa has seen as true friendship is only limited to the relationships she's made with her outcast friends, which is why she struggles later with her confidence.

Using Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory to analyze Vanessa's microsystem and school setting. The factors affecting Vanessa's role in school are her friendships with the outcast group, the negative influences of her brother and sister, and her boredom in school. In addition, her parents' involvement with school is also an attribution. Broderick and Blewitt make the following statement:

Finally, the level of involvement by parents in the schooling of adolescents also influences achievement outcomes. Consistent with the "hands-off" philosophy described earlier, many adults tend to leave the business of education to teachers or to the adolescents themselves. Involvement declines sharply at the middle and high school levels (Broderick, 2010, p. 333).

Part 3 – Focus on Community, Intervention, and Change:

In order for educators to understand and help students like Vanessa, it is important to have a good understanding of her risk and protective factors. As presented in the case study, Vanessa struggles with her academic performance and building a healthy friendship with Erin due to a lack of self-confidence. Dr. Melanie Brady asserts in lecture that metacognition is connected to academic development, backed by Vygotsky's concept called the "zone of proximal development" or ZPD. (Brady, 2018).

The ZPD is referred to as "the difference between what a learner can do without help and what he or she can achieve with guidance and encouragement from a skilled partner" (McLeod, 2018). Vanessa was able to reach her ZPD in academic performance due to Erin's coaching and scaffolding. However, because she still finds herself constantly struggling with self-esteem issues and being unable to deviate from her outcast friends, there are several risk factors involved.

Spring Hecht, an adoption professional and therapist, shares most common risk factors in her personal experience and work for adopted/foster youth are due to parental neglect, broken attachments and non-authoritative/nurturing parenting styles (Hecht, n.d., slide 10). Additionally,

in order to support adopted students like Vanessa, five protective factors should be evaluated and applied. These five factors are: parental resilience, social connections, knowledge of parenting and child development, concrete support in times of need, and social and emotional competence in children (Curiel, 2018). Using these protective factors and looking at the different system levels in Bronfenbrenner's model, I will make and discuss recommendations in the following paragraphs applied to Vanessa's case.

At the individual level, I will look at Vanessa's intelligence, her academic motivation, the challenges around her self-worth/self-esteem, and her need for acceptance and belonging.

Vanessa's microsystem is made up of her family, school, friends, and the community she lives in. Looking at what is offered in her microsystem and the relationships in her mesosystem allows us to understand how those protective factors can be used. Due to the chances that Vanessa has been insecurely attached since birth as well as having been raised by Authoritarian/Neglecting Uninvolved style of parents, the results are that she has trouble building meaningful relationships with her peers. Her relationships with her peers (outcast clique of friends) also reflect approval-seeking behaviors – which come from her low level of self-worth. Vanessa also struggles with comparing herself to others – a behavior developed from low self-esteem as well as watching her two siblings engage in “at-risk” behavior (her brother getting in and out of probation and her sister getting pregnant and dropping out of school).

Using personal experience and knowledge presented in research, I can deduct two protective factors that are crucial for adopted students like Vanessa starting with “knowledge of parenting and child development.” This factor is described to parents as having nurturing parent behavior, “being able to create a developmentally support environment for their child, being able to recognize and respond to their child's specific needs” (Curiel, 2018). The second protective

factor needed to support Vanessa's wellbeing is her parents display of "social and emotional competence of children." Without her parents fostering a strong and secure attachment with Vanessa, she may continue to have a difficult time forming and maintaining relationships with others as well as having positive interactions, communicating her thoughts/feelings/needs, and working through her self-esteem issues. A school counselor must also be able to recognize characteristics in the students who lack the attributions of being healthy and balanced learners. The recommendations at the individual level are for the counselor to build rapport with students like Vanessa and respond effectively to her concerns (lack of motivation, boredom, comparing herself to other students). Through having individual sessions with Vanessa, the school counselor may be able to identify signs of trauma, neglect and/or other factors that are hindering her academic performance. Another recommendation that would be appropriate is for the school counselor and/or educator to look to outside sources such as an adoption competent specialist or bringing Vanessa's parents in to discuss how they can be more involved. The parent-counselor relationship should be collaborative and matters because it helps with assisting issues on an ongoing basis and cohesive family interaction.

The protective factors I am choosing to apply at the local level are "concrete supports in needs of time" and "social connections." Given the situation, it is necessary for caregivers/parents to have access to support and services that are addressed to students like Vanessa. In the case of a crisis, families may need more specialized services. That is where a school counselor's capital is applied. As a counselor, it is necessary to build capital with community stakeholders that share the same educational values in advocating students. Given a situation like Vanessa's, where the school counselor may need additional guidance, having a network of professionals would benefit the counselor's work. The school should build

relationships with community organizations for adopted/foster youth and making resources available to students.

As mentioned in the case study, Vanessa's parents work long hours and are mostly absent at home. At the exosystem level, her parents are not directly involved in her life and are therefore unable to play a part in her academic performance and school environment. Building parental resilience, another protective factor, is important as it affects adopted/foster youth like Vanessa. It may be possible that her parents are undergoing stress at work or are unknowledgeable about the opportunities to be involved at school. Coming from a school counseling candidate standpoint, I would want Vanessa's parents to have a willingness to ask for help.

As providers in our community, we can demonstrate in multiple ways that parents are valued, we want to encourage parents to manage stress effectively and support them as decision-makers, and understand how to buffer their child during stressful times (Curiel, 2018).

The recommendations at the local level that I see as being conducive to Vanessa's wellbeing as other adopted/foster youth are making adoption training mandatory at schools. If Vanessa has an IEP, building adoption competency into her IEP and/or 504 Plans is another strength-based solution. Lastly, in a cultural context, we want to make sure that Vanessa recognizes what a healthy, meaningful relationship looks like, so that she can feel more comfortable allowing friends like Erin into her life. At the macrosystem, Vanessa's human development affects her behavioral patterns and lack of values. In order to help her recognize the importance of education and forming meaningful relationships, it is recommended at the societal/school system level to promote inclusion of adopted/foster youth at school. The protective factors that come with this recommendation will be the ability for Vanessa to build resilience and develop strong attachments. Hecht makes the following recommendations on how to create inclusion:

Help remove stigma/stereotypes and normalize adoption; discuss it in a general, matter of fact and positive manner, reinforcing it as simply another way families are formed (teachers can fold it into existing lessons on literature, genetics, immigration, history) (Hecht, n.d., slide 30).

By applying these strength-based/restorative justice approaches and evaluating how each protective factor affects the adopted student, educators will be able to shape students like Vanessa into healthy and balanced learners and guide them towards paths of finding self-identity.

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