

Therapy with Harry

"Not Asian Enough" Club

Let's Embrace Our Beautifully Complex Identity

Hey ,

What are your thoughts on "resilience?"

When I first encountered the idea of "resilience," I was overjoyed. I really was. And here's why. All my struggles in my life...with mental health, with unhealthy relationships...I can finally call it something. I can finally call it "resilience."

I finally had a word to describe what I'm doing. And this word tells me I'm strong. That everything that I'm doing, everything that's not going right for me...it was just part of my way of surviving a world that has screwed me over.



And over time, it became an excuse, a rational to justify everything that I was doing...like...

Why did I yell at my white friend? Because I was being resilient, by unleashing my anger towards racism. Why did I pick a fight with my boss about their imperfect social justice politics? Because I'm resilient, and I will use it to fight the power.

But you want to know the real reason? It was because I felt powerless, and it made me angry. And picking fights with people made me feel powerful, because I was good at arguing and criticizing and blaming.

I used “resilience” to justify my anger explosions. I knew it wasn’t right to unload on people. And it made me feel guilty about it. But if I can frame it as “resilience,” then I feel less guilty about it. I can put the blame on something else, like my white friend, or white supremacy, or the nonprofit industrial complex.

While structural oppressions do exist, my anger explosions do very little in changing that on a structural level, and do very little in changing my own experience of it.

And the worst part of it all was...I had a built-in excuse to never have to change. When I labeled my unhealthy behaviours as “resilient,” then it made it easier to justify and continue these behaviours.

Now I’m not saying that “resilience” is a bad thing. Resilience is great. It’s literally encoded in our DNA to help us survive stressful and traumatic events. And through these experiences, we learn and change and grow from these events.

But because our current society loves ideas and theories, resilience has also become an idea to analyze. And it becomes a potential danger for people like me, who is *really good* at using intellectualizing and rationalizing as defense mechanisms.

And I take ideas, such as “resilience,” and intellectualize it, until I can find a way to rationalize and justify my behaviours. And I watched myself repeat these same behaviours over and over again, leading to the same cycle of pain and misery.

So , how do you feel about the term “resilience?” I know it’s a term that has garnered some debate in social justice communities over the years. Respond this email and let me know what you think. I’m a real person on the other side, and I respond to all emails!



Take care, and keep being you!

Harry

"I help Asians go from feeling trapped to becoming self-liberated."

P.S. - Let me know how you feel about the concept of "resilience!"

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