

Umbilical cord

Umbilical cord, a connection between the fetus and its mother, is the best proof that we are inseparable from our mothers because all the nutrients we need and the waste materials we discharge rely on this conduit. When we are mature enough to live alone and leave the parent body, the doctor will cut the umbilical cord right away. Yet, nowadays many parents tend to “hover” above their children as if there are invisible “umbilical cords” connecting the children to their families. To those parents, this kind of parenting is how they love their children; but to their children, it may turn out to be a leash that forms a suffocating choke on the latter’s throat.

This kind of parenting was unfortunately experienced by one of my best friends of junior high school. We used to do almost everything together, such as walking home after school together, studying at cram school together, and hanging out in our spare time together. There was a routine before she headed for any place—calling her mother. She had to report every single movement to her mother. When she left the school, she called her mother. When she arrived at a MRT station, she called her mother. When she arrived and saw me at our meeting place, the first thing she did was calling her mother. One time after cram school, we walked home together and chatted so joyfully that we totally forgot this routine. Ten minutes after the scheduled time of call, the phone rang. As soon as she felt the rush vibration of her cellphone, her smile froze and her face turned pale. As she answered, I could see clearly she was shaking from finger to toe and I could hear her mother’s penetrating condemnation. The lashing out went on for about twenty minutes, and tears streamed down my friend’s face. I tried to comfort her by promising that I would take the responsibility of reminding her of this routine in the future. To my surprise, upon hearing the word “routine”, she dashed her cellphone on the ground and trampled on it fiercely while screaming loudly, “I will never ever call her again!” After the incident, I never walked with her on the road again, because her parents now drove her to school, to home and to every other place all the time, making every effort to maintain the invisible “umbilical cord”.

Perhaps a lot of parents became over-protective because the dwindling number of children per family left parents more time and energy to “cherish” each individual child, which ended up depriving the latter of opportunities to learn independence as well as self-management. In addition, tabloid newspapers and TV channels also tend to conduct outrageous and sensational reports on children missing, kidnapped, or even murdered, hence making parents all the more nervous. Threatened by those horrible reports, parents dare not let their “precious” walk alone on the streets, not to mention letting them face with difficulties alone.

As we can see, a leash serves only to bind the children instead of providing the vital nutrients and necessities of life and growth that children need. The stable bridge between parents and children is to be built on “trust,” with parents trusting their children to solve problems on their own and learn from these experiences. If parents are willing to “let go”, the children will be fine and grow to be more capable.

Parenting and Corporal Punishment

Drips of blood slowly oozed out of the wounds of the hands of a student who was caught telling a lie. An unendurable tension pervaded the entire silent classroom, and the whipping sound of the rod appeared to be dreadfully loud, which rendered the students trembling with fears. The above scene may be quite familiar in the memories of middle-aged adults, as corporal punishment was still prevalent in schools decades ago. Yet now, it has become obsolete since 2006, prohibited in schools as well as homes, which has created a serious disciplinary problem for today's parenting.

Most of the arguments against corporal punishment are based on cases of "excessive" corporal punishment. Surely, in those cases, the punishment would backfire, contributing to detrimental impacts on both parents and children. If the extent of physical punishment ranges beyond the child's level of tolerance, the severe pain might engender emotions of hatred instead of the realization that blunders must be avoided. In one piece of news, for example, a girl left home resolutely after having suffered corporal punishment. Also, repeated undue corporal punishment tends to trigger symptoms of chronic anxiety and fear that undermine the child's mental health and overall development.

To a certain extent, appropriate corporal punishment is still indispensable. To begin with, minor but timely punishment enables children to rectify their erroneous behavior instantly. Upon being beaten by their elders, children may feel the intolerable pain which creates a link between making mistakes and the following punishment. This connection would be deeply inscribed in their minds, reminding them to avoid continuous aberration. In addition, corporal punishment is an effective method for parents to teach their children to tell right from wrong. Whenever the children are punished, they progressively grasp the principle of conducting themselves, and the habit of proper behavior would be established firmly.

The total abolition of corporal punishment turns parenting into a formidable task, and leaves children without much strict discipline, which in the future may develop into more serious problems for the whole society. Corporal punishment isn't as unreasonable as today's people think, and if it is executed at opportune moment and to a proper extent, it may still be a worthy form of parenting.

How to Ruin Your Child's Personality

According to BBC news, helicopter parents tend to influence the choices of their child's occupation or career by "hovering" over the latter to keep him under control. Yet, I think the greatest impact on their child is the child's personality, especially regarding how to build up relationships with others whether in school or in society.

其實這中間少了一段，就是說明父母的籠罩究竟是如何毀了孩子的人格，下一段才能說人格被毀的後果

The school is like a miniature society, the connection or communication between people is an important issue for students to learn to manage. If a student has problem building strong relationships with her peers, it may make her feel lonely in most of her school time. One of my high school classmates, Amy, is an only child in her family and suffers from her parents' concentrated indulgence. They not only help her sort out her schoolbag every day, but also take her to and from school, making her feel that she is the center of the world. When we form discussion groups in class, she will suddenly become very nervous because she worries that nobody would want to be in the same group with her. While discussing and she makes a suggestion, if her suggestions is not used at the end, she will put up an angry face and then begin to say bad things about others behind their back. Sometimes she would even say such things loudly whether her target is around or not. In Amy's eyes, everything that happens to her is important and needs to be known by the teacher. But the teacher only tells her to stop spreading rumors and tells her that this is not the original intention of others. Most of the time, Amy cannot accept it; she thinks she is always right and others are wrong. And it gradually leaves her with fewer friends and always a bad mood.

I think communication between people is a difficult but significant issue and school is a great place to practice it. But if a child has already been pampered to the extent that she does not care about others and have problem building up relations with others, then she would lack the social skills necessary for a successful career. In that sense, her parents have virtually ruined her future by caring too much for her.

If My Parents Were in My Shoes

These days, parents tend to help their children map out the “ideal” future, considering it a way of showing love and support. However, they might just be killing their kids’ dreams at the same time, since they seem to easily ignore what kind of life their children really want to have. Sometimes, I wish I could put my parents into my shoes.

If my parents were in my shoes, then they would realize that getting good grades in school does not mean everything. Textbooks are not enough for us to cope with what we will face in society today, and focusing too much on textbooks might limit our visions of this colorful world. In contrast, doing some extracurricular reading and activities is also a way to broaden one’s knowledge and gain some experiences. I could gain more knowledge not taught in school, and learn how to interact with people when organizing an event together, both of which are immensely beneficial to my entering the job market. I hope my parents will understand that scores on transcripts can only represent some things but not everything, and they will want to give me more support on things outside schoolwork.

If my parents were in my shoes, then they would realize that having close friends cannot be more important for a youngster. My parents always complain that I hang out with my friends too often, and want me to stay home to do my schoolwork. However, everybody needs friends to accompany him or her through the phase of adolescence, in which there are so many changes, both physically and psychologically. When I feel down in the doldrums, it is my friends that I would like to turn to instead of my parents, whom I might keep some of my secrets from. It is because my friends, whom I can pour my heart on, can lift my spirits up and help alleviate my stress. This way, I would not get depressed easily and might even have better performances on study, which my parents would be glad to see.

If my parents were in my shoes, then they would realize that forcing someone to be completely masculine or feminine is not appropriate. Ever since I was very little, my parents keep warning me not to act like girls. For example, they do not want me to play with my sister and her Barbie dolls, and if I dance happily and shake my body, they would shout at me, “Hey! Don’t act like a girl”. But a man has no need to be totally masculine, as tenderness and care are essential parts of one’s personality as well. Those who are reckless might not be appreciated. If my parents know that one’s personality could not be determined by his or her gender, and it is cruel to force him or her to conform, they would not intervene but set me free to do anything I consider suitable for myself and to be whoever I want to be.

I hope that someday my parents can really stand in my shoes, and understand the troubles I face and the pressure they put on me. Only when they know how I feel about their parenting style will they know what is the best for me.

Cruelty in Filial Piety

Filial Piety is a core idea in Chinese culture while other cultures don't even have specific words for it. Its origin could be traced back to thousands of years ago when the philosophy of Confucius defined it as a virtue of respecting and obeying one's parents and ancestors. However, the seemingly reasonable and heart-warming ethic often carries its own dosage of cruelty that people usually do not dare to unfold for fear of being condemned for violating moral rules, and thus tragedies repeat time after time.

One common form of parental cruelty has to do with the parents' demand for returns. In one story, a woman was born to a poor family. Though she did not have a decent background, she made great efforts and always performed well on her schoolwork, so her parents pinned high hopes on her, demanding her to find a good job and support the livelihood of the whole family. The way they did it was through repeating the tiniest details of life in the past to emphasize how difficult it was to raise her, and repeatedly taught her that poverty is a shame and that she should work hard to change the fate of the family. The burden of guilt or gratitude left her with no room for negotiation, but obedience.

As much as other parents may be more loving, they could also become quite cruel if their children do not turn out the way they want. I have a male friend who has a tendency to love boys more than girls. Nonetheless, his mother was an extreme heterosexual activist and it was impossible for her to accept anyone who was gay, not to mention her son. So my friend was stuck in an uneasy state every day, struggling between his real desire and his mother's expectations. He tried hard to love girls but failed. Whenever his mother scolded the homosexual activists and same-sex marriage supporters on TV or asked him why he didn't have a girlfriend, he could not help but tremble and stayed silent. He didn't know how his future would be, and sometimes he even felt guilty for not being a "normal" child so as to get married and have a son to carry on the family name just as his mother has hoped.

In real life, many children are forced to live a life they don't like, or even change their life choices so as to meet the parents' expectations. Under the illusion of familial harmony and the ideal of filial piety, many tragedies have resulted. I truly hope that one day, parents and children could listen to one another and try to understand and respect each other's needs. Then perhaps we could all have what we really want without causing such tragedies.

A Security System for Daughters Only

People tend to think gender norms are maintained by patriarchy. But according to my experience in daily life, children tend to be controlled by their same-sex parent in learning the manners, which greatly limits their freedom. And as a daughter, I am deprived of my freedom of movement by my mother.

My actions had been severely restricted by my mom until I reached the age of eighteen. She set up many unique rules for me, but, not for my younger brother. One is I can't go to the KTVs to sing, even in the daytime. She thinks it is a very dangerous place. In fact, she is very concerned about every place I go. If she does not feel the place is safe, for example, the beach, she would not let me go. Another rule is she always drives me to meet my friends, and she will wait in the car until she sees my friends arrive. Sleeping out with my friends is of course out of the question, so I didn't go to graduation trip of junior high school.

I can understand mom is worried about my safety, but these restrictions are too much for me. Because of them, I lost lots of opportunities for having fun with my classmates. In high school, break time in between classes was only ten minutes, during which we had to go to our lockers to get the books for the next class. There was hardly any time to speak with each other. The best way to get close to other classmates was to go out with them on weekends. Sadly, I was often kept from joining my friends because of my mother's rule. I might seem to get along well with my classmates, but when they planned to travel together, I had to back out. When it came to my high school life, I always felt a big piece was missing from it because of mom's severe restrictions.

I have been curious about the reasons that drove my mother to set up these rules. I asked her a few times but she always gave me the same answer: "I'm worried about girls' safety". She wouldn't even let me go on my graduation trip when my teacher and the military instructor in the school were there to take good care of us. When I argued with her, she just said, "I don't like you sleeping overnight with friends". Of course, I also tried to negotiate through my father, but he just answered: "Go ask mom. She will decide." I think it is because my father feels he doesn't understand girls and he may not know how to teach his daughter properly. So if he lets me go out with my friend, he may be worried about my safety. But if he limits my freedom too much, he may think he is treating me unfairly. So, he leaves the decision to my mom.

Now I think I gradually understand why my mom doesn't like me to go out with friends. Firstly, she was always a good student with the best grades when she was young. A life with nothing to do but studying and simple housework in her spare time has left her inexperienced in life. Secondly, after graduation, she became a junior high school teacher and then a college professor. While teaching, she met many problem students and most of them were boys. Perhaps she became increasingly worried that her daughter would be affected by those boys, so she hoped to protect me by keeping me at her side at all times.

Sadly, when a mother overprotects her daughter, the daughter may also grow up thinking she has to do the same to her own daughter, and the control system is passed on from one generation of women to another. From my point of view, building confidence between mothers and daughters would be more useful in teaching daughters how to actively protect themselves and avoid dangers, rather than passively limit the daughters' freedom. At least, it would improve the daughters' ability to protect themselves. After all, parents can't be with their children forever.

Servant Parents

“And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all” (*Mark* 10:44). Robert K. Greenleaf, author of *The Servant-Leader Within: A Transformative Path* developed the idea of “the servant-leader” based on the Bible. This concept emphasizes the serving spirit and virtuous qualities such as listening, empathy, understanding, and so on that are important for followers of Christ. Being good Christians, my parents treat everyone around them, including me, their child, as rational and loyal servants would serve their masters.

But much more than merely responding to the master’s demands, my parents always anticipate my needs before I even mention them. For instance, I seldom clean my eye-glasses, but, they are always crystal clear. In the beginning, I did not notice it. One day, after playing tennis with my classmates after cram school, I went home and went to bed immediately, leaving my glasses lying on the bookcase. At midnight, I seemed to hear someone tiptoe into my room. I took a glance, and found it was my father. He was picking up my glasses and taking them out my room. In the morning, I was amazed to find my glasses tidy and shining under the sun. I guess my parents always have me as the central pillar of their life and hence care about every little thing in my life. Like servants, they exist to serve all my needs.

This serving attitude may have a lot to do with their faith, but I think it also has a lot to do with their life experiences. To begin with, in their childhood, they were taught by their parents or elders to obey. In those days, when the family finance was not good, children understood their parents’ conditions, thus, they willingly obeyed their parents. In time, this habit made serving others a second nature to them. Now their living standards may have improved, but the personality traits of care and service still remain, so, similarly, they use the same attitude to treat their children. Furthermore, as my parents only have me and my sister to care for, their energies are concentrated on us. Unfortunately, that kind of attention can also be quite suffocating as they would watch over everything we do. Currently, we live in a highly competitive world, which made our parents even more attentive to our studies and our daily life. In other words, they have become very protective as they urge us to excel so that we would have a better life in the future.

I think that my parents’ childrearing style has influenced my attitude toward life. In the first place, I used to struggle to escape from my parents’ control. And when I really got my own freedom, I found the real world was not as wonderful as I thought. It is cruel, brutal, competitive and I miss the time when I was under my parents’ protection which was comfortable, unrestrained and carefree. Yet at the same time, I noticed that somehow I have also picked up the serving spirit of my parents. I am usually attentive to the needs of my friends; I am usually conciliatory when it comes to possible conflicts with my friends; and I never mind lending a helping hand. I guess I am my parents’ child in body and spirit too.

As I mature, I have realized that my parents had done many things for me but I had done few things for them. They had not only given me a comfortable life but passed on to me a spirit of service. I hope I can be a servant-leader in the future, just like my parents, who served their children and everyone around them.

Monster parents and their children

In the English-speaking world, parents who pay extremely close attention to their children are called “helicopter parents” because they hover over their children all the time. In the Chinese culture these days, there are parents who would launch a variety of unreasonable requests to the school and even rudely challenge the teachers’ authority. These parents are called “monster parents” because they can create chaos at school as they fiercely protect the welfare of their children (Lifetime Development website). Compared with helicopter parents, monster parents are much more aggressive in regard to school and enjoy making troubles for teachers.

Monster parents can be such a pest because they have a lot of time on their hands. They are known to give the teacher phone calls at every inadequate time and regard the teacher as a personal secretary. They would ask him to cope with every petty matter for their children; they are eager to drive away students who are considered a bad influence on their children; they complain and shout in public if the teacher gives their child a lower grade than average. In the old days, parents need to make a trip to school to interact with teachers. Now with the advancement of Internet, monster parents can easily disgrace teachers by sending messages to their phones or deliver some impolite remarks about them on the social web. They can successfully pose a variety of threats on the teachers and keep putting psychological pressures on the latter. Today’s teachers have suffered from irrational requests from horrible “monster parents” so much that many are feeling miserable and even considering leaving their jobs.

Parents may believe themselves to be the best teachers of their children, but when monster parents are here, they will produce a very bad influence on their children. Would a kid truly respect his teacher if his parents always dispute what his teacher says? Would a kid learn how to assume responsibility if his parents always blame the teacher when the child does not do well on exams? When parents believe that “my child is always right,” how can the child learn to tell what’s right from wrong? I am convinced that it would be difficult for kids to survive in this highly competitive society, especially if they have never experienced one bit of frustration. Anti-social behavior has been known to develop among these children. If that happens, it would be their monster parents that are to be blamed.

Parenting among Different Classes

A parent's class position has a great influence on his or her values, which will result in her preferred choice of parenting style. In general, working class parents and middle class parents will have very different concerns when they bring up their children.

Mike is one of my classmates in junior high, whose parents sell fruits and vegetables in a traditional market. His parents have to get up early to prepare for their work then finish it late at night. The labor-oriented and time-consuming job leads to a special type of parenting. First, it is hard for the busy, exhausted parents to spend time accompanying Mike, let alone appropriately inculcating him when he makes a mistake. They will command or shout at him instead. Thus, Mike is not only distant from his parents but also lonely at all times. Fortunately, making lots of friends becomes the best way to fill his empty heart, which indirectly leads to his easy-going personality. In addition, from his parents' viewpoints, they can make a living without higher education. As a result, they don't place great emphasis on Mike's schoolwork; their only requirement is a passing grade. Undoubtedly, Mike's academic performance is barely satisfactory.

My middle-class classmate, Anne, has a very different fate. Her father is a government official and her mother is his shrewd assistant. Their jobs require high efficiency to deal with piles of important documents and the ability to well communicate with various kinds of figures. With these excellent abilities, they make every effort to assure that Anne can live in a comfort zone. At school, Anne's mom becomes the president of the PTA, ensuring that the whole class is on the right track. She also sends holiday gifts to teachers and classmates to build a network of interpersonal relationship for Anne. Anne's mom would also warn her of some bullies or unintelligent classmates who aren't worthy of association--obviously the parents have great hopes for Anne. Yet, ironically, the overprotection results in Anne's lack of ability in making independent judgments. When we are together, she often hesitates to make even the smallest decision, such as whether to watch a movie or visit the bookstore. Anne is sent to the cram school to study everyday after school so that she could top all other students. Understandably, the pressure gives Anne little pleasure. Although she performs well on tests, she never feels much happiness.

To some degree, a child's future is determined by the parents. Class differences can influence the childrearing process by affecting the parents' outlook on life and their parenting styles, causing entirely different prospects and eventually different lives for their child.

No parent is ever wrong?

As the old saying goes, “No parent is ever wrong,” which means parents would do everything in their children’s interest, and provide and care for their children in every possible way. And since they always act out of their best intentions for their children, whatever they do must be right. From ancient times till now, most Chinese scrupulously abide by this proverb; however, is this proverb indeed true?

Nowadays, cases of child abuse are countless. In Hong Kong, a mother used a needle to jab at her daughter’s hands and shoulders just because the daughter did not do well in her studies. Moreover, to my horror, another child abuse case happened in Kansas, America, where a couple slaughtered and dismembered their seven-year-old son. The two cases show a few brutal parents as well as their irresponsible attitudes, but their examples are infrequent after all. As a matter of fact, some child-rearing methods that we are accustomed to are more terrible, especially indulging children in everything. It is well known that spoiled children are always arrogant and willful, and furthermore they cannot put up with any frustration or difficulties in life. What is worse, this kind of kids will not only make themselves suffer hardships, but can also hurt others in the future.

Fortunately, my family is just the opposite. When I was ten years old or so, my parents’ marriage ended in divorce as we could hardly put up with my father’s improper behavior any longer. I still remember that before my parents’ divorce, my father often got dead drunk and hung out with his fair-weather friends to gamble away all his money. Actually, I always wondered if he had decided to spend half of his life drinking and using the rest half gambling. In addition, I had ever been beaten black and blue by him just because I was crying and he felt that I had irritated him. In brief, he had never taken care of his family at all.

I used to have a deep-rooted hatred for my father, regarding him as a direct contradiction of the saying “No parent is ever wrong.” However, as I grew up, I gradually understood that the reason why my father acted so irresponsibly was because his mother had indulged him when he was little. His mother, my grandmother, was a doting parent that spoiled him at will. I guess maybe she simply wanted to express her love and provide lots of resources for him, while my father became the scum of the earth. In my opinion, if my grandmother hadn’t favored him so much, perhaps he would turn out an ordinary person in the least.

Does every parent have good intentions and struggle to do their kids good? Maybe they do, but the result is often far from benefiting their children. While doting parents get used to pampering their child, they probably have never thought that they will produce a potential monster which can cause a series of tragedies in the future.

Parenting Styles in Different Generations

Between two generations spanning half a century, parenting styles can be quite different. For our present age, the most obvious change has to do with the gradual disappearance of patriarchal values.

In the previous generation, parents always value sons more than daughters. For example, my maternal grandmother gave each of her sons a house as a gift. Even though my mother and my aunt served as breadwinners for the family, they got nothing. Still, mother washed the dishes, cooked dinner, did the laundry, and even helped farmland menial jobs after school, but uncles were playing games with friends at that time. Furthermore, mother and aunt received less education than uncles. But now, in my generation, the status of men and women gradually became equal. Parents let their children get the same education. At home, my brother and I both have to do the housework, and it's not considered odd.

I think patriarchal values receded due to significant changes in industrial patterns. In the agricultural or early industrial society, physical strength was greatly needed and valued. If you have a son, you have labor force, he can work in fields. Even in the literati circles, those qualified to take the imperial examinations were all male. That's why boys were valued, and patriarchal values developed in support of that reality. But as agriculture and industry gave way to the service sector, women found a footing in the world where they could now work as men do. The old saying that "A married daughter is just like water that has been poured out of the door" now changes to "A daughter is as close as the cotton-padded coat."

In addition to the shift in the preference in gender, parents have changed their relation with their child too. The previous generation of parents were more restrained and subtle; on the contrary, this generation of parents do not begrudge to praise, to express love, to kiss, and to hug their child. They listen to their child's ideas and try to meet his or her psychological and emotional needs. As my maternal grandparents have eight children and my grandparents have seven children, they hardly have time to take care of each child's needs and the children practically grew up by themselves. Although my dad needed to walk two hours to school whatever the weather was like, my grandparents were not very worried about him because they were busy anyway. When my mother got sick, my maternal grandparents just told her: "Drink water! Get some rest!" In contrast, when my parents gave birth to me, they were already 40 years old. My mother quit her job in order to take good care for me. She not only took me to school, but made lunch for me. When I had a cold, my parents would take me to the big hospital. And they often kiss me, hug me, and call me on the phone to let me know that I am on their mind.

I don't know what kind of parenting styles will be suitable for the future. But I know somehow different families will find their own way to suit a variety of conditions. All in all, I hope parents in the future will still be loving.

Parenting differences between Taiwan and Switzerland

Most people have a general impression of Switzerland as a country that has beautiful and breathtaking landscapes, spectacular tourist attractions, and it is an international money-laundering place that exports exquisite and luxurious watches. What most people do not realize is that the Swiss have a unique and superior child-rearing style which is worthy of being a model for Taiwanese parents who are concerned about their children's future.

Several days ago, an in-depth news coverage about Swiss parenting caught my eye and revealed the extremely dramatic contrast between the Swiss and the Taiwanese styles. Like most western countries, for example, Swiss parents train their kids to become independent at a very early age, encouraging the latter to try and engage in various activities, and not admonishing them when they make mistakes. In contrast, today's Taiwanese parents tend to protect and pamper their kids in every possible way, often going out of the way to meet all their needs. But they are not willing to let their kids pursue their dreams. This flawed child-rearing style has been known to lead to the creation of the vulnerable "strawberry generation".

In addition, in western culture, when children reach the level of education at the university, they have to leave their home, make money to live on their own, and learn to take care of themselves, namely, rent a house, get a job, and settle down with somebody on their own. However, in Taiwan, parents would attend to their kids wholeheartedly. When their kids conflict with other kids in school, the parents tend to blame the other kids rather than examining whether their own kids are at fault or not. Under this kind of protection, the kids' conduct in school becomes irresponsible, willful and reckless. Then the so-called "monster parents" shift the blame onto the teachers for not teaching their kids right. Later, when their children graduate from college and become unemployed, the parents have no other choice than continuing to support the kids, now called "parasite singles," financially, which is becoming a worrying case nowadays.

The string of neologisms mentioned above portrays the younger generation and their parents and manifests the error in our parenting styles. As far as I'm concerned, parents in Taiwan should try to implement the Swiss parenting style. They should from time to time let go of their kids, cultivate them to think independently, enable them to live self-reliantly and face up to new things by themselves. Moreover, when the kids fail, parents should teach them how to stand up again instead of helping the latter instantly. After all, as the saying goes, "give a man a fish, he'll eat for a day; teach him how to fish, and he'll eat for a lifetime."

The Best Parenting Style

A few years ago, a book titled *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother* became one of the bestsellers in bookstores. The author, Amy Chua, aims to publicize the idea that Chinese mothers do much better jobs at childrearing than Western mothers. But are Chinese parents really superior to parents coming from western backgrounds? Well, I am afraid it depends.

A friend of mine, Emily, comes from a traditional family with typical Chinese parents much alike Amy Chua. When Emily does not live up to her parents' expectations, they would kick her out of the house and force her to wonder outside. The horrible part is, sometimes this kind of event even takes place at night. Emily had done a pretty good job hiding this fact, and I did not realize what kind of situation my friend was in until she was kicked out of her house at midnight one time. Fortunately, she grabbed her phone with her so that she could contact me to come to her rescue and did not have to end up walking alone in the streets on a cold and shivering night.

Unlike Emily's parents, my parents are like western parents and hold an open-minded attitude toward bringing up their children. If I had done something wrong, instead of kicking me out of the house, my parents would usually ground me for a period of time as punishment. From a week to a month, the period of being grounded is based on how serious the mistake is. I remember having been grounded for a month because of getting into a fight with my brother. At first, I would be really upset about the limitation of my freedom, and I wanted to get out of the house in defiance of their order. But after I learned about Emily's fate, frankly speaking, I would rather be grounded than being kicked out. Since then, every time I was grounded, I would take the chance to examine myself on what I did wrong instead of sulking unreasonably. In addition to becoming more mature, I also came to understand that all parents love their child despite the differences in childrearing styles.

The sad ending of my friend Emily's story came to the same conclusion. When Emily finally went home after a few days, she found out that her parents had gone out looking for her and were unfortunately killed in a car accident by a drunk truck driver. The neighbors and relatives had been trying to locate Emily all this time, but she had turned off her phone after calling me that night so as to cut off any connection with her parents as a form of revenge. If her phone had been on, her parents might not have come out looking for her and may still be alive. After her parents' death, Emily started to recall the days when her parents were around, and she gradually realized how much they loved her although they had been really strict and sometimes so unreasonable that Emily wanted to run away and never come back.

It is hard to tell which kind of parents is better, the strict Eastern kind or the open-minded Western kind. From my point of view, the best method for rearing a child depends on the child's personality. I am grateful that since I am the kind of person who tends to be dependent on others, my parents have always urged me to do what I am interested in and they trust and support whatever choice I make. My parents may not be like Amy Chua, the typical Eastern parent, but in my mind, they are the best.

Parenting for Today

I studied at a private junior high school where I saw much exaggerated parenting for today.

The first examples have to do with the interaction between parents and children. One day, a classmate of mine forgot to bring his water bottle to school. Instead of just drinking from the water fountain at school, he called his mom and insisted that she bring the water bottle to school. His house was thirty minutes away, but his mother had to make up for what he forgot. In another example, a boy in my class never did things right. He often fought with others and didn't care about school work. But, his mom had no idea with the way of educating him. So, she always cleared the messy situations for her son, taking a lot of snack for our class and teachers to obscure his ridiculous behaviors.

Another group of examples has to do with the way parents intervened in school matters. Many parents, considering themselves as consumers, thought that they had paid plenty of money for tuition, so they had the right to know and monitor the quality of teaching. Once, an English teacher didn't teach as the parents had expected. Then, five parents made a scene at the office, commanding the school to dismiss the teacher. Also, a lot of the parents would track the schedule of our learning and what homework we had for that day. If they think there had been too much homework for us, they would react immediately to the teachers.

These parents have been termed "helicopter parents" as they hover over their children all the time, and this development embodies three dramatic changes in our time. First, with late marriage and late giving birth, parents tend to cherish and then spoil their children. The reduced number of children per family also made parents focus on kids more than those in agricultural times who had dozens of children to take care of. High expectations for their only child are only natural. Second, economic prosperity allows parents to provide their children with high quality of life, and they would try everything to find what is good for children's body and mind. Third, due to the hard lives that parents had experienced, they tend to compensate by demanding that their children lead better lives than they did.

The problem of helicopter parents is not a problem of individual parents, but the result of social circumstances. As it stands now, parenting still needs to be rethought by all of us as we face the dilemma of caring too much or interfering too much.

My Grandpa

My grandpa passed away recently. He was a big part of my life and now there is a hole inside me because of his absence. With him gone, I've been thinking about him more than ever.

Taking a walk down memory lane, though vaguely, I could still remember the times we spent together, the laughter we shared, and him being always there. In my memories, he'll always be that man of a sharp tongue concealing a caring heart. When I was a senior in high school preparing for the college entrance test, I lived with my grandparents for a few months. I had to go study every day after school so I usually came home late at night. My grandfather always scolded me for coming home late, which bothered me sometimes, but he never went to sleep before my returning home, even though I had told him not to wait up. Some nights he'd even prepare snacks for me and breakfast for the next day. A "little princess" was my nickname that Grandma used to call me because of how attentively Grandpa treated me.

I remember being spoiled by Grandpa, but my father, as my grandpa's own son, obviously experienced a different treatment. My father once told us that when he was a child, he used to walk to school alone. It was a distance that took hours for him. Lonely and heartbroken as he felt, those long walks made him independent and mature. And the day he went to college, he had to carry all his luggage by himself. In contrast to others who mostly had their parents' help, my father was already like a grown man by the age of 18. I was shocked when I heard this because Grandpa used to drive me to school and to everywhere I wanted to go, so did my dad, not to mention that my parents helped me settle down at first day of college. The difference between the parenting styles that Grandpa used on my Dad and my dad used on me was quite obvious. So, how come Grandpa raised my dad by training him to be independent while my dad has practically been like a babysitter to me my whole life?

Some say that the parenting style of our grandparents' generation differs greatly from that of our parents because birth rates have fallen dramatically and today's children are treasured much more than before. However, I don't think this notion fully explains these diverse parenting styles. My grandpa had only three children, which gave him no reason not to spoil my dad like he spoiled me. I think the reason why my grandpa treated me differently was because I'm a girl. Since fathers generally bond with daughters more intimately, it's no surprise that grandfathers also tend to dote on their granddaughters, which was exactly what my grandpa did.

I miss my grandpa terribly. Whenever I close my eyes, his image still appears in my mind and his voice still rings in my ears. It's been hard losing someone I love dearly and I think it's going to take a while for me to let go of grief. But on the other hand, it also brings comfort to me that my grandpa is now in a better place and his spirit will always be with us as our memories of him will live on forever.

Parenting and the Law

Whenever a young person breaks the law, the public tends to attribute faults to his parents, thinking that they failed to perform their obligations of teaching and disciplining the child and hence are responsible for the problem. People seldom think that our society has to shoulder part of the responsibilities too. In fact, current child-protection laws have greatly limited parents' power to teach their children.

One important child-protection law is the law prohibiting domestic violence. In school, children are frequently taught to seek help if they face domestic violence. While such laws do help children who suffer severe violence in the hands of parents, this act also gives children an excuse to challenge their parents and make it hard for parents to discipline them. When some children feel slightly uncomfortable or frustrated because of their parents' discipline, they can easily report to the authorities and get their parents into trouble. Recently, a sixth grade elementary school student went to the police to accuse his parents of domestic violence because his parents forced him to go to cram school. After investigating, his parents said their son had asked to go to cram school because he wanted to prepare well to enroll in private school at first. However, the son regretted soon after but the tuition fee had already been paid. So his parents insisted that he continue his studies at the private school. They did not expect their child to report them.

The Domestic Violence Center often gets calls from children accusing their parents of abusing them, but in fact, most of the cases are nothing but overreactions. Still, such acts of "cry wolf" scare the parents. In order not to violate the law, they will go easy on their children even when the latter make mistakes, which cannot be good for their education. Underage children may be ignorant and fragile in many ways and need the law's protection, yet they are also clever and conniving when it comes to using the laws to get away with murder. We really need to rethink the role of parenting as a form of discipline and teaching.

Parenting Style in Blended Families

Statistics has shown that one of the most explosive issues parents quarrel about nowadays is the issue of parenting. How children should be taught the right manners and good behavior is already a big problem for simple nuclear families. When it comes to blended families, where children do not share the same parents and have very different feelings for one another, the complicate situation makes parenting an even more delicate and sensitive issue.

In a regular nuclear family, parenting is already becoming hard these days. It is challenging to try to build a strong bonding between family members when they already value things differently. For example, kids may be affected by their peers or the information delivered by the social media, but the parents are not engaged in the new trends so they do not know what their kids are thinking about. And when the parents are busy at work, they cannot spend much time with their children, so the bonding of family members is gradually thinning. Things become tougher with the increase of blended families.

A blended family consists of members that came from different families who have now been brought into a new family because of a new marriage. Understandably, the newly formed parents will do their best to create a warm atmosphere for everyone to feel comfortable in it, and it is quite challenging for parents to make sure that every single member is taken care of and is treated equally. My friend Sydney comes from a blended family. Her parents were divorced several years ago and she now lives with her mom, her half sister, and her mom's boyfriend who had a kid with his previous wife. There are five kids in her house, born out of three different pairs of parents. They all have different experiences of what a "home" is like, which makes parenting all the more difficult.

To prevent the feeling of unequal treatment among the five children, Sydney's mom is very careful when giving children pocket money—everyone will get the same share. When the family goes out for fun, all the kids will be equally engaged so that they would not feel any preferential treatment. Despite such efforts, the complicated situation in a blended family may still be difficult to handle. Sydney's mom is quite strict when it comes to teaching the children good behavior and manners. For example, when the 3-year-old kid is crying for not getting what she wants, her natural mother might eventually let go and try to appease the child with whatever the latter is asking for. However, when the child came into the new family headed by Sydney's mom, the new mother would be serious on teaching the right and appropriate manner and warn the child that no good result will come from such whining. Naturally, this parenting style can be easily linked to the long-term image of stepmothers as cruel and selfish.

Parenting style in blended families is a delicate matter. Both parents will have to give strong affection to all their kids in order to achieve a certain degree of bonding. Even with that, there is no guarantee it will always work.

My Prodigal Uncle

It is said that helicopter parents, parents with an unusual zeal to go to extremes to keep their child safe and sound and would do anything to win their child a better social status, are a recent development. However, my grandmother had already given an example of this notorious child-rearing practice fifty years ago. Interestingly, her care and loving seemed only concentrated on one child, contrary to expert opinion that such parents will hover over all their children equally. As my second uncle was the apple of grandma's eye, this concentrated indulgence spoiled him and turned him into a nightmare that haunts the whole family.

With the word "second", it is obvious that my second uncle is not the only child in the house. In fact, this misbehaving uncle has three siblings, an elder sister, an elder brother, and a younger brother, yet no matter how many brothers and sisters he has, he is the one and only child that my grandmother gives all her attention to. One could say that this partiality was decreed by the gods a few decades ago when my second uncle was only 4 years old. While the family went to visit a greatly worshipped temple on a sunny day, each child was told to get a divination to tell their future. Grandma's eyes lit up when the divination my second uncle got was read; it was the best one ever that was received by any member in our family's history. The divination said that my second uncle would enjoy prosperity all his life and would be a great success. Ever since that day, my second uncle became a god-like figure in the house, enjoying the never-ending attention of grandma.

As a child pampered by grandma, my second uncle turned out to be not only a pest at home but a trouble maker in school. He would skip classes if he did not feel like taking the course, and grandma would cook up some excuse for him. He would secretly steal from grandma's purse to buy everything he desired, knowing full well that grandma will only commend him for being able to use his clever brains. Once my second uncle even stole from grandpa's wallet in order to buy some newly published comics; he got off the hook only because grandma knelt down before grandpa to ask for forgiveness on my uncle's behalf. When my dearest second uncle was kicked out of the gifted and talented program in junior high, it was grandma who called everybody she knew and searched through her pile of business cards and eventually made a long-distance phone call to the town councilor. My second uncle got back into the program but quit it a few months later.

Since my second uncle had always been freed from taking up any responsibilities or bearing the consequences of his actions, he developed into an irresponsible grown-up, or to put it differently, he never grew up, which created more problems when he started to act like adults do. He tried to start a business while in college, which lit up our hope because finally the nasty boy had made up his mind to face the reality and try to be self-reliant. But when the family found out my second uncle had gambled away the family fortune and even used our house deed as collateral to borrow from the loan sharks, and our dear grandma tried to keep the truth from us all the time, a sense of bitterness and hatred rose against her. My second uncle of course did not know anything about these things; he simply disappeared. Till now, I do not know where or how he lives, but it is easy to tell from the court summons sent to grandma's house once a week that my second uncle did not live an honorable life.

Like all other helicopter parents, grandma poked her nose into everything related to my second uncle. Without a doubt, she loves him with all her heart, yet this did not lead to a successful life for my second uncle. It is said that people only learn from the consequences of their actions. If a child does not even know what a consequence is, how would he turn out?

Ideal Parenting in the Homosexual Family

Many countries have legalized same-sex marriage in the past few years, so homosexual families may become more and more common in the world. As it consists of two same-sex parents, it may offer an opportunity to avoid some of the problems of heterosexual families if it can take advantage of this characteristic to create an ideal parenting style.

To begin with, children's socialization may run a very different course if both parents are of the same sex. Early in children's development stage, the family is the strongest agent because children learn the rules for their behavior, the importance of socially-accepted values, and the need to meet social expectations. The family provides the initial human behavior patterns and teaches the children how the roles in a family work. In the heterosexual family, male and female roles may be clearly divided, for example, the male may play a financial supporter's role, while the female may play as a housekeeper's role in a stereotypical family. These factors will of course affect how the children adopt their roles. But, in the homosexual family, parents can break these gender stereotypes and experiment with other possibilities and roles. Their collaboration, rather than gender division, will certainly lead to very different results.

Secondly, homosexual parents have lived with prejudice and discrimination before and they know how people can be hurt by these negative feelings and emotions. So now they have their own family and try to bring up children, they can take the occasion to educate their children about the diversity of possibilities and choices in the world. They are in a better position to teach about having an open-minded outlook on the world and to accommodate differences and peculiarities. As the homosexual parents have already overcome so much pressure from both their family and society when they come out of the closet, they may have learned the correct way to solve such problems. Therefore, they can also help their children in developing these kinds of abilities, of being brave to lead their own life and confront the difficulties.

Last but not least, as same-sex marriage is not yet legalized in many countries, the homosexual family is still unprotected by law. Member of such families will have to try very hard to stabilize the family's relationship by devoting more time and effort to family affairs, such as interacting more with family members. This can also improve intimacy in the family.

I have great hope that the homosexual family can create new ways of parenting to deliver positive values to the offspring.

Punishment

What I can remember best about my childhood is being punished by my mother. She used to pinch my arms and thighs until they were swollen and bruised. Strangely, I could never recall any memory of what I had done wrong. I had asked my mother why she would choose it as a way of education. She told me that she knew physical punishment was not the best solution, yet she could not help it.

My mother was born third in her family. Since her sister and brother already occupied all the love of her parents, my mother was often neglected and treated like a servant. She had been responsible for all the housework since she was eight years old. When other kids were playing outside, she had to sweep the floor with a broom that was taller than her. In the winter, she was asked to wash all the clothes with her hands. The detergent often left her soft small hands chapped and bleeding. In the summer, she was made to climb onto the windows and wipe all the dust off without a ladder. Every day she had to cook dinner with a heavy wok which she could barely lift up. My grandmother had a twisted mind that if any of those were done “wrong” by her standard, which was based on her mood, my mother would get beaten up with a hanger, an iron bar, or a baseball bat. With all bruised and bleeding wounds, mother still had to continue her work the next day.

It is said that those who have suffered domestic violence will repeat their parents’ parenting style. I hope my mother is not one of them. She may have punished me in order to change my misbehavior, yet because she did not tell me exactly how to fix my mistakes, the physical punishment only left a clueless fear in my heart.

Transformation of Parenting

Parenting has changed through the years with the dramatic transformation of our world. For instance, in the past, parents would require children to work in order to help support the family and wouldn't dote too much on the latter lest they should cultivate bad habits. But today, parents do everything for their children, treating them like delicate treasures and keeping them from working on various kinds of things. There are three main factors that contributed to the changing of parenting — low birth rate, parents' attitude, and the advancement of society.

Nowadays, parents have fewer children, usually one or two, so the parent's attention is easily focused. When children do something wrong, in the past, they would be punished severely by the parents, unlike today, children are only gently admonished. Parents watch over their children closely and are afraid of any injury that may happen to their precious. They would even act as exclusive servants for their children.

Also, parents have high hopes that their children can lead a better life in the future. As they themselves had suffered poverty in their childhood, parents usually would provide everything to create a comfortable life for their children. In order to ensure a good future for their children, parents are becoming over concerned about education. Parents often want what's best for their children because they think the children's future does not allow any mistakes that may change the prospect.

Lastly, as science and technology are advancing with each passing day, the competition is getting keener and keener. The new generation should have stronger and more diverse abilities to survive in this competitive world. As a result, today's parents require their kids to learn many talents since they are young or get them trained for many skills, which may make life miserable for their children.

Today's parents seem to either spoil their children or drive their children crazy with overloaded work, making the latter dependent, vulnerable, and headstrong. Such inappropriate parenting styles may cause bad impact on the next generation and create a vicious cycle. We need to think hard and design better ways of parenting for today's world.

Causes of the Helicopter Parents

Nowadays, people tend to use the term “helicopter parents” to describe those parents who hover above their children and try to intervene in their children’s life. Generally, the public tends to consider that the cause of “helicopter parents” was the dramatically falling birth rate. However, there are still some other reasons contributing to the appearance of “helicopter parents.”

First, the “economic booms.” In the past decades, the international economic environment has been improved enormously. Because the previous generation, today’s parents, had gone through an impoverished era, they tend to focus on their own “imperfections” during their process of growth. Consequently, they are eager to give their children favorable conditions for development by removing all the obstacles in their children’s life journey. Therefore, parents tend to be indulgent to their children, which might make their children less self-reliant.

Second, the highly competitive world. Since globalization has become a reality, the competition which young people are going to face will no longer come only from within their own country. For example, young people need to compete with competitors from all over the world in order to secure jobs. Besides, education policies have been changing rapidly, leaving parents confused and anxious. As a result, they become more and more aggressive in intervening in their children’s schooling and paving the way for the latter’s success.

Psychologists have described the “Peter Pan syndrome” as the reluctance of patients to grow up into responsible, independent, humble, helpful adults. This may be exactly the problem with the personality of those children who were overprotected by their helicopter parents. As children are deprived of opportunities to learn, to conquer difficulties, it will only make children become more frangible.

The community and the Professionals:

Shifting sources of the knowledge about Childrearing

I am really fascinated with the books, so I often go to the bookstore. But lately I have noticed a strange phenomenon: more and more childrearing books have been published to teach novice parents how to bring up their babies. I am very curious about this, because in my memory I have never seen such books in my grandmother's home or even in my own home.

Child-rearing has long been a communal thing, where frequent interaction between people passed on vital information for bring up children. I still remember when I was a child living in my Grandma's home. There were always people walking up to my grandma's house to chat, and then passing information onto others. The experience of family elders was a great source of wisdom and they often talked about the experience by word of mouth. And when new parents encountered difficulties, they can always get help from their neighbors or relatives. Knowledge is produced within the community and members feel supported and secure because they can easily double check and confirm if they are doing the right thing.

But now as population concentrates in the city, where most live in high-rise apartment building with little contact with one another, people have less opportunity to exchange views with their neighbors, and no one can be used as a basis for reference. As a result, the childrearing knowledge process has changed. Parents turn to books written from professionals for basic information about child-rearing. Low-birth rate brings about the side effects in the more and more competitive society. Now parents give birth to only one or two kids, so they devote a lot of efforts to the children, and most parents hope their children can lead the pack right from the beginning, so they actively seek information to help their children.

Books written by professionals may be helpful for new parents to get a grasp on taking care of the baby, but bringing a child up is a much more complicated process that requires a lot of support from all of us.