BLIND TO THE WEB OF SOCIAL CHANGE

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Seminar: Child/Parent

Assignment: You are asked once again to consider the material in Parents in Contemporary America. After reading chapters 10 and 11 and viewing the materials in the class scrapbook, what kind of advice do you have to give people your own age about the role of parent?

(Note: This essay is written to my 17 year old sister Sandy in hopes that in some way it may provide insight into her relationship with our parents.)

(1) "I want to go to the tanning booth, but Mom won't let me. I am the only one of my friends at school who doesn't go--Yvette goes, Susan goes, and Christina goes. I want to get a tan for the prom. I don't understand why she won't let me do it. I'd pay for it myself."

(2) You have been caught in frustrating situations like this so many times, especially these last four years. The subject may change, but the scenario is the same: you want to do something your friends are doing, then Mom and Dad say no. Your ideas and society's ideas often disagree with Mom's and Dad's views and this can bring conflict. Even though Yvette, Susan, and Christina are allowed to go to the tanning booth, they experience conflict with their parents in other areas, like curfew and dating. Please try to be aware that other parents and children experience problems too.

(3) Being the fashion-minded person that you are, you develop new ideas by looking through magazines. You have seen pages and pages of perfectly beautiful people with perfectly designed outfits leading perfectly happy lives. These advertisements are giving you a distorted picture of reality. Life is not nearly so perfect. We all experience conflict in our lives, so do not feel alone when dealing with these problems. Try to realize that all of us are caught in the sticky web of the rapid rate of social change. This drastic rate of social change in our society is causing conflict between parents and children which the advertisements fail to acknowledge.

(4) The fast social change is creating confusion over values. LeMasters and DeFRAIN elaborate on this point in chapter 11 of their book Parents in Contemporary America, stating that as the rate of social change accelerates, parents like Mom and Dad are finding it difficult to understand their children. This confusion is two way--children also find their parents to be impossible at times. This conflict is especially true for young people your age and at the junior high level. This conflict is easier to understand when we realize that this rapid rate
of social change makes the world Mom and Dad grew up in and developed their values in quite different from the society we are now in.

(5) Parents react differently to the changes in our society. LeMasters and DeFraid point out that the reactions range from participating in the changes to deploring them. Mom and Dad seem to be in the middle. They go along with some things, as when they let Doug spend a week in Florida with his friends, two boys and three girls, and just laughed as they mentioned that they would never have dreamed of doing that when they were his age. On the other hand, they hold fast in not wanting you to get your ears pierced. They seem to be flexible in some areas while standing firm in others.

(6) You are or will be facing the problem of growing up in a rural community and being bombarded by urban society. Most children of farmers do not stay on the farm. This leaves parents trying to "internalize rural values and a rural way of life" in their children while society is going in the other direction (LeMasters and DeFraid 225).

(7) Another factor which might influence you is the effect of advertisements on your idea of the parent/child relationship. With the time you spend leafing through magazines and watching television, you might be vulnerable to the distorted image portrayed in these advertisements. These advertisers fail to deal with conflicts between family members. In a class project, fifteen advertisements which pictured a parent and child relationship were collected. Of the fifteen pictures, only two dealt with conflict while the other thirteen showed an intimate, happy relationship between the parent and child. The two advertisements which showed some real problems were announcing television specials dealing with the problems of teenage pregnancy and world hunger. The realistic view of parent/child relationships was not illustrated in any other pictures. This misrepresentation of the roles could add to your frustration in dealing with Mom and Dad. If you expect a perfect, conflict-free relationship with Mom and Dad, then you may be strongly hurt by the problems when they occur.

(8) Try to realize that Mom and Dad are in a bind. Parents in Contemporary America illustrates that if the set of values taught by parents deviates too much from the current model, they risk the possibility of damaging their relationship with their child or the possibility of their child being rejected by his or her peers. Both have damaging effects. Mom and Dad seem to have worked through this well. They still maintain a good relationship with you while you still have acceptance by your peer group.
Through being aware of the inaccurate view of parent/child relationships pictured in advertisements and being tuned in to the effects of rapid social change, hopefully you can better understand your relationship with Mom and Dad. The rapid change of social norms precipitates confusion between parents and their children. Parents react differently to changes—some delight in the changes while others deplore them. A factor in your situation is that you are being raised in a rural setting with rural values, but probably some day will be part of an urban environment. Often the norms of these two societies differ. These factors, along with the neglect of them by advertisers, create distance between parents and children. Through a give and take relationship which realizes that you are both caught in the web of social change, you can help to narrow these gaps.