Kathy Hoffer

HofferK@xenos.org

March 1, 2016

**Evaluating Cultural Trends in Parenting**

**Trends:**

*Positives:*

*Negatives:*

**I: ABDICATION OF AUTHORITY**

There’s been a transfer of authority from parents to kids.

Examples:

Results: self-centered kids who are less able to control themselves or get along with peers

**II: OVER-PARENTING (aka Helicopter Parenting)**

*Hovering over kids in a way that prevents their learning independence*.

1. **“Being There”**
2. **“There” but Distracted**

*While bloated and angry and looking to settle the score in my third trimester, I sat in my rocking chair and barked orders at my husband about how far he needed to space the chevron stripes he was painting on the walls. My swollen fingers made fruitless attempts at crocheting little forest critter stuffed animals that were totally practical to hand over to a slobbering newborn….I was going to use every ounce of energy I had to throw my baby the best [first] birthday party he would not have the mental capacity to give a fart about….[I] would prepare healthy snacks for a carefully planned out tablescape with coordinating textiles and hand-lettered cards…I was up until 3am the night before my son’s [1st birthday] party, sewing a birthday crown….(Scary Mommy* article*)*

1. **Over-Emphasis on Achievement/Academic Advancement**

**III. INORDINATE FOCUS on HEALTH & SAFETY**

**There’s more to it than stats:**

**“**The irony is that we are now, arguably, living at the safest time for children that the world has ever known. The childhood diseases that were once common and deadly have been all but eradicated. Our food is cleaner and safer than it has ever been before. Thanks to seat belts, they don’t even die in car accidents in anywhere near the numbers that kids of our generation did. Crime stats are down….And yet—*people are terrified*.” (*Madness*, 173)

“Of course, serious harm coming to any child is an unspeakable tragedy, and real child predators are out there even though very few commit stranger-to-stranger crimes. But why do we base our daily decisions…on a one-in-a-million chance that our kid could be killed by a stranger, when…in any given year a child is more likely to be killed in an equestrian accident, as a result of youth football, or as a passenger in a car….If we prevent our children from learning how to navigate the world beyond our front yard, it will only come back to haunt them later on….” (*Adult*, 22)

“Fears are fueled by the media, whose ratings go up when they tell a scary story. We perceive that our nation is a more dangerous place, yet the data show that the rates of child abduction are no higher, and by many measures are lower, than ever before….Children abducted by strangers represent .01% of all missing children….It’s a cruel myth that more and more kids are going missing and are abducted by strangers.” (*Adult*, 21, 22)

“*No one…is to be trusted….Not teachers, not doctors, not childhood immunizations. Even milk is an ‘insidious ingredient.’ The media not only fans our fears, it comforts us in our hubris [arrogance]*.” (*Madness*, 171)

**RESULTS**

**Learned Helplessness**

**Unprepared for life**

-Lack life skills

-Difficulty holding jobs: overly-dependent on others; little initiative; poor work ethic; complain.

-Entitled & whiney

“While hyper-parenting can induce anxiety, depression, and stress in older kids, among younger children it now seems chiefly to produce bad behavior. Educators complain that many children have trouble transitioning to preschool because they’ve been played with so constantly and have gotten so much of what they want all the time at home. They come to kindergarten over-prepared intellectually and underprepared in basic social skills. Some five-year-olds actually come to kindergarten reading, writing, talking with extensive vocabularies, and capable of advanced math,” she wrote, “but many do not know how to share or play cooperatively and often demand continuous one-on-one attention and entertainment. Ironically, despite these obvious academic gains, educators see more and more children still lacking important developmental gains such as basic social skills or even potty training.” *(Madness, 203)*

**Psychological Problems**

Control issues (OCD, eating disorders, cutting); fearful & unhappy kids (depression, anxiety); self-obsession…

**No resilience**

Children who are raised to believe that they are the center of the universe have a tough time when their special status erodes as they approach adulthood. (Teller)

Colonel at West Point Military Academy: Young men today are less resilient than ever. “If you raise your voice, they get teary-eyed. Like no one has ever corrected them before….If you’re prevented from feeling discomfort or failure, you have no sense of how to handle those things at all. (*Adults*, 255)

**Health & Safety: no better, and probably worse!**

**Parents are stressed, and marriages are ending:**

Researcher Ellen Galinsky asked 1000 kids what they would most like to change about their parents’ schedules. Few of them wanted more face time; the top wish was for mom and dad to be less tired and stressed. Parents today are scared, not to mention exhausted, anxious, and depressed. (*Adult* 139)

[Couples] who live entirely child-centric lives can lose touch with one another to the point where they have nothing left to say to one another when the kids leave home. When children come along, we believe that we can press pause on the soulmate narrative, because parenthood has become our new priority and religion. We raise our children as best we can, and we know that we have succeeded if they leave us, going out into the world to find partners and have children of their own. Once our gods have left us, we try to pick up the pieces of our long neglected marriages and find new purpose. Is it surprising that divorce rates are rising fastest for [new empty nesters](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/22/fashion/weddings/divorce-after-50-grows-more-common.html?_r=0)? (Teller)

**STEPS TO RESIST NEGATIVE CULTURAL TRENDS/MESSAGES**

“To parent in such a state of calm, you have to be able to believe that things will basically turn out okay. And frankly, at this point in time,…there is much reason to believe they will not.” *(Madness*, 185)

* **John 1.12**: *But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God.*
* **Hebrews 4.16:** *Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.*
* **1 Peter 5.7** *Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you.*
* **Psalm 16.8** Because God is at my right hand, I will not be shaken.
* **Romans 8.28** *God causes all things to work together for good for those who love Him….*
* **Joshua 1.9** *Be strong and courageous. Do not tremble or be afraid, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.*

**Discussion Questions**

**(If don’t get through them all, get together for coffee w/ your other mom friends and finish it up.)**

*How could you tell if you are buying into some of these negative parenting trends?*

*When is/isn’t it appropriate to let your kid experience negative natural consequences of his—or others’—actions? (I.e., when is it right to step in to help/ease them? What’s the difference between enabling vs compassion?)*

We’re not meant to do *nothing* for them—just not *everything*! “While our children are still at home with us, we must nourish them, love them for who they are, support their interests, and teach them the skills and values that will foster their independence and prepare them to live life” (*How to* *Raise an Adult*, 339).

*What’s the difference between appropriate help and kindness versus enabling their helplessness and passive dependence on us?*

*Why do you think so many of today’s parents mistrust authority?*

*What sorts of things* should *we allow our kids to choose freely (be hands-off), and what areas should we use our authority to override their free choice and get strict about?*

*What are your own tendencies in parenting? What would it look like for you to lean against them with regard to some of these trends?*

*How would you describe the line between protecting your children and giving them the freedom they need for growth & development? Discuss age-appropriate levels of autonomy.*

*What do you think drives the tendency to over-parent?*

*Do you think your own fears affect your kids and your parenting? If so, how?*

*Of the insights from today, what changes or adjustments do you plan to make in the way you parent, if any? What positive steps you can take now?*

*Where can we let go of some of the unnecessary control in our homes and parenting?*

*What’s the difference between personal preference versus unhealthy extremism?*

*Why do you think so many parents are reluctant to allow or enforce consequences?*

**Additional Random Stuff**

Don’t gulp down everything you hear. For comic relief, check out this funny example of unnecessary hysteria: <https://www.csun.edu/science/ref/humor/dhmo.html>

**Curveballs you must let your kid experience:**

*Not being invited to a birthday party • The death of a pet • Breaking a valuable vase • Working hard on a paper and still getting a poor grade • Having a car break down away from home• Being told camp is full • Getting detention •Missing a show because she was helping Grandma*  *• Being blamed for something he didn’t do • Having an event canceled because someone else misbehaved • Being fired from a job • Not making the varsity team • Coming in last at something • Being hit by another kid • Deeply regretting saying something she can’t take back • Not being invited when friends are going out • Being picked last for neighborhood kickball (Adult*, 266-7)

“We have raised a generation of young people who have not been given the opportunity to learn how to solve their own problems. They have not been given the opportunity to get into trouble and find their own way out, to experience failure and realize they can survive it, to be called bad names by others and learn how to respond without adult intervention. So now, here’s what we have: Young people, 18years and older, going to college still unable or unwilling to take responsibility for themselves, still feeling that if a problem arises they need an adult to solve it….They don’t seem to have as much grit as previous generations. Helicopter parenting is really at the core.” Peter Gray, “Declining Student Resilience: A Serious Problem for Colleges: College personnel everywhere are struggling with students’ increased neediness.” *Psychology Today*. Sept 2015.

“In the way we go about mothering today, we communicate to our kids all our anxiety, our competitiveness, and our narcissism. And kids pick up on everything.” (*Madness*, 58)

**More advantages** that come with becoming a child of God, *the* Father:

**Ps. 46.1-2** *God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea….*

**James 1.5** *If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.*

**Romans 8.28** And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him….

**John 3.36** *Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on the.*

**Parenting Styles** (*Adults,* 167)

1. **Authoritarian: demanding & unresponsive.** Strict, expect obedience & respect, and punish their children for failing to comply. They don’t explain reasoning for their actions—they are the “because I said so” type. They value achievement, order, discipline and self-control. Their children have a lot of responsibility in the home and few freedoms outside of it.
2. **Permissive/Indulgent: undemanding & responsive.** These parents tend to attend to their child’s every need and comply with their child’s every request. They are reluctant to establish rules or expectations, and thus have little basis for or need to discipline. They remind to the point of nagging, but the behavioral consequence they threaten rarely comes. They “give in” regularly and are reluctant to say no or to enforce consequences when they do say it. Some are very present physically in their child’s life. They want their child to like them, and act more like friends than parents.
3. **Neglectful: undemanding & unresponsive.** These parents are, at best, “hands off,” and at worst criminally negligent. They are uninvolved in their child’s school and home life, are emotionally distant, and often physically absent.
4. **Authoritative: demanding & responsive.** These parents set high standards, expectations, and limits, which they uphold with consequences. They are also emotionally warm, and responsive to their child’s emotional needs. They reason with their kids, engaging in a give-and-take for the sake of learning. They give their child freedom to explore, to fail, and to make their own choices.

 **More Responsive**

**Authoritative**

**Permissive/ Indulgent**

 **Less Demanding** **More Demanding**

**Authoritarian**

**Neglectful**

 **Less Responsive**

**Helicopter parenting tendencies fall into one or both of two types: authoritarian and permissive/indulgent.** They are authoritarian if they bring a heavy hand of direction to their kids’ academic, extracurricular, and home lives instilling a fear of failure with little regard for what each kid wants to pursue. They are permissive/indulgent if they are focused on pleasing their kid, praising their kid, protecting them from failure or harm, and sticking up for them in the world, with little regard for building skills, a strong work ethic, or character.

In a study of close to five thousand U.S. teenagers and their parents found that children raised by authoritative parents have higher academic achievement, fewer symptoms of depression, and fewer problems with aggression, disobedience, and other antisocial behaviors.

**REFERENCE/RESOURCE LIST (read critically)**

**Books**

* Barna, George. *Revolutionary Parenting.* 2007.
* Eyre, Linda and Richard. *Teaching Values to your Children.* 1993. [Very practical]
* Lythcott-Haims, Julie. *How to Raise an Adult: Break Free of the Overparenting Trap and Prepare Your Kid for Success*. 2015.
* Sax, Leonard. *The Collapse of Parenting: How We Hurt Our Kids When We Treat Them Like Grown-Ups*. 2015. [I haven’t read it all, but I like what I’ve seen so far.]
* Warner, Judith. *Perfect Madness: Motherhood in the Age of Anxiety.* 2006. [Great with describing trends, how they developed, and how anxiety-ridden and/or ridiculous some moms are; but I think she might have a bit of a chip on her shoulder and/or an over-emphasis on working moms.]

**Articles:**

* “Ban Dihydrogen Monoxide!” <<https://www.csun.edu/science/ref/humor/dhmo.html>> [Highlights in a humorous way how quickly people embrace alarmist news.]
* Dannemiller, Scott. “Why I Stopped Helping My Kids*.*” 18 Feb 2016. [good!] <<https://theaccidentalmissionary.wordpress.com/2016/02/18/why-i-stopped-helping-my-kids/>>
* Gray, Peter, PhD. “Declining Student Resilience: A Serious Problem for Colleges: College personnel everywhere are struggling with students’ increased neediness.” *Psychology Today.* Sept 2015.
* Teller, Danielle. “How American Parenting is Killing the American Marriage.” 30 Sept. 2014. [Very good!]
* Villalpando, Nicole. “Physician to Parents: You’re Doing it Wrong*.” Parenting Magazine. Austin American Statesman* 21 Jan, 2016[about Sax’s new book, cited above]

**Videos/Films/Shows:**

* Charles, [Augustus.](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCduDuc1DkYsWhYVBxo6aK4g) “OMG, 80's, 70's, 60's Babies! We Made It!”[poking fun at today’s uber-safe culture] <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oUOo4oX4xCs>>
* *Frontline*, June 30, 2015: *Growing Up Trans.*
* *Race to Nowhere*, 2010. <[www.racetonowhere.com](http://www.racetonowhere.com)>
* Rosin, Hanna. “The Overprotected Kid.” 23 Jun 2014.
<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-611S2rA510>>
* “You Know You’re a Bad Mom If…” by The BreakWomb: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uf1_7xxWPE0>>

**Being proactive about your kids and porn:**

* Gardner, Brian. *Porn Free.* 2011.
* Rochford, James. <http://www.evidenceunseen.com/theology/practical-theology/battling-pornography/>