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VEPACHEDU EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATION

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Mana Sanskriti (Our Culture)

Chief Editor: Dr. Sreenivasarao Vepachedu, Esq.

AFFECTION AND PARENTING

Parenting is the care and nurturing of offspring between conception and independence. It is important not only to humans, but also to many mammals and birds. Depending on the species-typical pattern of such investment, parenting influences how offspring are reared and relationships among the sexes. It has traditionally been viewed as an important source of environmental variability in the long-debated nature–nurture dichotomy wherein individual differences are attributed to both genetic and cultural factors.

Human children, like other mammalian offspring, are conceived, breastfed, nurtured and trained, and are eventually able to fend for themselves and start the life-cycle. However, the period of dependency is longer in humans relative to that of other primates, most probably, due to the intellectual demands of human society and the physical immaturity of human children, and places an extraordinary burden and responsibility on human parents to ensure the offspring survival in the natural selection process. This shaped how parents around the world treat children, the structure of the human family, and relationships between women and men ¹.

Natural selection is a highly interactive process, involving an organism's response to a changing environment, resulting in the survival of the fittest, i.e., individuals who fit well within a current environment survive, and those who fit less well perish along with their genes. A child possesses 50% of each parent's genes. Thus it is in the parents' best genetic interest to see that an offspring survives so that copies of the parent's genes are passed on to grandchildren. A person can further benefit the transmission of genes by helping relatives, who share a percentage of genes, e.g., rearing nephews/nieces, each of whom shares about 25% of her genes, a woman can further increase her genetic contribution to the next generation, which may be the reason for a joint family structure in many cultures, which in turn could be the reason for human tribal/clan/caste affiliations. We do take part in this selection process and such patterns are observed in

¹ Bjorklund, et al., [The Evolution of Parenting and Evolutionary Approaches to Childrearing: Biology Of Parenting, Handbook of Parenting, Volume 2, Biology and Ecology of Parenting, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 2002.](#)

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other mammals, birds, and social insects, indicating that self-awareness is not ordinarily involved².

Another aspect in parenting is the amount of investment shared by parents. For most species, including humans, females invest more heavily in their offspring than males do, naturally, e.g., depending on the requirements of the young, there are substantial species differences in the amount of post-sex investment parents provide to their offspring, such as the gestation period (9 months in humans), which is completely borne by the female. Males of some species contribute literally no support to their progeny or mother. Human males are an exception to the typical mammalian pattern, and yet, women in all cultures provide more support and engage their children more frequently than men do; women devoting more of their time to child care than men do, even in the dual income families of the modern day first world societies. For a substantial paternal investment, a high degree of paternity certainty is a prerequisite, which has been achieved in the contemporary human society through the institution of marriage. The result is a husband who can be relatively confident of the paternity of his offspring supports his wife by providing resources, protection and love for her and offspring, thereby ensuring the survival of the offspring and transmission of genes. In contemporary America, the quality of a father's active and supportive involvement in his children's lives is positively associated with emotional, academic, and social competence³.

In all societies, as discussed above, support also comes from related kin, such as siblings, cousins, uncles, aunts, and grandparents. The conditions under which kin are apt to provide support are when genetic relatedness is high. Maternal grandparents, like the mother, can be quite confident that the baby is related to them, whereas paternal grandparents (and fathers), can never be 100% certain of paternity. An excellent example of such successful grandparents' involvement is the first African American President

² *Ibid*;

³ *Ibid*; see also, Cabrera et al., 2000; Lamb, 1997;

[Schön, Natural Parenting, Evolutionary Psychology, 5\(1\): 102-183.](#)

[Siedl-de-Moura, et al., Human development in an evolutionary perspective, Avances en Psicología Latinoamericana/Bogotá \(Colombia\)/Vol. 27\(2\)/pp. 252-262, 2009.](#)

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Barack Hussein Obama, who was brought up by Dunhams, his maternal American grandparents⁴.

As a social unit, a family presents a context for parents to care for their children's physical and emotional needs and to transmit assets, knowledge, and values. The quality of family life can also be a decisive factor in the moments in which families face crisis situations, such as the economic insecurity, separation, disruptions in social support, and stress associated with immigration. Parenting styles are determined by many factors, including ethnicity, culture, class, level of education, personal family history, influence of immigration, levels of acculturation, ethnic ancestry, and the goals, values, and particular needs of each family, such as family cohesion, future plans for children, and the level of support of extended family⁵.

There can be no debate that parents play a key role in their children's development. However, parents in different cultures receive different kinds of guidance in childrearing in the form of traditions, examples or books, e.g., In her book entitled, "It Takes a Village," Hillary Clinton states, "Children are not rugged individualists. They depend on the adults they know and on thousands more who make decisions every day that affect their well-being.... Parents bear the first and primary responsibility for their sons and daughters -- to feed them, to sing them to sleep, to teach them to ride a bike, to encourage their talents, to help them develop spiritual lives, to make countless daily decisions that determine whom they have the potential to become." She continues, "From the moment they are born, they depend on a host of other "grownups" – grandparents, neighbors, teachers, ministers, employers, political leaders, and untold others who touch their lives directly and indirectly.... Each of us plays a part in every child's life: It takes a village to raise a child."

Community and parental attitudes about childrearing practices reflect cultural values and priorities, e.g., physical punishment of children is frequently the norm in

⁴ [President Barack Hussein Obama.](#)

⁵ [Méndez, Latino Parenting Expectations and Styles: A Literature Review. Protecting Children, A Professional Publication of American Humane, Volume 21, Number 2, 2006.](#)

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certain cultures and parents claim the right to punish their children on cultural and religious grounds⁶.

Within Western cultures, self-esteem consistently has been demonstrated to be inversely related with parenting styles characterized by low levels of acceptance and high levels of overprotection (i.e., affectionless control). Although in traditional collectivist cultures there may be a preference for this parenting style, within a strong collectivist framework it is not thought to have a negative impact on self-esteem. However, for immigrant adolescents, the cultural context of collectivism may no longer support such a parenting style as adaptive, particularly because they tend to acculturate more quickly than their parents.

A study of immigrant Chinese and European-American mothers of preschool-aged children found that the Chinese mothers scored significantly higher on the “training” ideologies. This “training” concept has important features, beyond the authoritarian concept, that may explain Chinese school success in the US⁷.

In an Australian study, authoritarian parenting, characterized by high levels of overprotection and low levels of acceptance, related negatively with self-esteem for both Vietnamese Australian and Anglo-Australian adolescents⁸.

In a Finnish study, the results showed that a high level of psychological control exercised by mothers combined with high affection predicted increases in the levels of both internal and external problem behaviors among children. Behavioral control

⁶Collier et al., Culture-specific views of child maltreatment and parenting styles in a Pacific-Island community, *Child Abuse & Neglect*, Volume 23, Issue 3, Pages 229–244, March 1999.

⁷Chao, Beyond Parental Control and Authoritarian Parenting Style: Understanding Chinese Parenting through the Cultural Notion of Training, *Child Development*, Volume 65, Issue 4, pages 1111–1119, August 1994.

⁸Herz, The Relationship between Self-Esteem and Parenting Style, A Cross-Cultural Comparison of Australian and Vietnamese Australian Adolescents, *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, vol. 30 no. 6 742-761, November 1999.

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exercised by mothers decreased children's external problem behavior but only when combined with a low level of psychological control⁹.

In a study from the University of Adelaide in Australia, children with lower levels of the hormone were later more likely to develop problems with alcohol and drug abuse, among other addictive behaviors. Past research has established quite a variance in oxytocin among people, though scientists do not yet understand how the hormone affects health. Essential to the developing mother-child bond, we are all born with varying levels of oxytocin. Yet, our oxytocin systems are not yet fully developed until the age of 3, which means our systems are potentially subject to a range of influences, both external and internal. External influences over the oxytocin system of a developing child may include stress, trauma, severe infection, or early exposure to drugs. A well-developed oxytocin system is in a position to directly and indirectly increase resilience, for example by reducing drug reward, increasing social reward, reducing anxiety, reducing stress response and immune stimulation¹⁰.

It appears that human contact through hugs lowers blood pressure and reduces stress, which cuts the risk of heart disease. Hugs have also been shown to improve overall mood, increase nerve activity, and a host of other beneficial effects. Positive physical touch has an immediate anti-stress effect, slowing breathing and heart rate. Each time we hug, we increase the level of oxytocin in the blood. This hormone triggers a "caring" or "bonding" response in both men and women¹¹.

Oxytocin has been implicated in processes of parent-infant bonding in animal models. Several studies in human mothers have shown that peripheral oxytocin release during birth, breastfeeding, and skin-to-skin contact between mothers and newborns is related to higher maternal responsiveness, lower maternal stress, and more optimal

⁹[Aunola et al., The Role of Parenting Styles in Children's Problem Behavior, Child Development, Volume 76, Issue 6, pages 1144–1159, November 2005.](#)

¹⁰[Fuisman-Pijlman et al., Low Levels Of 'Love Hormone,' Oxytocin, In Kids Linked To Substance Abuse Later On, Pharmacology, Biochemistry and Behavior. 2014.](#)

¹¹ [Mientka, Hugs and heart health, The side effects of this medicine are all good!](#)

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mother-infant bond¹². Human mothers, like other mammalian mothers, engage in the species-typical forms of affectionate contact. In humans, maternal affectionate contact is expressed in holding the infant in a cradling position and providing affectionate touch, including caresses, soft kisses, light pokes, hugs, and gentle touches. The mother's high or low affectionate contact style is similarly stable over time and contributes to the infant's neurobehavioral, cognitive, and social-emotional growth. It is possible that whereas hormones associated with birth, lactation, and affectionate contact may induce hormonal changes in mothers, tactile stimulation and active forms of behavior such as exploration may shape the neuroendocrine basis of fathering. Human fathers engage in interactions that involve proprioceptive and stimulatory contact and their play is often directed toward active exploration of the environment¹³.

Physical touch is a multifaceted component of nonverbal communication. Touch can convey anger, fear, love, sympathy, and other emotions to both the person being touched and to observers of the touch. Evidence is growing that humans have a physical, psychological, and spiritual need for a steady diet of touch. Nongenital, nonsexual, firm touch promotes not only developmental health in young children but also physical and psychological health in people of all ages, through myriad pathways whose relationships are not yet fully understood¹⁴. Frequency of touch is positively correlated with warmth, empathy, generosity, concern for others, and a positive self image. Many Americans go through life rarely touching others or being touched because of various fears. Yet many kinds of touch are healthy and appropriate and available to each of us. Most children

¹²[Oxytocin and the Development of Parenting in Humans, Biological Psychiatry, Volume 68, Issue 4, Pages 377-382, 15 August 2010.](#)

¹³[Feldman, Natural variations in maternal and paternal care are associated with systematic changes in oxytocin following parent-infant contact, Psychoneuroendocrinology, Volume 35, Issue 8, Pages 1133-1141, September 2010.](#)

¹⁴[Traina, Touch on Trial: Power and the Right to Physical Affection, Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics, 25, 1: 3-34, 2005.](#)

[Field, Touch, The MIT Press, February 2003.](#)

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would love to be touched and held more than they are¹⁵. Many Americans accept as natural that the adorable cuddly child growing into the sulky, rebellious, noncommunicative adolescent. However, much of this change in a teenager's personality is biologically based, and this transformation might rather reflect the dramatic decrease in physical contact that is available between adults and children following the onset of puberty¹⁶.

In light of the contemporary preoccupation with sexual abuse, as touch signals "sex" in American culture, and as boys and men begin to leer and other girls begin to judge; girls desperately need reassurance that their bodies are not dangerous distractions. A dad who doesn't freak out that his daughter has breasts can provide that reassurance as few others can. Dads, like all adults, need to be careful not to foist unwanted affection on children. Forcing your daughter to hug you when she clearly doesn't want to is violating and may become incest punishable by jail time¹⁷; the most frequent type of incest (36%) was between a father and his daughter¹⁸; it is worse than shying away from her embraces. On the other hand, it's not a great idea to put your daughter in the position where she feels she has to ask for normal affection. There's a delicate dance here, as there always is with teenagers. A little awkwardness is normal. Every father can make a huge difference in his daughter's life. As the primary male role model in a girl's life, fathers influence their daughters in profound ways, from how they see themselves to what they come to expect from men and the world at large. But men often don't realize the importance of their interactions or may shy away from too close involvement¹⁹.

¹⁵[Blanton, A Study Of Skin As Tactile Connection In Human Sexuality: Sense Of Touch Via Our Largest Sex Organ: Skin, A Dissertaiton Submitted To The Faculty Of The American Academy Of Clinical Sexologists At Maimonides University.](#)

¹⁶[Lebeck-Jobe, The Role Of Positive Physical Touch In Family Therapy and Training For Marriage And Family Therapists On The Ethical Use Of Physical Touch In Therapy. A Two Paper Alternative Department Thesis Presented to the Faculty of California State University, East Bay, June 2010.](#)

¹⁷[Phelan, Incest and its meaning: The perspectives of fathers and daughters, Child Abuse & Neglect, Volume 19, Issue 1, Pages 7-24, January 1995.](#)

¹⁸[Atwood, When Love Hurts: Preadolescent Girls' Reports of Incest, The American Journal of Family Therapy, Volume 35, Issue 4, 2007.](#)

¹⁹[Kelly, Dads and Daughters: How to Inspire, Understand, and Support Your Daughter when She's Growing up So Fast](#)

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As every father knows (or will find out), good parenting involves being both consistent and adaptable. No matter how tempting it is, we can't treat our teens as we did when they were toddlers. Parents need to give our kids more autonomy, more freedom, more permission to separate from us, while loving them just as intensely as we did when they were little creatures who sat on our laps and clung to our necks. That means both acknowledging the reality of the onset of puberty without being dismayed or discomfited—or at least without making the discomfort clear to daughters. Fathers have a vital role to play in the lives of young women. In a world where so many men seem predatory and unreliable, in a culture where so many older men sexualize teen girls, a loving father figure can provide an indispensable reminder that men are not inherently weak. Girls need dads with the maturity to soothe their own anxieties about their daughters' burgeoning sexuality. And they need dads who will remind them—in words and actions and hugs—that their bodies are never a problem²⁰.

Fathers who are affectionate and firm with their daughters, who love and respect their wives, and who simply stick around can play a crucial role in minimizing the likelihood that their daughters will be sexually active prior to marriage. The affection that fathers bestow on their daughters makes those daughters less likely to seek attention from young men and to get involved sexually with members of the opposite sex. Fathers also protect their daughters from premarital sexual activity by setting clear disciplinary limits for their daughters, monitoring their whereabouts, and by signaling to young men that sexual activity will not be tolerated²¹.

Evidence suggests that the influence of father love on offspring's development is as great as the influence of mother love. Some studies conclude that father love is the sole significant predictor of specific outcomes after controlling for the influence of mother love. Overall, father love appears to be as heavily implicated as mother love in offsprings' psychological well-being and health, as well as in an array of psychological

[Sharpe, Fathers and Daughters, Routledge, January 1994](#)

²⁰[Schwyzer, Hug Your Daughters](#)

²¹[Carol W. Metzler et al., "The Social Context for Risky Sexual Behavior Among Adolescents," Journal of Behavioral Medicine 17 \(1994\); Popenoe, pp. 158–160.](#)

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and behavioral problems²². Like mammals, human fathers engage in interactions that involve stimulatory contact and their play is often directed toward active exploration of the environment and rough-and-tumble play, highly rewarding, increasing the father and child's positive arousal, and inducing oxytocin release which bonds father and child.

The stereotypical American male is less affectionate than women and less affectionate than men in other cultures. This societal norm to “not touch” is even stronger between men, which unfortunately includes between fathers and sons. Adolescence is a critical period of identity development. When parents hug their children, they are giving the important message of love and acceptance. Positive physical contact is a nonverbal way to provide some relief from fear of rejection and can be a strong source of comfort during a confusing time in life. When we are touched by a loved one, oxytocin is released in our brain which makes us feel better²³.

Fatherhood is subject to social, economic, and political influences that can change expectations. The North American fatherhood is currently in the midst of a shift, away from the authoritarian, emotionally detached father and toward a nurturing father²⁴. Through the changing stages of caring for children, male embodiment constantly shifts in the weight of its salience in the identities and practices of fathers and caregiving²⁵.

²²[Rohner et al., The importance of father love: History and contemporary evidence, Review of General Psychology, Vol 5\(4\), 382-405, Dec 2001.](#)

²³[Dunne, Teenage Boys Need Hugs Too.](#)

²⁴[Morman et al., A “changing culture of fatherhood”: Effects on affectionate communication, closeness, and satisfaction in men's relationships with their fathers and their sons, Western Journal of Communication, Volume 66, Issue 4, 2002.](#)

²⁵[Doucet, 'Estrogen-filled worlds': fathers as primary caregivers and embodiment, The Sociological Review, Volume 54, Issue 4, pages 696–716, November 2006.](#)

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"Earth provides enough to satisfy every man's needs, but not every man's greed."
- Mahatma Gandhi

Hinduism is a way of life, with diversity of religion, and Indian teachings share the importance of seva (service).

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Om! Asatoma Sadgamaya, Tamasoma Jyotirgamaya, Mrityorma Amritamgamaya,

Om Shantih, Shantih, Shantih!

(Aum! Lead the world from wrong path to the right path, from ignorance to knowledge, from mortality to immortality, and peace!)

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