

The effect of parental attachment on peer relationship:

A case study

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Abstract:

This paper is written based on a real case study, and it is focused on a typical family structure in China which is a family that contains two kids, an older sister and a younger brother. Due to the gender preference ideology of some parents in China are hard to remove or update, they are obsessed with having a boy, even though it is against the law since 1970s, that is the crazy 'boy preference' (Anonymous, 2013). This paper analyzed how parents' boy preference has affected the older sister's temperament, and how her temperament traits have brought influences in her parental attachment and social skills, last but not least, how her poor social skill her peer relationship. Suggestions for parents to fix up the relationship with the older sister and suggestions for helping the older sister to get along well with peers are given in the last part of the paper.

Keywords: parental attachment, temperament traits, social skill, peer relationship

1. Objectives and significance:

The older sister who has an younger brother and parents who were deeply affected by Chinese feudal ideology, her received love and care from parents are less than her brother (W. Wang, 2005), which is also a big problem for her acquired temperament development. The objectives of this paper are to analyze and summarize the major characteristics of the older sister's temperament, attachment relationship to her parents, social skills and peer relationship in a family that parents have boy preference; find out how the older sister's temperament are affected by her attachment relationship to her parents and peer relationship on this specific case; to give suggestions for parents to fix up the relationship with the older sister and suggestions for helping the older sister to get along better with peers on this case.

Female is a group that considers as inherently disadvantaged in society. It is essential for women to have strong personalities and friend network, which can help women overcome various difficulties and barriers facing in society. The education of the family, especially the attachment relationship to parents, plays an important role in the formation of a child's characteristics and development of peer relationship (He et al., 2018). Because of the Chinese feudal ideology, older daughters in the family structure of 'parents with an older daughter plus a younger son' are commonly treated and raised by parents unfairly (W. Wang, 2005), for example, parents may give the younger son more priority, love and care, because in Chinese feudal ideology, boys are the most important inheritance in the family (Nie, 2008). However, nowadays, this phenomenon cannot be said to have been eliminated, at least it is still prevalent in some cities, like Chaoshan and Hakka area (Huang & Huang, 2007). It is not difficult for us to see how much the attachment relationship with parents and the memories from childhood affects girls' developments, this is why this case is worthy of our study and discovery, then we should give proper suggestions to both parents and the older sister in this case, try to help become better in their own family and social character.

2. Case descriptions:

My case study is based on a real case of Bella's, she is my 15-year-old cousin who was born in a small town. She has a brother who is 2 years younger than her, her parents are strongly affected by Chinese feudal ideology which means they have a 'boy preference'. Bella described her younger brother's birth as a 'struggle experience' and her mom was like a 'refugee'-- about 20 years ago, 'Family Planning Policy/One-Child Policy' was the strictest policy those days, everyone has to obey it unconditionally. However, some people still risked giving birth to the next child, to do so, pregnant ladies have to escape from the investigations by Birth Control Department by running away or hiding (Bulte et al., 2011), but things are a little bit different in Bella's family, her parents chose to send her away to foster her in her aunt's home thousands of miles away and claimed her 'death' to people. She was sent back and knew this story accidentally when she was 7 years old, before she came back, she even thought her aunt was her mom, and there were few opportunities for her to visit her parents because they were busy making money to pay the penalty of admitting having two children to the government.

When she finally came home, she has to learn everything from the beginning, because things were not as the way as she thought – her parents were not her aunt and uncle, her aunt was not her mom, and she has a brother at home. Bella was confused and heart-broken, she became irritable and sensitive to people's words. As time goes by, she got used to this loneliness and unfamiliarity. She remembered her parents had no time to know more about her because they were extremely busy, even when they had spare time, they would go for her brother first.

She also talked about her birthdays, Bella's birthday is 2 weeks earlier than her brother's, every year on Bella's birthday, she would get only a small cake, but 2 weeks later, her father will call on everyone in the village to celebrate her brother's birthday. Fireworks, barbecues, parties were well-planned every year. She felt no warmth and sincerity from her parents, in return, she gave no sincerity and trust to them.

When she is hanging out with her friends, she does not know what to say, plus, she gets angry very easily, that is because she did not acquire good communicative skills which caused her peer rejection (Seibert & Kerns, 2015). She treats people coldly, especially her brother and strangers, she would rather not talk to anyone for a whole day. Everyone claimed she has a cold, gloomy vibe, and a wired characteristic.

3. Case analysis:

According to He et al. (2018), the acquired temperament is mostly affected by the parenting process even though biological is equally important, Bella's acquired temperament is affected by how she was raised by her parents (Jones et al., 2015), also her attachment relationship is affected by her temperament, also to some extent, parental relationship plays an essential role in developing social skills, which have determined her peer relationship (Acar et al., 2019).

3.1 Temperament Traits: Temperament is partly biological and partly acquired, the latter process is connected with the parenting method (Jones et al., 2015), it is not hard to see Bella's parents raised her and inappropriately treated her, they claimed her fake death in order to have another child, spent more time and gave more care to the younger son, treated two kids differently in their birthdays, all of those negative parenting behaviors made huge strikes to young Bella. Bella came home when she was 7, which is a prime time for an adolescent to adjust behaviors since it depends on a lot upon the interaction between her temperament and parents' attachment, and how comfortably she fits in the environment and people communication (Groh et al., 2017), but unfortunately, as mentioned above, her parents acted ignorance, unfairness, and little communication, her difficult temperament is caused and formed since then (Cameron, 1977), she became sensitive, irritable, hyperactive and silent.

3.2 Attachment Relationship to parents: Bella's attachment relationship with her parents is insecure for sure. First, Bella was not raised by them for her first seven years, her initial perception of her parents was wrong, secondly, she was forced to accept her unfamiliar family, most importantly, her parents did not seize the opportunity to bond with her and showed little interest in her, what's worse, they treated their daughter and son differently because of their 'boy preference'. In brief, Bella's difficult temperament and her parents' negative parenting method directly caused insecure parental attachment (F. Wang et al., 2015).

3.3 Peer Relationship: The insecurity of parental attachment caused her poor communication skills and negative attitude to social events, whether with family or peers (ENGELS et al., 2002) (Belsky & Fearon, 2002). Bella did not let go of her defenses when she is interacting with peers, even when she is younger, she always acted domineering, indifferent, and violent behaviors when she is with peers. She is always rejected by peers because of her poor social skills.

4. Suggestions on intervention:

It is never too late to bond with family as long as sincere hearts are together, here are several suggestions that might be useful for improving Bella's attachment relationship to her parents: Parents should learn to accept their children's temperament, do not force it to change; more family activities are encouraged, Bella should bond with her family as a group instead of isolating herself as a small unit since her parents are busy, I will suggest them to start from spending pockets of time to go shopping, or doing sports for an hour; then I will suggest heart-to-heart talks, Bella's parents

should talk to Bella privately, tell her about their expectations on her and encourage her behavioral changes; Bella should also talk out of her heart, release all her stress and grievance, after her emotion release she should use her actions and promises to let her parents know girls are also as powerful as boys, there are no such huge gender differences nowadays.

Some suggestions for Bella to overcome peer rejection: Start from observing, join crowds and find a spot to see how they interact with others, then join more social activities such as school clubs, put down the defenses to seek sincere friendship; Keep her life regularity, find a hobby and insist doing it, during the process of doing something she likes, she will generally know more about inner peace, and she can know some peers who also have the same interests. By improving her social skills, her peer relationship will generally be better.

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