



Over-parenting: Parents who won't let go

In my ten years teaching at UPM, I have met several students (some of them First Class Honors) who have shared with me about their problem with their parents, or more specifically, their problem of *parents who won't let go*.



Time cover (Issue Nov 2009) (photo from www.time.com)

Although these students are in their mid-twenties, their parents still see them as small boys or girls, who are still immature and incapable of making wise decisions on their own. Consequently, their parents believe that they are actually helping

their children by making all the decisions for their children: decisions such as where their children should work, whether their children should continue with further studies, or even if their children should go overseas to attend a fully sponsored scientific conference. These students of mine, though already adults, live under their parent's long shadow and iron-gripped rule.

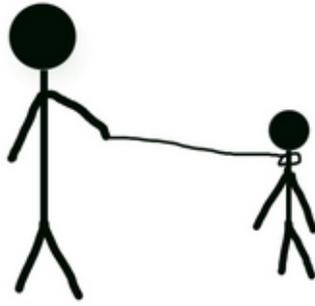
You can choose your partner and friends, but, unfortunately, you cannot choose your parents. If you are blessed with good parents, lucky you. But if you are damned with bad parents, you risk lifelong psychological stress, low self-confidence, inability to reason and think, and incapable to manage well your life and work.

My students have reluctantly aborted their postgraduate studies under me simply because their parents decided against it. No, the problem wasn't because their parents could not afford to support their postgraduate studies. Back then, I had my research grants that I could provide as much as RM1,500 per month. Sure, not as high as what they could earn from working, but this amount is enough for food, rent, studies, and with some left over for a decent social life.

The key problem of these students isn't about financial support, but about their parents who won't let go. My students have described to me how they have been blackmailed and threatened if they continue their current path of postgraduate study. Judging from the parents' reaction, you wouldn't have guess that all the fuss and verbal assault was simply about their children wanting to continue to study.

I have one very hardworking student (my most hardworking postgraduate candidate to date) who was forced by her father to choose a job that she clearly did not want. Even though she informed her dad about it, he wouldn't listen. She was close to tears when she shared her frustrations with me. The last I heard from her, she is still doing the job her father wants.

And there was another female student of mine who came to see me one day at my office, downtrodden after being at the receiving end of a week-long verbal lashing from her mother. The reason? My student simply expressed her ambition to do a MSc under me. From the tongue-lashing she received from her mother, you would have thought my student suddenly decided to become a jobless, marijuana-smoking hippie or something.



(picture from
www.nj.com/parenting/eric_r_uhalter)

There are more stories to tell, but all these students of mine share a common problem of *parents who won't let go*. These parents do not realize the harm they are doing to their own children.

In response to (adult) students who have *parents who won't let go*, I have this advice for them:

1. If you are still staying with your parents and can afford to rent a place on your own, move out. The sooner, the better.
2. Stop relying on your parents' help (*i.e.*, money or favours). Live and die on your own.
3. Respect your parents, but do not tolerate their blackmails, threats, or attempts to make you feel guilty (*e.g.*, they tell you they raise you up with much hardship, so, as they imply, you now owe them big time).

Break free from your parents. Rip them out. Painful or not, just rip them out of your life. They might just realize that you have now all grown up.