The Distance Weakens the Bond, the Bond Shortens the Distance

In the article “How College Changes the Parent-Child Relationship”, Alia Wong (2019) describes a phenomenon that, according to a recent survey and several studies, more than half of college students maintain a stronger relationship with their parents. Wong then stated that more students nowadays are willing to receive remote help from parents with detailed research results. Thus Wong points out that distance may contribute to parent-child interdependence, which usually leads to a more pleasant relationship providing parents play an active role as advisers in their children’s life. Overall, Wong holds the opinion that the distance change the roles of parents, and indeed promotes the parent-child relationship. On this matter, I disagree with Wong in general due to some reasons. I personally believe the distance, instead, probably weakens the bond between parents and children in a sense.

The survey cited in the article suggests a considerable number of college students suppose their relationship with their parents is better, while one could argue that it is not only the distance between parents and children that contribute to the change in their relationship. Parents are responsible for guiding and educating their children, so they have to point out the mistakes that students, especially teenagers, may have. Then students may be despondent when parents punish them. But things change when students step into college. Parents have no need to emphasize some boring rules to adults who are responsible for themselves. Then students may believe parents are friendly to them. In fact, parents are always loving them. Hence, it is not the distance that cause the change of parents’ roles, and the relationship isn’t “improved”. It seems that, apart from the distance, the growth of children is likely to be a key factor in the “improvement” of the relationship as well.

Meanwhile, a close relationship sometimes is not necessarily a gratifying relationship. Generally speaking, children live with their parents every day so slight misbehavior is easy to spot, resulting in the vast possibility that parents and children disagree. While parents would try to hold on to their authority when children are young, they may punish their children sometimes. According to a questionnaire study, more than half of teenagers are frequently criticized for issues central to family daily life, including being disobedient, lazy, etc. (Harris & Howard, 1984, p. 115). Thus quarrels are likely not frequent but inevitable. Though it may not be a pleasant time for parents and children, a few quarrels indicate that parents are caring for their children and their relationship is still good. Perhaps only those who really love the children that will make strict demands on them. In contrast, people tend to maintain a nice superficial bond with distant friends. Even if parents don’t regard their children as strangers, according to my personal experience, they discuss fewer topics or give only necessary suggestions to their children. The distance, which dwindles arguments and worries though, restricts the daily communications and indeed weaken the bond. Therefore an “awful” relationship may be a strong and valuable relationship, while a “great” relationship could possibly be a weak and distant relationship. Children then probably having a less strong relationship can be inferred.

Furthermore, what parents and college students do is to reduce the distance in essence. Ordinarily, if there’s a long physical distance between two men, they will see or talk with each other less. In this case, they may lack communication, which is fundamental to keeping a stable relationship. Then why do children appear to have better relationships? As mentioned in the article, parents play a more active role in students’ life nowadays. Children rely more on their parents due to increasing pressure and higher living cost. Besides, “technologies are important for maintaining and strengthening the parent-child relationship”(McCurdy et al., 2022, p. 4), modern logistics services allow children to get what they want from their parents, plus parents are willing to offer both material and spiritual support through the electronic devices. It is convinced that the distance between them is not that long. Parents and children are trying their best to eliminate the effect of physical distance and maintain a short psychological distance to some extent. Otherwise, children are assumed to leave their parents at an early age in order to foster a strong bond with their parents if distance truly counts. I believe this assumption is definitely wrong. Consequently, instead of distance strengthening the bond, the bond shortening the distance is supposed to be more accurate.

Finally, I still appreciate one of Wong’s opinions that parents with the role of advisers can benefit students’ achievement. As children grow up, they need less punishment to adjust their behavior but more advice. When parents provide more suggestions to their children, children can conceivably not only choose an easier way to success, but discuss with their parents and strengthen the bond as well. Thus parents becoming an advisor is beneficial.

As is mentioned in the article, “ this limbo [brought by distance] ... may spur a healthy evolution in students’ relationship with their parents”, Alia Wong (2019) believes that distance can strengthen the parent-child relationship, while I suppose it can weaken instead. The key factor in the change of parents’ roles is possibly not the distance, and parents serving as a friendly adviser probably indicates a weaker bond indeed. What’s more, the distance is reduced as much as possible owing to efficient services, advanced technologies and parents’ efforts. Thus distance is not that important and may not contribute to the change of parents’ roles. Although Wong provides an important point that parents as advisers could help with children’s further development, I could hardly agree with Wong’s leading arguments. College students can form a firmer bond with their parents, from my point of view, by making more efforts to understand and communicate with their parents. In addition, no matter whether the distance is long or short, some phone calls, selfies or even a short message could shorten the psychological distance between parents and children, and are truly helpful for the relationship.

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