

AI-02000 Child Shame Around Parents

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Tags	Psychology
Created time	@August 21, 2025 12:23 PM

Explain the psychodynamics of a child being ashamed or embarrassed when a parent or mother is present with friends.

A child's embarrassment or shame around a parent in the presence of friends is a normal part of development, often rooted in the psychodynamics of identity formation and the shift from family-centric to peer-centric relationships.

The Search for an Independent Identity

From a psychodynamic perspective, adolescence is a critical period where a child begins to separate from their parents and establish their own individual identity.

This process, known as individuation, involves:

- **Differentiation:** The child works to distinguish themselves from their parents. They start to see their parents' habits, tastes, and values as distinct from their own, and they may reject those they don't want to adopt.
- **Creating a "Public Self":** The child's world expands beyond the family unit. The opinions of peers become extremely important, as the child is now forging a social identity outside of the home.

When a parent is present with friends, the child's two worlds collide. The parent represents the "home self"—the child they have always been—while the friends represent the "public self" they are trying to create. The child's fear is that the parent's presence or actions will expose their "home self" and undermine the image of independence and social competence they are trying to project to their friends.

The Role of Self-Conscious Emotions

The feelings of embarrassment and shame are self-conscious emotions that emerge as a child develops a greater capacity for self-evaluation.

- Embarrassment: This is an uncomfortable feeling caused by a public exposure of a perceived personal deficiency. When a parent says or does something that the child deems "uncool," it can be seen as a public demonstration of a flaw, causing embarrassment. It's often fleeting and situation-specific.
- Shame: While embarrassment is about a specific action, shame is a more profound and painful emotion about one's entire self. A child who feels chronic shame may not just feel embarrassed by a parent's actions, but may feel a deeper sense of disgrace or unworthiness connected to them. This can be exacerbated by parents who are overly critical or who consistently dismiss their child's feelings.

The child's hypersensitivity to social norms and their egocentrism—the belief that everyone is constantly watching and judging them—intensifies these feelings. They may overthink every interaction and perceive a minor parental misstep as a major social catastrophe that will define them in their friends' eyes forever.

Is it partly a dislike to parents?

No, it's not a dislike of parents. It's a normal part of a child's psychological development. This feeling of shame or embarrassment arises from a child's need to create their own identity separate from their parents, and not from a dislike of their parents themselves. It is a stage of development when a child is transitioning from being entirely dependent on their parents to becoming more independent and self-sufficient.

The Process of Individuation

Psychodynamically, this is explained by the process of individuation, a key stage of development where a person develops a distinct personality from their parents. As a child's world expands to include friends and peers, they start to compare themselves with others. They begin to create a public image, or "social self", that may differ from the identity they have at home. When parents are present with friends, the child fears that their parents' behavior will expose their "home self" and interfere with the public image they are trying to create. This can feel like a social threat, leading to feelings of embarrassment.

Psychological and Social Dynamics

- **Shift in Attachment:** As a child grows, the primary source of emotional support and validation shifts from parents to peers. The opinion of friends becomes increasingly important.
- **Ego Development:** Children at this stage are often egocentric, meaning they believe they are the center of everyone's attention. They are hyper-aware of their own actions and believe that every perceived mistake they or their parents make is being scrutinized by their friends.
- **Control over Public Image:** The child wants to control how they are perceived by their friends. They feel a loss of control when their parents are around, as they cannot predict or manage their parents' actions or words, which might be seen as "uncool" or "childish" by their peers. This is a normal part of asserting independence and a need to be seen as an individual rather than a family unit.

What about an adult who recently graduated from college and doesn't even introduce the mother or father to fiends.

For an adult who has recently graduated from college and doesn't introduce their parents to friends, the dynamic is similar to that of an adolescent but with a different set of psychological complexities. It's often not about "dislike" but about the ongoing process of separation-individuation. This is a lifelong developmental task, and major life transitions, like graduating from college, can trigger a renewed effort to establish a fully autonomous identity.

The Shift to an Independent Self

College is a period of intense self-discovery and freedom. An adult leaving college may feel a strong desire to solidify their identity as a person separate from their family of origin. Introducing parents can feel like a step backward, a re-merging of two distinct worlds—the independent, adult self and the child self—that they've worked so hard to keep separate. This is often driven by a need to:

- **Establish Boundaries:** An adult may have a clear sense of their own life and boundaries, and they may not want their parents' influence, opinions, or judgments to bleed into their friendships. This is a healthy aspect of adult development.

- Control the Narrative: They want their friends to see them as the person they are now, not as "the child of..." They want to be judged on their own merits, not on the basis of their family's social standing, values, or behaviors.

Unresolved Family Dynamics

In some cases, the reluctance to introduce parents can be a sign of unresolved issues. The adult may be trying to protect their friends from a parent who is overly critical, emotionally distant, or otherwise difficult. It can also be a way to create space from a family dynamic that is unhealthy.

For example, if a person feels they were raised in an environment of emotional neglect or control, they might have a deep-seated fear of vulnerability.

Introducing their friends to their parents could feel like opening themselves up to judgment or disapproval, and they may not want their friends to witness that dynamic. In these instances, not introducing parents is a form of self-protection and boundary-setting.

This video explains why individuals with an avoidant attachment style might be reluctant to introduce their family and friends. This is Why Avoidants Don't Introduce You to Their Family and Friends

In the Filipino culture, we are careful on boundaries and when we immigrated to the US and raised our children with boundary-less parenting, the child most likely shows this type of shame, explain and delve.

The "shame" a child may feel when their parents are present with friends is a complex issue, especially when considering the clash between traditional Filipino cultural norms and "boundary-less" Western parenting styles. This dynamic is not about a personal dislike of the parents but rather a deep-seated conflict between the child's inherited cultural values and their lived experience in a new environment.

The Influence of Cultural Norms

Filipino culture traditionally emphasizes strong family ties and a concept known as "pakikisama," which means getting along and fitting in with a group. This often translates to a collectivist mindset where the individual's identity is intertwined with the family and community. In this context, showing respect for elders and not causing them embarrassment is paramount. Therefore, children are socialized to

be mindful of how their behavior reflects on the family as a whole.

On the other hand, traditional Filipino parenting tends to be more authoritarian, with a clear hierarchy where parents have authority and children are expected to be respectful and obedient. This system, while strict, provides a clear framework for behavior and expectations.

The Impact of "Boundary-less" Parenting

When Filipino immigrant parents adopt a "boundary-less" parenting style in the US, they often do so with good intentions, aiming to give their children the freedom and independence they believe is valued in Western society. However, this can create a significant disconnect.

- **Loss of a Cultural Compass:** The child is raised with a Western-style freedom that doesn't align with the collectivist Filipino values they may be exposed to at home or in their community. They may feel a lack of clear boundaries and expectations, leading to confusion and a sense of not knowing what is appropriate behavior. This can lead to anxiety about how their parents will behave in front of their friends, as they have not been taught a clear set of social rules or norms to guide them.
- **Identity Conflict:** The child is caught between two worlds: the Filipino culture that values respect and family honor, and the American culture that emphasizes individualism and self-expression. When a parent, who is a symbol of the traditional world, enters the child's Westernized social circle, the child fears that the clash of these two worlds will be exposed. This can manifest as shame or embarrassment, as they feel a deep sense of conflict between who they are expected to be at home and who they want to be in front of their friends.

The Role of Guilt and Shame

Shame in this context is not just a passing feeling; it is tied to the concept of "hiya" (a Filipino word often translated as shame, but it also carries the meaning of social anxiety or a sense of propriety). "Hiya" is a powerful social regulator in Filipino culture. It's the feeling of social disapproval that one gets when they violate social norms or expectations.

In this unique situation, the child feels "hiya" not because their parents are "bad," but because their parents' behavior in a public setting is perceived as a potential source of social embarrassment or a violation of an unspoken social code. The

child may feel that their parents' actions will reflect poorly on them, causing a loss of face in front of their friends. This feeling is intensified when the parents, in their effort to be "cool" or "American," may behave in ways that a more traditional Filipino parent would not, further confusing the child and increasing the likelihood of feeling "hiya."

The Path to Resolution

To bridge this gap, open communication is essential. Parents can explain to their children the cultural values they are trying to pass down, while also acknowledging the child's desire for independence. Similarly, children can express their feelings to their parents, helping them understand the social dynamics of their peer group. This mutual understanding can help ease the tension and allow both generations to navigate the complexities of their dual identities.

List 22 guidelines to address this type of parent - child conflict

Navigating the conflict that arises from a clash of parenting styles and cultural values requires a blend of empathy, communication, and clear boundaries. Here are 22 guidelines to address the conflict you've described.

For Parents

1. Understand the "Why": Recognize that your child's embarrassment isn't a rejection of you, but a natural part of their identity development.
2. Reflect on Your Parenting Style: Consider how your "boundary-less" approach may be confusing your child.
3. Acknowledge the Cultural Gap: Understand that the Filipino value of "hiya" (shame) and respect for elders may conflict with American individualism.
4. Listen Actively: Give your child space to express their feelings without becoming defensive. Validate their experience, even if you don't fully understand it.
5. Talk About Boundaries: Ask your child what makes them uncomfortable and work together to set clear expectations for when friends are around.
6. Respect Their Privacy: Allow your child to have a private life that is separate from the family.

7. Be a Student of Their World: Show interest in their friends and their culture, even if you don't always "get it."
8. Avoid Public Criticism: Never criticize or embarrass your child in front of their friends, even in jest.
9. Find a Compromise: Agree on a signal—a word or a gesture—that your child can use to tell you when you're crossing a line.
10. Reassure Them: Remind your child that you love them and are proud of them, regardless of what others think.
11. Lead with Grace: Model respectful behavior in your own interactions with others.

For Children

1. Understand Your Parents' Intentions: Recognize that your parents are likely trying to give you the freedom they didn't have.
2. Communicate Calmly: Instead of getting angry, explain your feelings using "I" statements, such as "I feel embarrassed when..."
3. Educate Them: Gently explain the social norms of your peer group.
4. Set Boundaries Respectfully: Clearly state what you need from them, for example, "Could you please not talk about my childhood in front of my friends?"
5. Offer a Glimpse into Your World: Introduce your parents to your friends in a controlled environment, like a brief, planned visit, to ease the tension.
6. Be Patient: Understand that it's difficult for them to change a lifetime of cultural values and habits.
7. Find Your Identity: Work on accepting both your Filipino heritage and your American identity. They are not mutually exclusive.
8. Acknowledge Their Sacrifices: Recognize the sacrifices they made to move to a new country and provide you with a better life.
9. Don't Internalize Their Actions: Separate your own identity from your parents' actions. Their behavior is not a reflection of your worth.

For Both

1. **Seek a Neutral Mediator:** If the conflict is ongoing, consider seeking a therapist or a trusted family member who can help facilitate an open discussion.
2. **Reconnect with Family Rituals:** Find ways to celebrate your Filipino heritage that feel comfortable and authentic to both generations, such as cooking traditional meals or attending cultural events.