Death from Expectations

Death can take place physically or mentally. A person can actually stop breathing and die, or a person can live a life that they do not want and be smothered in responsibilities they do not want to fulfill. “Why I Went to College” and “Suicide Note” both define death in different ways but for the same reason. The pressures parents placed on these teens resulted in different deaths, but both could have been avoided if the parent’s expectations were not so strict.

In “Why I Went to College” by Martin Espada, the son (assumed by the author and simplicity) is basically being threatened to go to college by his father: “…’cause I’m gonna\break your jaw” (Espada 6-7). Now, the father may not actually mean this threat, but it is apparent that the son must continue school by going to college. There could be multiple reasons. The father may not have had the opportunity; therefore, he wants to the son to take advantage when one is given. Another reason is that society has created a huge stereotype that people who do not go to college are not going to become anything or are failures, but this is completely wrong. There are plenty of jobs that pay well without requiring a college education – like law enforcement. No, it may not pay as much as a becoming a doctor would, but it is still a good paying job that allows some extra money. There are reasons for young adults to attend college, but none of those reasons matter if the person does not personally want to attend. The results of a person being forced to do something are unhappiness, sloppiness (not done to the best of their ability), stressfulness, and carelessness. The son will end up stressing himself out to make good grades for others’ approval, possibly not receiving the grade and then being punished for it.
Lundvall once said, “While secondary school certificates were the trump card of industrialization, higher degrees are those of the knowledge economy. Lifelong training is essential” (Krsticm 748). People who create such a stereotypical society have this mindset. It is good to have this kind of ambition, but teens have to have this mindset on their own. When this is forced upon a person, as the teen in “Suicide Note” and “Why I Went to College,” failure begins to creep in.

By the same token, Janice Mirikitani writes about a daughter who commits suicide from the same expectations of her parents and society she lives in. In “Suicide Note,” the daughter compares herself to a son because sons are held in higher esteem than daughters, and it seems they can get away with more than daughters can: “if only I were a son, …\ I would swagger through life\ muscled and bold and assured,\ drawing praises to me\ like currents in the bed of wind, virile\ with confidence” (Mirikitani 10, 16-20). This stress of not feeling good enough can cause distractions in class, resulting in grades dropping. In Asian culture, school expectations are extremely strict, literally deathly. The daughter did not want to live with the shame of disappointing her parents and not being what her parents wanted (as in they wanted a son), not smart enough for school, and simply not being enough of any characteristic that makes a person happy. Sadly, she committed suicide because the opinions of others were more important to her than her own happiness.

According to BMC Women’s Health, there is a gender gap in the Asian culture on the rates of success when completing school with the favor of females (Bahshakaei 1). This alone proves the daughter was held to higher expectation and explains why she wanted to be a male. The males have less to live up to and can get by with doing less than the females but are still held up to a high standard. The people who come together to decide these societal assumptions are the parents, teachers, and co-workers (Bahshakaei 2). When authoritarians have such high
expectations, a person feels that they must fulfill those. This can be one of the most mentally overwhelming issues a teenager faces.

Furthermore, if either parents were more considerate of their child’s feelings, death – in some way – would not have been an option. In “Why I Went to College,” the father should be more supportive of the son’s wants, rather than forcing him to do something he does not want to do. In “Suicide Note,” the parents should have comforted the daughter and praised her grades, even if they were not up to society’s standards. “The suicide rate for women of traditional college age has steadily has been steadily declining for nearly 30 years” (Shwartz 121). With this information, a person can conclude that the student in the “Suicide Note” had much to compete with. Sometimes, a person is just not interested in college or furthering their education. School is not for everyone, and putting so much pressure on a person will not ensure success in their schooling.

Teens just need love and support in what they wanted to do, not what society wanted. “… parental support is associated with positive attitudes and affective reactions towards school enhancing academic performing” (Raufedler 3742). When a parent is encouraging and supporting, a child will perform better and be more successful in extracurricular activities. However, Raufedler then says, “In contrast, parental pressure has been found to correlate negatively with academic achievement yet positively with test anxiety” (Raufedler 3742). According to the test, parents put a huge amount of stress on students by expecting so much out of them. Parents want their child to be above the others academically, physically (as in sports), and still expect their children to be social and get enough rest. There is just not enough time in a day or week to make all this possible. The teens in “Suicide Note” and “Why I Went to College” felt the most stress from trying to please their parents with their academics.
As can be noticed, the teens are under an extreme amount of pressure to live up to standards that they do not want to hold. Both poems exemplify a struggle that young adults are faced with every day – acceptance of others, more importantly, those closest to them. These detrimental actions could have been avoided if the parents listened to how their children felt, instead of forcing the teen or the family to look better under societies terms.
Works Cited

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