

How parents affect our relationships with authority figures

Faima Bakar Thursday 23 May 2019 9:08 am

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(Picture: Ella Byworth for Metro.co.uk)

Authority figures make me nervous. I blame my parents.

I've never quite managed to build friendships with my bosses, seniors or team leaders, despite having had almost 20 jobs.

Respect for your elders is such a huge part of the South Asian community – we even have separate pronouns for older people. This respect is **evident across a lot of Asian cultures**.

But attributing respect just by virtue of age and seniority has meant giving it out willy-nilly, rather than only giving trust and admiration to those who have earned it.

My parents taught me that, much like an elder, the boss is always right, even when they're wrong. We weren't allowed to talk back to our elders so by extension, neither to our bosses.

This tendency to stay silent and blindly accept the views of those above us could lead to frustration, a lack of job satisfaction, and could even be detrimental for our careers – **BAME women are less likely to progress to leadership roles**.

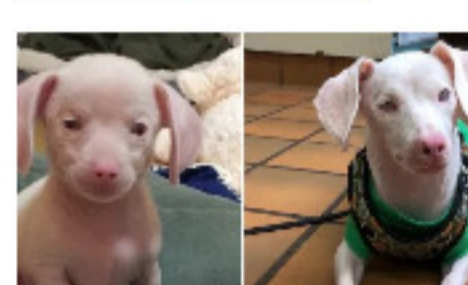
This kind of grin and bear it passive mentality seems to be part of the good immigrant rhetoric.

This is the idea that immigrants are inherently bad until they can prove their brilliance. You're the model minority once you do something excellent like win gold medals or baking competitions.

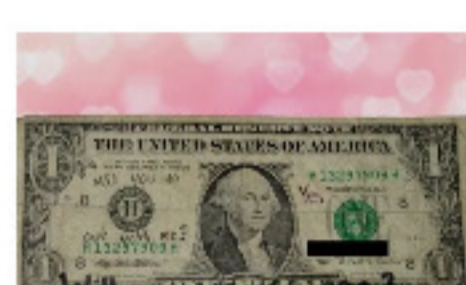
But such accolades are not possible for the everyday immigrant. So they learn to be accepted in another way, by nodding politely, being agreeable and just existing in the background without drawing attention to themselves.

My parents, first generation immigrants, decided that not making any noise was the best tactic to get by. And it filtered down to me, making me a bit of a 'yes person' though I would love nothing more than to be a bad ballsy b*tch.

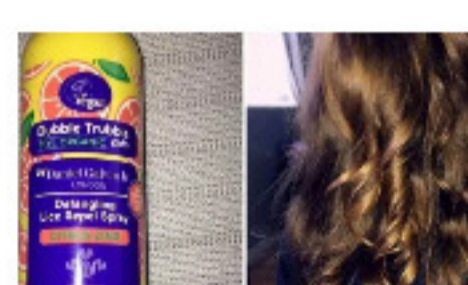
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Sarah Ockwell-Smith, author of *The Gentle Parenting Book*, tells Metro.co.uk that there are two ways children of authoritative parents can grow up to be.

She says: 'Those who were taught to be submissive and compliant to their parents, through traditionally authoritarian discipline often involving elements of fear, can continue the compliance and submission and allow themselves to be controlled by those in authority, not questioning what is done to them, even if it is unjust.'

'Or they can react in completely the opposite way – by constantly questioning authority and refusing to submit to it.'



Those who raise their children collaboratively with mutual respect and empathy for the child's feelings – tend to have the healthiest relationship with authority figures (MMUFFIN for Metro.co.uk)

It makes sense for us to inherit behaviours we see in our parents, especially if we continue to observe their behaviour as we age.

Some groups are more family-oriented than others and not expected to become independent as soon as they turn 18. In Asian settings, it's completely normal for us to live at home into adulthood. The more we see our parents as adults, the more we become them.

Acting in a way that we've immediately witnessed is called availability heuristic – a mental shortcut where you rely on easily available examples to form a belief rather than looking further afield – says psychologist Dr Alex Forsythe: 'We may hold very prominent memories of our parents' behaviours that we tend to give more weight to and therefore we use that information to interpret our behaviours and attitudes.'

If you're used to seeing your parents bow down to all their superiors, you may internalise the message.

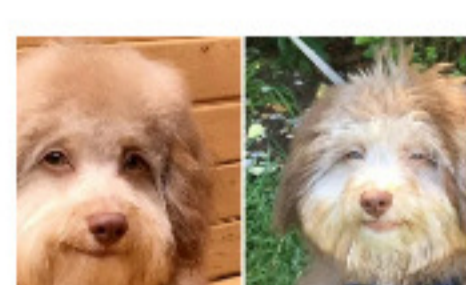
On the other hand, western (non-Asian) children are brought up to value autonomy and independence, something not stressed by Asian parents.

It's not a malicious thing on our parents' part but this blanket trust in elders isn't always a good thing, especially as it lends itself as a model to treat subsequent 'elders', such as our bosses.

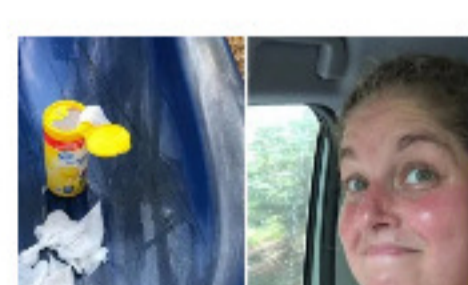
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Kate Mansfield, a relationship expert, grew up in an unconventional family as her parents believed in free love and travelled around the country. Authority was not something Kate experienced much as a child.

Kate now struggles to listen to authoritative figures.

'I was treated as an adult in many ways and had a lot of freedom as a child in terms of being expected to look after myself, being left alone often and looking after my siblings,' she tells us.

'As a young child I was perfectly behaved, I did as I was told and tried to please them. But then as a teenager I rebelled and went totally the other way, I did as I pleased and refused to listen to or to respect authority at all.

'I very much reacted against authority and did my own thing, I had a real struggle with respecting rules and boundaries at work when I was younger, although some of this is personality type – I am very much a freewheeler, creative and entrepreneurial.

'I have always ended up in leadership roles in all of my jobs.'

No one way of parenting is definitively better than the other and both have their limitations.

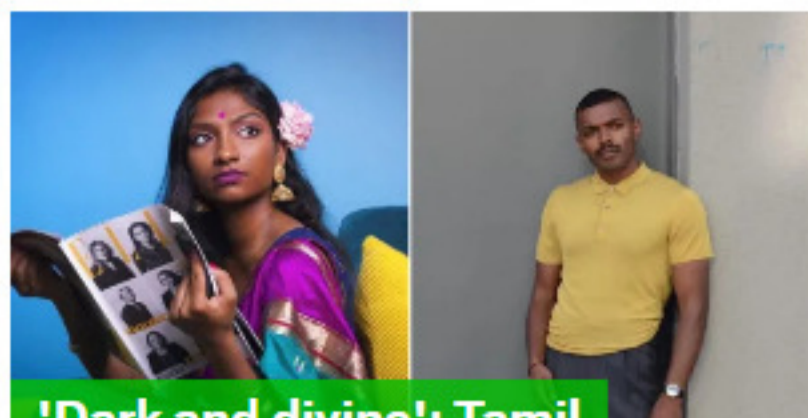
Though I've inherited the passiveness of my parents towards my seniors, it doesn't mean it'll always be this way – nor that there is anything inherently wrong with it.

But it's important to be able to adjust to your environment and own the spaces you occupy. That means making some noise when noise needs to be made.

Dr Forsyth adds: 'We spend much longer as adults than we do with our parents so most people can unlearn maladaptive social behaviours'.

So there is hope yet to master the art of being a bad, assertive b*tch.

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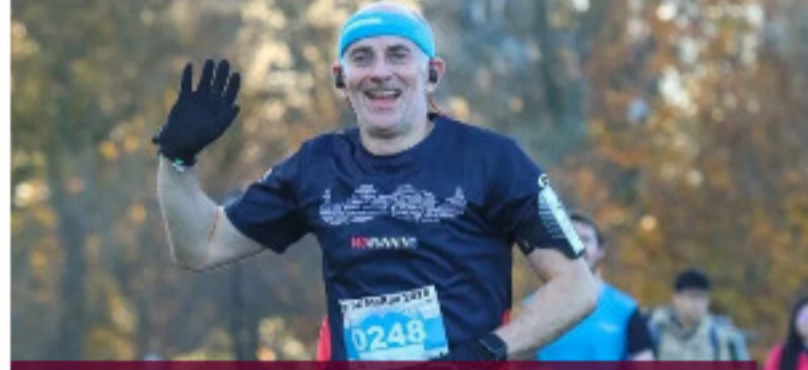
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OPINION

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The beauty of wanting to get married is that it's not because I feel we have to, but because I want to. »



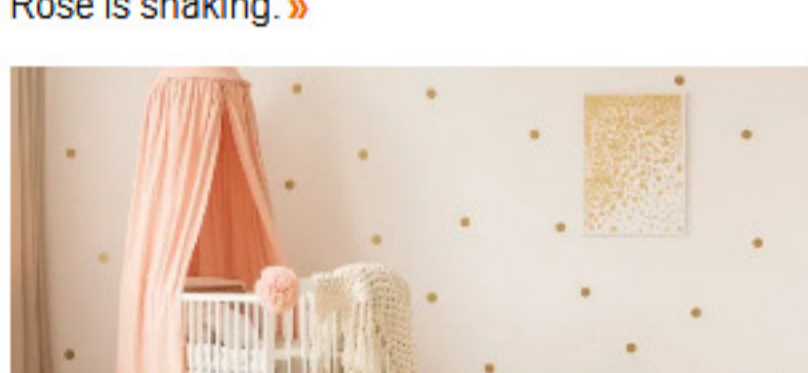
Parents are loving this head lice spray that also detangles thick, curly hair

Win-win. »



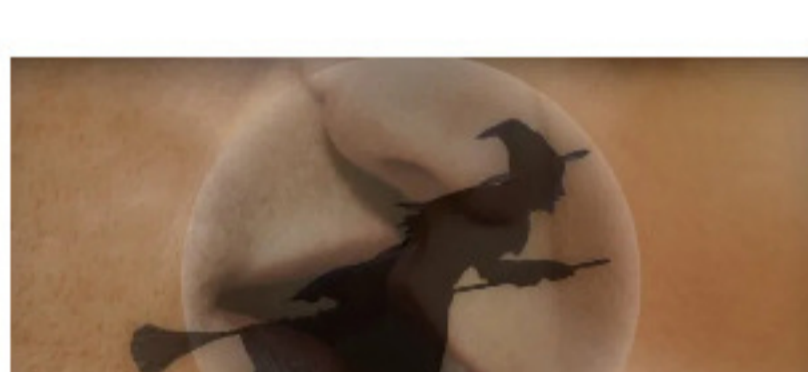
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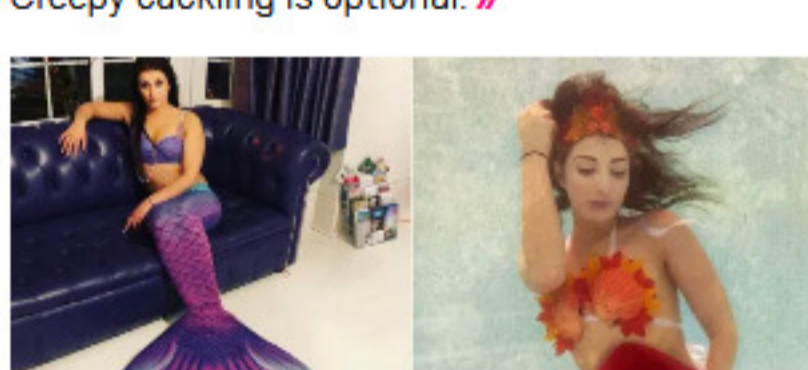
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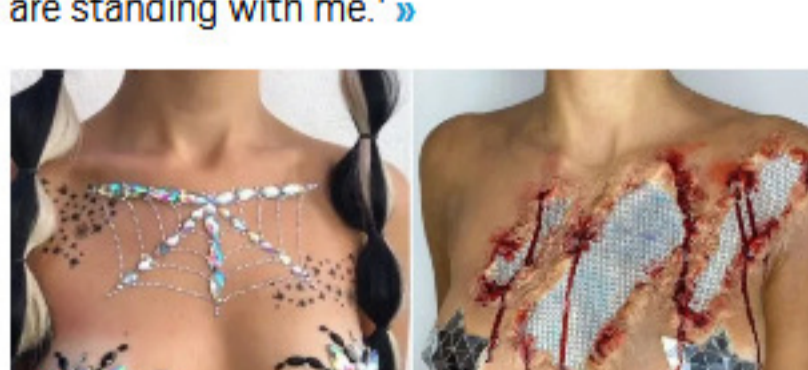
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She says her old job was making her miserable. »



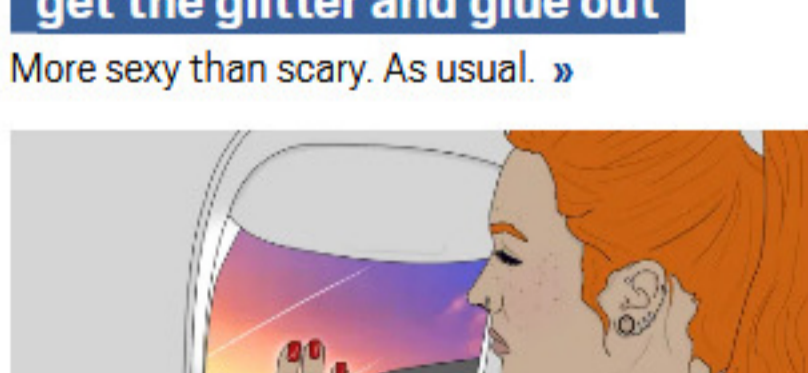
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'My victory lies in the fact that all my queens are standing with me.' »



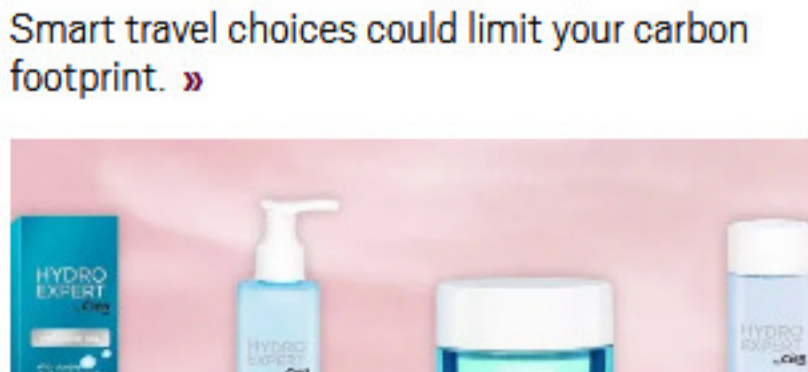
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More sexy than scary. As usual. »



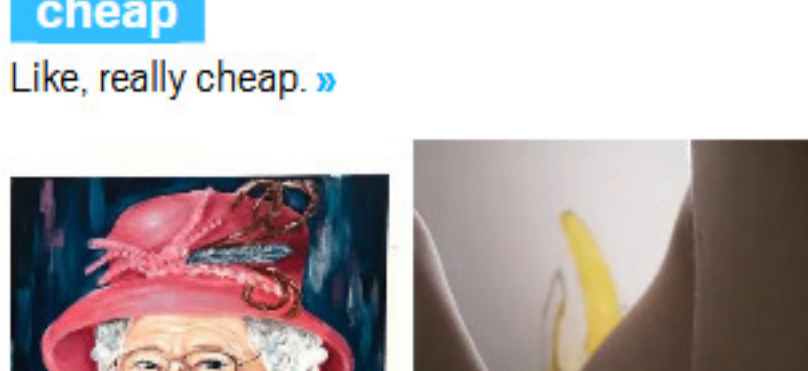
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