

## Ada Lee Man-ching

*Drawing is thinking, thinking is life, life is thinking.*

Everybody has a childhood, or do they?

When I was little, I always derived the greatest pleasure from drawing. I loved to draw things with colour pens. I could draw anything, from mother washing the dishes to father sleeping. Eventually I had so many drawings that there was no more room for them. I thought they would certainly be thrown away by mother. To my surprise, when I came home one day, I found mother had put up all my pictures on the walls. I really felt very happy. After that, whenever I finished a drawing, I would find a space on one of the walls at home, so that it gradually became my art gallery. In retrospect, I am really very grateful to my parents for their encouragement and tolerance which gave me so much space in childhood. All the bits and pieces of my childhood are still vivid in my mind. Maybe this has to do with my having expressed myself and recorded my life through drawing! Although those drawings on the walls could not be taken with us when we moved house, every scene and object in them was already engraved on my mind.

When I grew up, I became a drawing tutor. During the nine years of this work, observing children drawing, I have been able to re-live the pleasures of my old dreams. Everything in the drawings is so natural and familiar.... Lines and figures which mean next to nothing to adults

actually enable children to enjoy telling me stories and so much about their feelings. Faced with children of limited verbal-reasoning ability, I have become more and more curious, dying to know more about the colours, the stories, the underlying feelings in their drawings.

Image is a visual sign as well as mental language. Drawing unites visual sense, image, emotion, aesthetic, and thinking. Through recognition and analysis of visual signs, mutual comprehension, communication, and care can be obtained. To teachers and parents who have received professional training, both children's drawings and adult graffiti are visual signs expressing life. Reading signs is like a Western doctor understanding his or her patient's condition through reading an X-ray photo, or a Chinese doctor feeling the patient's pulse. Children's drawings are the concrete manifestation of their feelings and perceptions, in other words, an external form of mental language, which contains many different languages, different moods, and different stories ... all their mental input and output. So what can be understood from children's drawings is far richer and deeper than talking to them face to face. Drawings can reflect our thoughts, our internal emotional world, our lives.

Family is the most important environment in the development of children. The role it plays is like a "dye vat". What kind of person a child will become largely depends on how this dye vat does its work! Everybody has their own family, and their views about family differ. To children, family is central. Parents are the centre of the family,

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A.M.C. Lee (✉)  
Independent Researcher  
e-mail: adahki@gmail.com

the emotional fortress of children, the people with whom they have the most contact. They exert the greatest influence on children's personality, learning, and psychology (Qiu Lianhuang 1984). Many family problems are hidden behind the façade of a seemingly prosperous society. Many children's psychological problems are the result of their family experiences. The family's influence on the psychological development and health of a human being is much greater than people imagine (Wong 1988). A properly functioning family is a safe haven, a place in which one can divulge what is on one's mind, a place which provides energy and a motive for action. In a malfunctioning family, members are not good at understanding and communicating with each other. When in difficulties, they will blame each other. The frustrations and anxieties of the parents may also be projected onto the children, rendering them the victims of family conflicts.

Normally, as far as sociological studies on family are concerned, most respondents expressing views and expectations about family are parents or adult members of a family. This is because many adults (including sociologists), thinking that children are mentally immature, do not value their views. And there are also many people who are afraid of children's views and opinions, because they often lay bare truths that adults have been hiding, denying, and running away from. So they choose not to listen to children's views. But do we realize that children are also part of the family? Apart from being participants in the daily life of the family, they are also observers of the marital relationship, the key figures who turn husband and wife into parents (Laing 1971). Children have their own views and feelings about their family, but lack the means, space, and power to fully express them. Whether these views and feelings are expressed or not, determine whether children will grow up healthily. No comprehensive study could have been done without children's voice. We should not and could not afford to neglect children's views and feelings about family.

According to the [Census and Statistics Department of the Hong Kong Government](#), the

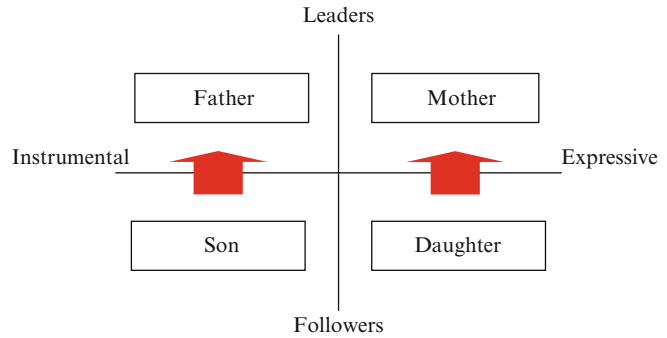
number of divorces and separations granted to Hong Kong couples was 97,000 in 1996, rising substantially to 224,000 in 2006 representing a sharp increase of 130%. The sharp rise in the numbers of divorces and one-parent families in Hong Kong has meant more and more Hong Kong children grow up in incomplete families. Society often focuses on these children, deems that they have to face many family problems, and provides them with services and welfare to help them cope with problems arising from the incompleteness of their family. One of these services is Children's Home, the aim of which is to create a family environment for children to replace their incomplete family. However, while adults think that these services are able to help the children, do the children themselves think likewise? Is "Children's Home" a family? Does "incompleteness" necessarily mean "problem"? Does society not overemphasize the problems of these children of incomplete families?

What do children from incomplete families think about their own family? How do they depict their own family in their drawings? What do they think about their parents and themselves? My chapter attempts to answer these questions.

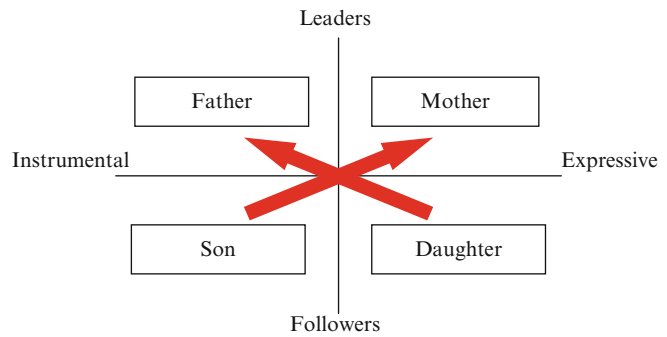
Children's Home is a home under the Social Welfare Department of the Hong Kong Government. As the name implies, the purpose of this home is to provide children with family problems a place to feel "at home". Children's Home is managed by a surrogate family, where there are surrogate parents who strive to impact feeling of "family" to those children. The children have to follow regulations in the home; they have to eat, watch television, go to bed, and wash dishes according to a schedule and a division-of-labour plan.

The term "incomplete-family children" refers to children whose parents are divorced or separated, or who have been abandoned by one of the parents, or of whom one or both parents are dead. The 16 incomplete-family children who participated in my study in 2005 were all inhabitants of Children's Home, including six whose father was dead, two whose parents were both dead, and eight whose parents were divorced.

**Fig. 26.1** Family structure and functions



**Fig. 26.2** Possible modes of child socialization into deviance



**The Literature**

Parsons (1955) points out that although the modern family has lost certain functions, it has specialized in some other functions, notably in child socialization. Children learn from their parents’ different social norms, values, and skills such as how to interact with people, in order to develop their own personality. Parsons thinks that children in the family learn from their parents the key elements of their own future parenthood, through the process of socialization (Parsons 1955). As Fig. 26.1 shows, the son learns to play the “instrumental”, economic, or problem-solving role to become a father. The daughter learns the “expressive”, emotional, caring role to become a mother.

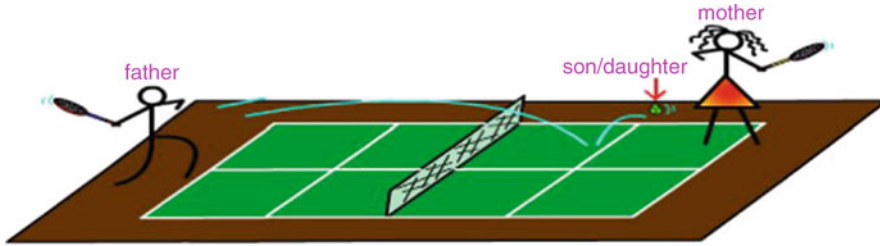
However, if the father or the mother is absent from the family, how will the child be able to learn about their own future role in a family? Parsons did not answer this question. His research mainly focuses on the views of adults (parents) without regard to children’s views. Moreover, Parsons assumes that children in the family will accept the parents’ arrangements and guidance.

Alas, children have their own views and opinions as well as the will to resist.

Deviance, sociologically speaking, describes actions or behaviours that violate cultural norms, including formally enacted rules.

From Fig. 26.2 we can see that the son at home does not necessarily want to take over from the father the instrumental role. Instead, he may wish to play the expressive role of the mother, enjoying the time spent at home. The daughter does not necessarily want to take over from the mother the expressive role, either. Instead, she wishes to play the instrumental role of the father, relishing the time spent at work. In both instances, the son and the daughter thus socialized are considered as deviant.

Parsons (1955) also thinks that the family is the source of psychological gold, a place which brings happiness. The workplace tires us out; only at home can we enjoy happiness. Family makes us happy. But Parsons neglects the fact that family can also be a place which produces problems and brings its members displeasure, disputes, conflicts, troubles, and sadness. Family abuses, even kills.



**Fig. 26.3** Family as a tennis game

Laing (1971) thinks that family is about relations and interaction between parents and children. Starting from the birth of the child, the parents teach that only things in the family are good; that everything outside the family is bad and dangerous. The child also, unknowingly, becomes the key figure maintaining the marital relationship and communication. Family is like a tennis game (Fig. 26.3); the child is a tennis ball passed to and fro, bounced back and forth, by the husband and the wife as father and mother—in that many messages between them are conveyed by the child, the go-between, the third party.

Laing (1971) thinks that children are the most powerless group in the family, just like the tennis ball being bounced around by the parents in Fig. 26.3. When we look at family, we usually concentrate our attention on the parents playing the game but pay little attention to the ball (the child) being passed back and forth. This problem results from a failure to consider the child's point of view.

A family which breaks up as the result of an extra-marital affair is an apposite example. Everybody will sympathize with the abandoned wife and condemn the husband who abandons his wife and child, but very few people will spare a thought for the feelings of the child. Adults have the strength to pick themselves up and recover, no matter how serious their trauma may be. But the distress of children, who have no control over events, is often overlooked. Their failure to receive proper care and love will deeply affect their future development.

When Parsons and Laing study the family, they look at children in the family from an adult analyst's point of view. We have a sociology of the family in the eyes of the adult, not of the child.

The art therapist Lu Yaqing (2000) points out that drawing provides opportunities for non-verbal expression and communication. In the process of artistic creation, the artist is able to dedicate himself or herself to the subject of the event, lower his or her defences, and allow the unconscious to emerge. Artistic expression is integrative in terms of time and space. The artist is able to relate the expressed thought and emotion to the past, the present, and even the future.

Visual sociology lays particular stress on the social contagiousness of the visual sense in terms of the emotions. Before creating a work of art, the artist must first experience certain emotions, which he or she then conveys to other people by way of some external sign (such as drawings), in order to produce social contagion. From this it can be seen that the art of drawing begins with the individual evoking a certain experience and its related thoughts and emotions and giving them certain form by way of images (Chen Bingchang and Chen Xinmu 1975).

The artist, Wang Jiacheng (1975), thinks that children possess a “natural eye”, which means that they have not yet been influenced by induction or rationality and therefore are able to accept paradoxical correlations. Images that arise in the mind without being controlled by observation can be self-sufficient. The writings and drawings of children are thus a poetic kind of intuitive action. What adults express in their drawings may be done for the people around to see, but what is expressed in children's drawings is mostly children's own thinking.

Drawings that children consider very normal and very natural may be shocking to adults. The characteristic of children's drawings is that their perspective is unsophisticated and their

expressions, highly naive. Children's drawings are not based on objective visual realism but derived from inner subjective emotions. The relations between human figures, animals, and space do not necessarily conform to a fixed perspective. They are not arranged in an orderly way as in the adults' world. Children's drawings are self-centred, with proportions and positions arranged subjectively. So children's drawings are unsophisticated, simple, and naive. Unaffected by rationality, they look at things innocently. Driven by subjective emotions, they put their unadorned inner feelings on paper (Lu Yaqing 1996).

The art therapist Fan Qiongfang (1996) thinks that children's drawings are executions of simple fine arts skills. The process of drawing, from imagination to expression, usually involves children at psychological, emotional, and cognitive levels. Children use a lot of symbols, just like codes, to express what they feel inside. The contents of their drawings are therefore a kind of mysterious and interesting metaphor.

The child psychologist Hu Baolin (1986) thinks that children's drawings very easily reflect their favourite colours and convey what they want to express. So the forms and colours depicted in the pictures are the portraits of their mind. As a result, quite a few studies of children's drawings point out that they are autobiographies, confessions, as well as their fingerprints, brain scans. Children's drawings enable us to catch a glimpse of the inner world of children.

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## Research Methodology

The research subjects of this chapter were 16 children (10 boys and 6 girls) from a Children's Home. They were all primary school pupils residing in a Children's Home. They only went home once or twice every week.

The 16 children formed eight drawing groups over a period of two months. To complement the group drawings, I collected additional data through the three steps of thinking, drawing, and talking in relation to a series of drawing topics. Their drawings involved altogether seven topics,

namely, "My Family", "The Home", "The Ideal Home", "My Father" "The Ideal Father", "My Mother", and "The Ideal Mother".

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## Analysis and Interpretation of Data

### My Family

Once, I saw a four-year-old boy playing a game with a three-and-a-half-year-old girl. The boy was riding a tricycle, and the girl was sitting at the back, holding a doll in one hand and a paper bag containing towels and clothes in the other.

I asked the girl, "Are you going to your gran's?"

The girl pretended to be worried and, in an adult tone of voice, said, "The kid is ill, I've got to take him to the doctor".

I also pretended to see the light suddenly, "Oh, yes! No wonder he (the boy) is driving so fast. He's a taxi driver".

The girl curled her lip as she corrected me, "I'm mum, he's dad. He's riding a motor cycle!"

Family is a microcosm of society, which is in turn an extension of family. Children are part of society. They have their own unique way of thinking, learning, playing, and expressing themselves—often artistically. We can see that the game above is children's imitation of family life and a representation of their experience. When the little girl is sick, her mother will hug her and hold the bag, while her father takes them on a motor cycle to see the doctor. From this we know that young children already have a certain concept of family and a certain understanding of daily family life. Some people compare family to a haven. Some people compare family to a warm stove. Others compare it to a gentle cradle. Yet others think family is prison, hell. What is family in the eyes of young children? How do they depict their own family in drawings? What kinds of family story can we see therein?

### Family Communication: Hugging Each Other

Human beings are social animals. Without communication, humans are just a physical body to



**Fig. 26.4** My family (Siu Yan)

each other. A belief in the importance of communication is a belief in human spirituality. The individual is single-faceted, while the family is a more or less integrated complex, in which there are neither absolute leads nor absolute minor roles. There are countless ties which tightly bind the family members to each other like an invisible net. Communication among the family members is an important element in building up relationships and maintaining kinship feelings (Lee Wai-yung 2003).

In the drawing, “My Family”, Siu Yan, 11 years old, draws a scene of her mother watching television together with her and her younger brother, with her mother’s arms around them. Siu Yan explains the drawing:

My younger brother and I do not have much to play with at home. Our sole fun is to hug mother, watch television together, and chat until half past ten, when we go to bed (Fig. 26.4).

Since Siu Yan’s father died while performing his duty as a fireman on the Chinese mainland, she, her younger brother, and their mother have depended on each other for survival. So communication with her mother is important to her. As a result, the scene of her, her brother, and mother

hugging each other whilst watching TV together is an important experience, which makes her feel they are family. Everybody needs understanding and care. Growing children particularly yearn for their parents’ attention and patience. However, in reality, many parents cannot let go of their sense of “dignity” and they often rudely reject their children’s demands for love. This is undesirable. Parent–child communication is often like talking with one’s past.

### **Expression of Expectations: “Daddy, Mummy, No More Fighting!”**

Laing (1971) thinks that the family is like a tennis game. Comparing the parents to the players and the child to the tennis ball, he points out that the roles played by the parents at home are active while the child’s is passive. But in his drawing, “My Family”, Siu Fung expresses his wish to play an active role.

In the drawing, “My Family”, (Fig. 26.5), Siu Fung, 7 years old, depicts how he tries to stop his parents fighting. In explaining the drawing, he says,

Before father passed away, he often quarrelled and fought with mother. The two of them were like

**Fig. 26.5** My family (Siu Fung)



armies to the left and right of the drawing, both armed. (Question<sup>1</sup>: How come father and mother are still smiling so happily when they are fighting?) Because I am an angel. With my magical powers, I hope to make them stop fighting and smile a lot. So, using my magical powers, I place a mansion between mum and dad. Also, dad is dead. He's now in Heaven. If I am an angel, I can fly up there and visit him!

Siu Fung's father died of cancer when he was at a tender age, but Siu Fung still retains a vivid impression of his parents quarrelling and fighting at home. So, even though his father has been dead for a few years, he still makes this scene the major episode in "My Family", showing how deeply this scene is imprinted on his mind. Most remarkably, he wishes he could become an angel so that he will be able to mediate between his parents, and fly to Heaven to visit his deceased father. The child

also senses that he could be the important figure binding his parents' marriage together. He thinks he is able to mediate between his parents when they fight, and this is also his imagination, his expectation.

#### **A Family Characteristic to Be Proud of: "The Most Luxurious House"**

"Happiness" is a very popular word. It is an important aim of people in their lives, in their marriages and families. The happiness brought about by family is inestimable.

What children's young psyche sees is pure, sincere, and flawless things. This kind of joy is also a priceless treasure. While pursuing pleasure, adults should take children's feelings into consideration and help them to create an environment conducive to the pursuit of happiness (Song Xiufen and Zhuang Huiqiu 1986). Among the 16 children interviewed, Siu On puts into his drawing the family asset which makes him happy and of which he feels proud.

<sup>1</sup>"Questions" refers to the questions asked by the author of this chapter.



**Fig. 26.6** My family (Siu On)

In the drawing, “My Family” (Fig. 26.6), Siu On, 11 years old, draws a very luxurious house. In explaining the drawing, he says,

My home is very large and luxurious. It is the most gorgeous home in the whole world, because my family is the richest! So I can build the outer walls in different colours and use the most expensive materials. This is the most beautiful and gorgeous home in the whole world. (Question: Where are your family members?) I did not draw the members of my family, because they are never there. I live in the Children’s Home. My mother and sister are often away. I no longer see my father at home. My sister and brother do not live at home, either. That’s why I don’t want to draw anybody in the house....

Siu On’s mother is a hotel manager. His “home” is really richer than those of the others in the Children’s Home. But does belonging to a rich family mean happiness? When Siu On first talks about how rich his family is, and how gorgeous his house is, he unconsciously looks proud and self-important. But when he is asked about the members of his family, his face grows dark and he lowers his voice. Apparently, he feels unhappy about the state of his family. He feels sad about his father’s departure and the frequent absences of other family members—and he is reluctant to mention them of his own accord. In fact, even

though it may be the most gorgeous house in the world, is it a home or just a hotel if most of the time nobody is there and nothing happens there, be it happy or unhappy, and if the family members just sleep and shower there?

Siu On draws what he takes to be the most beautiful things in his home, so that he does not have to admit that his home life is what the outside world would call emotionally deprived, and in order that he will not be labelled a child from a problem family. These are what Laing (1971) calls denial and repression. Older children will try their best to forget, deny, repress, or avoid mentioning undesirable things about their family. They will repeatedly stress the merits of their family in front of other children. Only after repeated probing, can we begin to understand what they consider to be the less appealing side of their family.

### **Dissatisfaction with Family Members: “Mum Often Spies on Me”**

If parents want to empathize with their children, address their needs, and be liked by them, then, when they associate with their children, parents should not regard themselves as superior. They should not think they are experienced, learned,





**Fig. 26.7** My family (Siu Wai)

and always correct. More importantly, they should not take their own way as the only standard to assess whether their children's ideas are correct or not. Parents should clearly recognize that as human beings, they have shortcomings and mistakes, that they and children are equal in terms of character.

In the drawing, "My Family" (Fig. 26.7), Siu Wai, 8 years old, draws a house with three rooms. In the window of the room in the lower right-hand corner, he lightly outlines his mother's shape in pencil. Explaining the drawing, he says,

This is my home. There are three rooms. The highest one is mine; the one in the lower left-hand corner is my younger brother's, the one in the lower right-hand corner is my mother's. Because I like to be alone and I don't like my mother and brother coming to find me in my room, I like to live in the highest room. (Question: Why did you only draw mother at the window of the room in the lower right-hand corner?) It's because mother is very wicked. She likes to spy on me and my brother through the window or through the crack between the door and its frame, in order to find out what we are doing. If we are not doing revision, she will immediately rush in and scold us. I am very afraid of her.

From Siu Wai's drawing, "My Family", it can be seen that he does not like the company of his mother and brother. Neither does he like his mother's frequent interference in his activities. He is very dissatisfied with his mother's peeping behaviour. That is why he would like to live in the highest room so that nobody can disturb him. Though children are young, they have their own sense of dignity and way of thinking. Adults simply should not treat them in insensitive ways. Otherwise, things will just get worse.

Parents are a symbol of inviolable authority. They monopolize children's right to learn and to live. One cause of family tragedy may be the lack of equality among the family members. The role of the parents at home should be neither as judge nor as police officer, but as a schoolmate growing together with the child. Parents should not interfere too much with children's growth. They have to give them adequate free time and allow them the right to make plans and reach decisions. People who grow up in a free atmosphere will be healthier in their mind and body.

In the book, *Between Parent and child*, Ginott (1965) points out that if we observe everyday conversations between parents and children, we will notice that they really take in astonishingly very little of each other's words. The tone of their conversation sounds like a monologue on the stage. The monologue of one party contains criticisms and instructions while that of the other party contains denial and plea. This kind of tragic interaction occurs not because of lack of love, but because of lack of respect; not because of lack of wisdom, but because of lack of skill. For example, Siu Wai's mother lacks proper respect for others in communicating with her child, which widens the communication gap between them.

## The Home

### Living Under Rules

In the drawing, "The Home" (Fig. 26.8), Siu Kit, 6 years old, draws a representation of his life in the Home. Explaining the drawing, he says:

In the Home, we can't do anything, like watching TV or playing. We can only do housework and



**Fig. 26.8** The home (Siu Kit)

homework. Even when we're tired from doing the housework, we still can't play. What's more, we have to follow a lot of different rules. So there is no freedom. It's so miserable. (Question: Do you like living in the Home?) Of course not, because there is absolutely no freedom here!

From the contents of the interview above and from the drawing, we can see that in the mind of Siu Kit, the Home is a place without freedom. He thinks that in the Home there are a lot of rules to be followed and a lot of housework to do. There is no time for rest and fun. There are things which the children in the Home cannot do without the permission of the surrogate parents. They have less time for play than other children of the same age. Moreover, they have to be responsible for duties like housework, so that the children feel that there is no freedom there, that every second of their lives is governed by rules. Thus all these 16 children do not like living in the Home, and they think it is a place without freedom.

Children need to be able to play and it is their nature to want to. Play also accords with the needs of their physiological development. It can benefit their learning. Any game has rules for children to follow. From that, children can learn to interact with others. So repressing children's innate need

for play means removing their opportunities to learn from play.

### Living in Loneliness

In the drawing, "The Home", Siu Wai, eight years old, draws a small house and a robot to represent his life in the Home. Explaining the drawing, he says:

The Home is like a small house in the drawing, and I am like the robot in it. (Question: Why is the house so small?) Because although the Home is very large, I only like being in my bed in the room. So I've only drawn the room. (Question: Why are you a robot?) Because although the Home is very large, I have many things to do every day. I must obey auntie<sup>2</sup> (surrogate mother), otherwise I will be punished! (Question: Why are there no other people?) Because I seldom play with other kids. I don't like them. They don't usually help me, and I often quarrel with them. So I will not make friends with them! In the Home, I have no friends, and so I don't want to stay here! (Fig. 26.9)

From Siu Wai's drawing, we can sense his loneliness in the Home. There is only one single person in the drawing and a small room. He has

<sup>2</sup>"Auntie" is how children in the Home address the surrogate mother.



**Fig. 26.9** The home (Siu Wai)



**Fig. 26.10** The home (Siu Chiu)

no friends, nor is he happy. In fact, the soulless life of the Home makes the children feel like robots. Their life has been organized for them and they cannot live like ordinary children cared for by their parents. They feel intensely lonely.

### Living Under Pressure

In the drawing, “The Home” (Fig. 26.10), Siu Chiu describes the Home as hell. He explains,

I think the Home is like hell, where every kid leads a hard life. It seems that they are all maltreated.

(Question: By whom are they maltreated?) Auntie and uncle<sup>3</sup> (surrogate parents) are whipping us in the drawing! (Question: Do auntie and uncle beat you?) No, they don't beat us, but they often find fault with us. When we make a mistake, we are punished. They are like messengers from hell, who often maltreat us! (Question: Do you like living in the Home?) No, I hate it. I really hope to leave this nasty place as soon as possible!

Of the 16 children, Siu Chiu, 12 years old, is the oldest. He has been living in the Home for almost six years. What he thinks about the Home can be clearly seen from this drawing. He does not like the Home, because they have a hard life there which he compares to life in hell.

To summarize, judging by the above drawings, almost all of the Home images depicted by the children are negative. There are even children who describe the Home as hell. They think that living in the Home requires compliance with rules and orders. Punishments are rigorously carried out. Any activities related to "play" are forbidden. These all represent their dislike of the Home. In most of the drawings, the surrogate parents are not presented. Would these surrogate parents feel like parents to the children? Can the Home give the children a feeling of family?

## The Ideal Home

### Family Is Where You Are: "Living Alone on the Aeroplane"

Family is the foundation and nucleus of society as well as its epitome and symbol. A stable societal foundation is composed of stable families. In other words, stability is the ideal state of the family. However, in the innocent eyes of children, stability is not the essential requirement of an ideal family. There are even children who take instability to be the mode of their ideal family. Why so? Under contemporary societal pressure, all kinds of suffering are the reason for psychological trauma. Happy experiences are easier to forget. The more deeply hidden a memory is, the more it bewilders and affects one's psyche.

<sup>3</sup>"Uncle" is how children in the Home address the surrogate father.

Most deeply hidden memories are unhappy, painful, and sad.

In the drawing, "The Ideal Home", (Fig. 26.11), Siu On, eleven years old, draws an aeroplane as his "ideal home". Explaining the drawing, he says:

In my eyes, the ideal home is an aeroplane. Living there, I will be able to fly everywhere freely. (Question: Only you alone live in the aeroplane? Anybody else?) Me alone, because I don't want to live with other people. I only want to fly the aeroplane alone in all directions!

Siu On considers an aeroplane to be his ideal home, in which he will live alone. Apparently, this is a result of his family situation. He does not want to live with other people; he does not want to have family; he only wants to have freedom. Many people wish to have a stable family where they live happily with other members of the family. But Siu On runs away from the members of his family and prefers the dynamic, mobile state of his ideal home. He wants to live in an aeroplane. Wherever the aeroplane lands is his home.

### Living with Animals: "Joy with Beasts"\*

In the drawing, "The Ideal Home", (Fig. 26.12), Siu Yan, eleven years old, expresses her wish to have the North Pole as her "ideal home". She says:

My ideal home is somewhere at the North Pole where I will live alone. I am not afraid of the cold, so I can live alone in an ice house. (Question: Why are there so many animals in the drawing?) Because I want to live with these animals. I don't like being with people. I like animals. When I have time, I can swim with them. How nice!

Like Siu On, Siu Yan wishes to live alone in her ideal home. Siu Yan chooses animals to be her companions, considering association with animals to be better or happier than that with humans. This is a result of her real family situation, which has made her reluctant to live with her family. Living alone or with animals is a kind of criticism of reality and an expression of discontent with family life.

### I Will Only Live with My Siblings: Deep Sisterly Affection

In the drawing, "The Ideal Home" (Fig. 26.13), Siu Lai, 10 years old, draws a large house as her



**Fig. 26.11** The ideal home (Siu On)

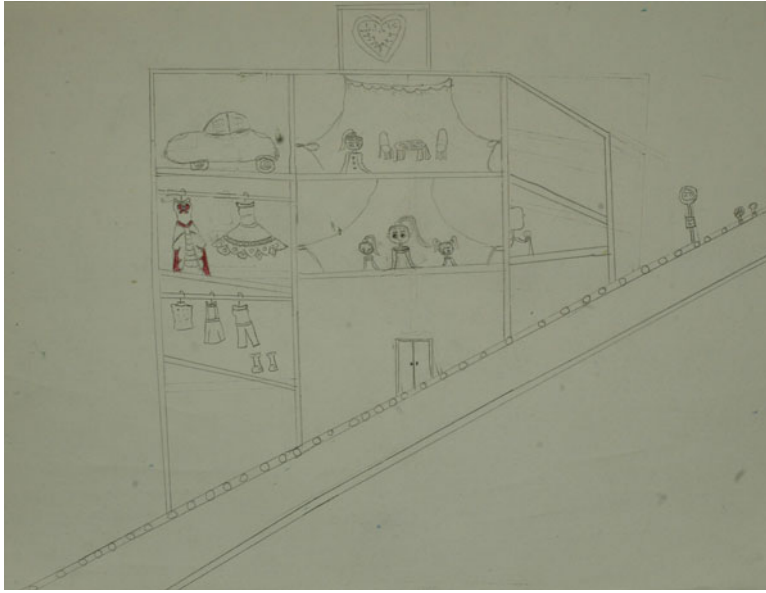


**Fig. 26.12** The ideal family (Siu Yan)

“ideal home” and wishes to live with her older sister there. In explanation she says,

My older sister loves me dearly. She often comes to the Home to visit me and take me out for a treat. So I am very fond of her. My sister is a fashion designer, and so she has a lot of beautiful clothes. I wish I had a very large house, in which I would

live with my sister. The house has to be very large, with a lot of rooms for my sister to store her beautiful dresses. (Question: You will only live with your sister? How about your dad and mum?) I don't like dad and mum. Neither of them loves me. They seldom come to the Home to visit me. They never take me out for a treat. So I won't live with them.



**Fig. 26.13** The ideal home (Siu Lai)



**Fig. 26.14** The ideal home (Siu Yin)

As a result of her parents' divorce, as well as the lack of love from both parents, Siu Lai has a strong emotional bond with her older sister, hoping to organize her ideal home with her sister. From that it can be seen that the older sister is Siu Lai's role model.

### **Yearning for Freedom: Car as Home**

In the drawing, "The Ideal home" (Fig. 26.14), Siu Yin, 12 years old, draws a car as his "ideal home":

I want a car as my home, because I will be alone and able to drive wherever I want to. Sounds great!



**Fig. 26.15** The ideal home (Siu Chiu)

When I have time, I can visit different friends. Free and easy. Truly wonderful. (Question: How about your family? Are they living in the same car?) No, I don't like being with them. They all get on my nerves. So I prefer being on my own, free and easy!

From this "Ideal Home" drawing of Siu Yin, it can be seen that he wishes to own an unstable and dynamic home. Wherever the car stops is his home. He yearns for freedom and does not like living with his family. These all reflect his dissatisfaction with reality. He does not like his present home, the Home, his family or his present life.

### **Solitude: The Golden House**

In the drawing, "The Ideal Home" (Fig. 26.15), Siu Chiu, 12 years old, depicts himself alone in a very large house. He says,

My ideal home is a very large house, in which I will live alone. There will be lots of gold. Preferably everything will be made of gold. This will prove that I am very rich. In a word, the house will be very large, large enough for me to play football and video games. Then it will be really ideal. (Question: Why do you want to live alone?) Because I don't want to live with anybody. Under no circumstances should dad and mum look for me. It would be best if they don't know where I live. Then I will not be scolded by them. Then I will be free to play video games, read comic books, and play football. (Question: Won't you feel bored?) No, certainly

not. Because I shall be so rich. I can do whatever I like. There will be video games, comic books and football. Why should I feel bored?

From this "Ideal Home" drawn by Siu Chiu and his explanation, we can infer that he is very dissatisfied with his family home and the Home. He wants to live alone and have freedom. His relationship with his parents is not good. Living in the Home is also hard for him. That is why he prefers to live alone, deeming that only living alone is the ideal state, enabling him to be free and happy.

In the children's drawings, most of their ideal homes are impracticable and fanciful in adults' eyes. For example, they prefer to live with animals in a house made of ice or to live in an aeroplane in the air. These may be described as non-homes. Moreover, in these "Ideal Home" drawings, the children seldom draw their present family. Although they have co-habitants in the drawings, they are all animals. Why do these children choose non-homes as their ideal homes? Why do they want to live alone or with animals instead of their family? For these children, who come from incomplete families, these "unrealistic" pictures fully depict their discontents with their family, the Home and real life.

### “My Father”, “The Ideal Father”

One weekend, a couple took their 6-year-old son to the park. On their way, they came across a man trying to sell a small electrical appliance. As the husband used to study electronics, he was very interested in the appliance. He fiddled with it for quite a while. As the man was eager to sell the product, he exaggerated and claimed that it was the most recent invention with the latest technology. Hearing that, the husband frowned a little bit. The son standing next to him understood what was going on and lost no time in saying to the salesman, “Don’t try to fool my dad, mister. He knows everything!” (Li Hong and Fang Baochang 2005). A telling phrase uttered by the son reveals a secret hidden in the mind of many a child: The father is their idol. In the mind of the child, the father is capable of doing anything in the world. The father is able to answer all the child’s questions; the father is able to repair broken toys as if he were performing a miracle. These all win the hero worship of the child, who is unfamiliar with the world.

However, while children treasure so much the time spent with their fathers, how do fathers view this father–son bond? If asked, “What is the most important thing for you?” most fathers would answer, “My children” or “My family”. Unfortunately, this oral claim is not borne out by the reality. This is especially clear when we observe how the fathers allocate their time and energy: “Would you please play with me, dad?” “Let me watch the game first”. “Let me read the paper first!” “I promise to play with you this weekend”. “I’m very tired now”. Goode (1992) suggests that the father’s excuses conceal the man’s laziness. Bearing the above-mentioned mode of interaction in mind, we are now going to explore how children depict their fathers, what kind of father is most ideal, and what kind of father–son stories can be seen from the drawings and interviews with the children.

### Class Achievement: “Father’s Wounds”

The principle of “men outside, women inside”, handed down through generations in China, has acquired a fixed position in the Chinese minds.

The husband usually works hard outside the home for the livelihood of the family, shouldering a responsibility different from the wife’s. As Parsons (1955) points out in his scenario of housework division, the husband plays an instrumental leader’s role at home and takes charge of the external affairs of the family, in order to fulfil the role and position assigned to him and expected of him by society. As a husband, a father, and a family head, he has an inescapable and heavy responsibility for the family economy, while the internal matters of the family fall on the shoulders of the wife. Under the insidious influence of socialization by their parents and society, the children also think that the father should go out to work and support the family. Further, they expect the father to have a good job, a responsible position, and a high salary.

Siu Yan’s father died a few years ago on the Chinese mainland. He was a fireman. In the drawing, “My Father” (Fig. 26.16), she draws him dressed in sports gear. She explains:

My dad was a fireman and had to take a lot of physical exercise in order to keep fit. So he was often dressed in sports gear. (Question: Did you like your father being a fireman?) No, because he had a hard time of it as a fireman on the Chinese mainland. After fighting a big fire, he would come home with quite a lot of injuries. When he came home, mum, my younger brother and I often had to help him dress the wounds. And each time dad looked as though he was in great pain. So I didn’t like him being a fireman!

Although Siu Yan never saw her father at work, from his scars she thinks that dad’s work was very hard, and she was not happy about her father’s job.

In the drawing, “The Ideal Father” (Fig. 26.17), Siu Yan draws a man in a suit, with a thick sheaf of papers in his left hand, and a cigar in his right hand. She explains,

I like to show dad sitting in a taipan chair dressed in a suit, because then he can work comfortably. When dad was a fireman, he had to work with the sweat pouring down his back every day. And mum thought that dad’s wages were very low. So I don’t want dad to be working hard out of doors, earning just a little money. I like to think of dad as a boss, sitting in the office, giving orders. In this way, he can earn a lot of money and he need not work so hard.



**Fig. 26.16** My father (Siu Yan)



**Fig. 26.17** The ideal father (Siu Yan)



Comparing Siu Yan's two drawings—"My Father" and "The Ideal Father", we see that she transforms her father from a fireman into a manager. She thinks that in this way her father will achieve more, be richer, and rise up the social ladder.

Through socialization by family, school, peers, and the mass media, the child learns the direct relationship between occupation and status in society, apart from the housework division model of "men outside and women inside". The work of the working class is usually connected with low achievement, low pay, and hard work, while the work of the middle class is usually connected with high achievement, high pay, and comfortable life.

### **Emotional Need: "I Want Father to Hold My Hand"**

A few years ago, there was a popular song called "I Love Someone who does not come home". The singer was a woman and the person who would not come home was a man. Men not wanting to go home are a social phenomenon. Men engaged in physical labour often want to play poker or chess after work. Men engaged in business have even more excuses—business negotiations, entertaining clients, carousing with colleagues. They have every reason to go home very late. Some men like to work overtime (Yang Yu 2003). The reason why men do not like to go home is largely connected with the social role they play. In society, the male is the lead. The centre of his life is work. Family is just his place of rest. After recharging his batteries at home, he still has to fight his corner in the world of work. In the evening, when he is supposed to go home, he is reluctant to do so, because of his subconscious attachment to work. Even chatting with colleagues after work is a manifestation of this kind of attachment.

To most men, career is the most important component of their life. When we ask a man who has just been fired what he feels, we will probably hear the following reply, "I feel that I am worthless". Apparently, workplaces are where men acquire their self-esteem. Women's magazines are always full of advice on how to be a mother.

But in men's magazines, there are almost no articles on fatherhood. This will inevitably make fathers think that bringing up children has nothing to do with men. Then what do children think about fathers wholly dedicated to their work?

The last time Siu Kei, 10 years old, saw her father was during the 2003 SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome<sup>4</sup>) epidemic in Hong Kong. So, in the drawing, "My Father" (Fig. 26.18), she draws how she saw her father for the last time. She explains,

I haven't seen dad for a long time. The last time I saw him was during the SARS epidemic, when classes were suspended. We were wearing masks, and could not see each other's faces. And I was very upset! (Question: Why are you crying in the drawing?) Yes, when I saw dad last time, I really cried, because dad said that he was going to work on the Chinese mainland and therefore would not be able to visit us for some time. At that time, I was really very upset and could not stop crying.

Siu Kei, who lives in the Home, treasures every opportunity to meet her father and every moment she spends with him. As soon as she had learnt that her father would not be able to see her very often due to his work, she became very sad and depressed. Time spent with the father is very precious for both the father and the child. When the father is willing to share his precious time with his child, he is implicitly conveying the following message to the child, "You are very important to me". A father who is willing to give is actually implicitly conveying to the child love, care, and respect. In the eyes of the child, the parents are the most respectable people in the world. If the parents deem it worthwhile to give the child their complete love and attention, the child will be fully aware of his or her importance to them.

In the drawing, "The Ideal Father" (Fig. 26.19), Siu Kei depicts herself and her father, but this time they are not wearing masks, and the girl in the drawing is not weeping. The father is even holding her hands. She says,

<sup>4</sup>Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) is a respiratory disease in humans which is caused by the SARS coronavirus. In early 2003, SARS spread from the Guangdong province of China to rapidly infect individuals in some 37 countries around the world.

**Fig. 26.18** My father (Siu Kei)



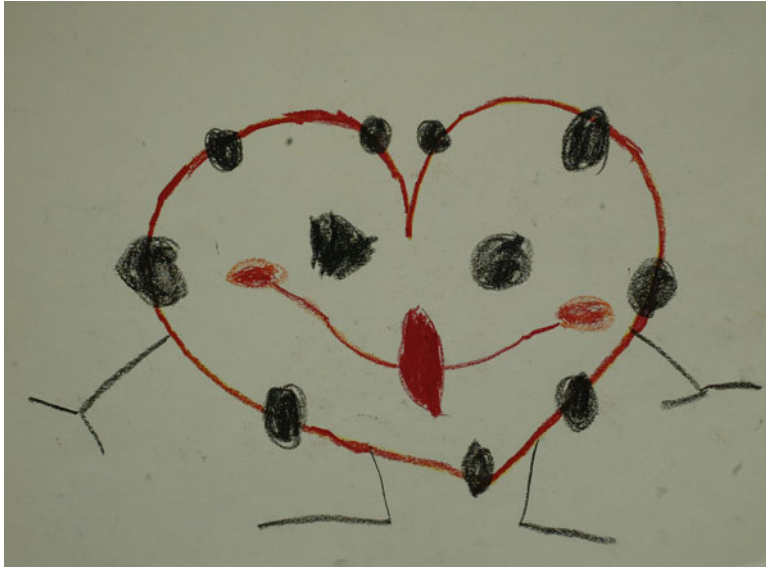
I wish dad could spend more time with me and take me on trips. I also wish he would hold my hand and go for walks with me. Whenever dad takes me out, he doesn't want to hold my hand. So I wish he would take me by the hand and go everywhere with me. This is bound to be good for both of us.

Compare the two drawings of Siu Kei and it can be seen how deeply she longs to spend more time with her father. She also wishes she and her father could have a happy life together.

Many men think that bringing up children is mostly a woman's job. So when a man actively plays the role of the good, caring, loving father, he may be worried that he has encroached on the woman's preserve. Fatherhood may thus threaten manhood—and perhaps also motherhood, and fathers may feel that focusing on caring in everyday life will compromise their masculine image. It is noticeable that when men get together to reaffirm their manhood, their conversation is limited to the following four topics—sport, money, work, and sex. They may think that children are a topic of conversation for women only.



**Fig. 26.19** The ideal father (Siu Kei)



**Fig. 26.20** My father (Siu Wai)

Particularly regrettably, they get no respect from their peers for having a caring relationship with their children. As men they may perhaps be more concerned to impress others with how they have prospered in their careers.

Men often think that children prefer their mothers' company to that of their fathers. This may be because women, in associating and interacting with children, seem to be more enthusiastic and focused than men. Women are more capable of appreciating children. Although most daughters (especially little girls) seem to be more attracted to their mothers, it is easy to discover that daughters actually prefer to be with their fathers. It is because the father makes the daughter feel special. Actually, the daughter indeed recognizes the difference between herself and males (including her father). The relationship built up between every parent and their children is unique. When a father interacts with his daughter, he does not have to imitate the behaviour of his wife. He can provide the daughter with another kind of parental role model such as instrumental leadership. This will help her to interact with different people in her future life. When it is necessary to make important life decisions, she will be able to draw knowledge and inspiration from these two different styles and modes of life.

### **The Imaginary Father: "A Big Heart and a Small Heart"**

Children need a father who is willing to play the father's role, better still, caringly and lovingly. Masculinity cannot be acquired by taking any course. It can only be learnt from the father in everyday life, with the father as the model. No childhood need is so strong as the need for the father's protection. From infancy, the child is aware that there is a father who can protect one from danger. However, among the 16 children from incomplete families, some have never seen their father. Maybe they have learnt something about their father from their mother, but there is simply no impression of their father in their mind. So the drawings of "My Father" and "The Ideal Father" all come from their imagination.

Siu Wai, 8 years old, has never seen his father. He has only learnt from his mother that his father died of cancer. He has no impression whatsoever of his father. In the drawing, "My Father" (Fig. 26.20), a heart is drawn to represent his father. He says,

I have never seen my dad. He is dead, but mum tells me that dad is in my heart. I think dad must be a happy man, so I drew a heart to represent dad! (Question: Why are there so many black spots on the heart?) Mum told me that dad died of cancer. These black spots are cancer gems that killed dad.



**Fig. 26.21** The ideal father (Siu Wai)

From the drawing, “My Father”, and his explanation, we can see that Siu Wai knows the fact and the cause of his father’s death. But what is surprising is how he can so easily narrate something people usually consider to be extremely sad. Judging from the easy tone of Siu Wai’s speech, it seems that he has already accepted this distressing fact. Or maybe he thinks that this is just a very ordinary thing. What concerns me is whether he, an 8-year-old boy, has accepted this distressing fact or has simply failed to grasp the significance of this event. After all, Siu Wai represents the father he has never met with a heart. From this it can be seen that although in Siu Wai’s mind, there is no impression of his father, the father really exists in his mind.

In the diagram of “The Ideal Father” (Fig. 26.21), Siu Wai also represents his father with a heart. But this time, he draws another smaller heart to represent himself:

If father were still around, I would want him to spend time with me, play with me, go shopping with me, and take me out, so that we would both be very happy. (Question: Why are there no black spots on the heart?) Of course, there are none. I don’t want father to suffer from cancer. Had it not been for cancer, father would not have died, and we would have been able to see him very often.

Although Siu Wai has never seen his father, he hopes to live with him. This shows that children

value their association with their father. Comparing Siu Wai’s drawings, we can see that, although Siu Wai has no impression of his father and is not clear whether his father has ever lived with him at all, he thinks that it would be wonderful to spend time with him.

From what Siu Wai says, we can see that when we spend time listening to children’s simple and unadorned speech and get them thinking, we can begin to understand the way they look at the world. Children’s replies enable us to understand better how they think and how they interpret events in their little world. They can bring their parents joy; their unique perspective and sincere attitude will astonish adults; their outstanding imagination and creativity are amazing, enabling adults to look at the world from a completely new angle. Siu Wai is a case in point. With no impression whatsoever of his deceased father, he represents the father’s image with the “heart”, which impresses us with his unique way of expressing himself as well as his deep feelings for his father.

Children value the time they spend with their father, and fathers need to spend time to establish a close relationship with their children. However, adults often tend to be casual in their relationship with their children. Many fathers think that their work has a bigger claim on their time and their children can wait—often forever.

Meanwhile, children wait and wait. The father may live until 80 years of age, or maybe longer. But what if his life is not so long? What if everything comes to an end tomorrow? And the father will not have a second chance to watch the child grow up. This precious time will never come again.

### “My Mother”, “The Ideal Mother”

During the second half of his life, a husband always feels guilty towards his wife. One day an earthquake occurred, causing the husband to jump out of bed and run out into the courtyard. It was only after the earthquake stopped that he saw his wife running out with their three children. The husband said to the wife, “Thank you for forgiving me for thinking only of myself at the critical moment. But I didn’t mean to. It was just a moment’s confusion and panic that caused me to run out without thinking” (Yang Yu 2003). This husband really revealed the crux of the problem. Generally speaking, women are accustomed to devoting themselves to their family and caring about their husbands and children. On the other hand, husbands’ concern for their wives and children is much more casual. It is precisely because of this difference that the husband’s first reaction in an emergency was to think only of saving himself.

The idea of “women being responsible for internal affairs” in traditional Chinese families explains the behaviour of the mother above as well as highlights the role of women in the family. Just as in the housework division scenario of Parsons (1955), the wife plays at home the role of an expressive leader, who takes care of the children and the internal affairs of the family, in order to fulfil the role as expected by society. From the children’s drawings below about their mothers, we can learn the children’s different views about their mothers. Under the insidious influence of socialization by their parents and society, most of the children think that the mother had better stay at home to be a housewife, and they hope that the mother will spend more time with them.



Fig. 26.22 My mother (Siu Yin)

### Ordinary Mother: “Mahjong Armour and Cooking Apron”

“Before marriage, obey the father; when married, obey the husband; in widowhood, obey the son”. This kind of rule imposed by Chinese tradition on women fully reveals the traditionally subordinate role and position of women. In the past, women mostly relied on their husbands for survival. When their husbands died, they relied on their sons. This deep-rooted attitude is expressed in the adage “Frailty, thy name is woman”. However, in recent years, quite a few independent and tough women have come on the social scenes so that the frail image of women is no longer so widely accepted. Nonetheless, do children like their mothers to be tough women? Compare Siu Yin’s drawings, “My Mother” and “The Ideal Mother”, and we will see that she does not like, and is dissatisfied with, her mother’s present glamorous look. Siu Wai, instead of wanting her mother to be as rich, as powerful, and as accomplished as her father, wants just an ordinary mother.

When the father of Siu Yin, 12 years old, died, he had been living with him, his mother, younger brother, and sister. In the drawing, “My Mother” (Fig. 26.22), Siu Yin depicts a beautifully dressed mother. He says,



**Fig. 26.23** The ideal mother (Siu Yin)

Mum is usually dressed very beautifully. Every evening she puts her make-up on and goes out to play mahjong. Mum always goes to mahjong in this dress. She calls this dress her armour, which always enables her to win money. So she always dresses up to the nines when she goes to play mahjong.

The cultivation of all the child's good habits depends on its parents, in particular, their words and deeds in everyday life. And the child has to rely on the parents as example and model. But where may the role model for Siu Yin come from when his family is without a father and his mother often neglects her children?

In the drawing, "The Ideal Mother" (Fig. 26.23), Siu Yin draws a very fat, aproned mother. In explaining his drawing, he says,

This is my ideal mother. She's very fat. Wearing an apron, she is always cooking for us. (Question: Why do you like mum to be fat?) Because I don't want her to dress herself up so beautifully. I prefer her to be dressed plainly and to be at home with us every day, cooking for us.



**Fig. 26.24** My mother (Siu Chiu)

Compare the two drawings of Siu Yin, and we can see that he does not like his mother's present look. This is because his mother dresses up not for the benefit of her family, but for the benefit of the people she is going to meet for mahjong. So Siu Yin prefers an ordinary mother who will keep him company most of the time.

### **Emotional Need: "I Want Mother to Watch Me Play Football"**

The child is the future of the parents and the blossom of the family. Communication with the child is communication with one's own past. If the parents cannot communicate effectively with the child, they will have to face the child who is unable to grow healthily and a future without self-awareness.

In the drawing, "My Mother" (Fig. 26.24), Siu Chiu, 12 years old, depicts his mother looking angry. He says,

This is my mum looking angry. When she flares up, both my older brother and I are really scared. (Question: Is it you who upsets her?) No! I don't often make mum angry. She's a very hot-tempered person. Sometimes, when she comes home and has a row with dad, she gets very angry, and she takes



**Fig. 26.25** The ideal mother (Siu Chiu)

it out on my brother and me non-stop. Sometimes she even beats us up. That's why we are very worried when she gets angry!

From Siu Chiu's drawing and interview, it can be seen that both of his parents are moody people. And Siu Chiu has described how he and his brother are afraid of their parents' temper. Parents plant a seed in the emotional garden of children, which will grow in time. To certain families, this seed is "love, respect and autonomy". But there are also families like Siu Chiu's, which plant the seed of "fear, obligation or guilt" in the inner world of children. There is a comic book which describes how people vent their emotions, especially anger. The first scene of one of the chapters is a boss yelling at one of his employees. Obviously, the employee now feels like yelling at someone in order to let off steam about his own grievances. So the second scene shows him going home and yelling at his wife. The third scene is the wife shouting at her children. Then the children kick their dog, which then bites a cat. This comic aptly describes Siu Chiu's family situation. In the comic, people vent their anger on vulnerable objects, which easily become a scapegoat, rather than on the initiator. The family drama is a power play.

In the drawing of "The Ideal Mother" (Fig. 26.25), Siu Chiu draws the sight of his

mother coming to the football ground and watching him play football. He says,

I really love football. If only mum would come and see me play football! (Question: Has your mother ever come to the playing fields to see you play football?) No! Not once! She often says she doesn't like me playing football. Every time we go home after playing football, she gets mad! So I really wish she would come and see me play football. I don't expect her to come every time. Once would be enough, if only she would!

From Siu Chiu's drawing, "The Ideal Mother", it can be seen that he very much wants his mother to spend more time with him. He also wants his mother to accept him and his older brother, to accept their hobbies and approve of them. From that it can be seen, all children, no matter how old or young they are, want better communication with their mother and her support, encouragement, and approval.

Now the greatest threat to society is the increasing challenge to the stability of family. The rate of divorce and the proportion of one-parent families are gradually rising. The deficiency of supportive forces such as marital and parent-child bonds is responsible for a major crisis of the modern family. Children nowadays are lonelier and lonelier, because they lack the power of love, the emotional support of parents who will pat them on the head, put an arm round their shoulders, and say with



appreciation in their eyes, “Well done! Good kid!” Emotional support in the family is its solid foundation, the source of a happy life in the family, sunlight for the healthy emotional growth of the children. This kind of emotional support is two-way and interactive—parents should become the emotional support of children; and children are also the emotional support of parents (Engel 1998). When there is reciprocal emotional support in the family, an indestructibly strong centripetal force will be generated, helping each and every member of the family to develop well as an individual.

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## Conclusion

The family is constantly changing. Just as the times change, so does the family. Society’s politics, economy and ethos all influence the family’s constitution and organization. Along with the growth of children and family members, the family grows. A three-year-old child obediently holds its mother’s hand while crossing the road, whereas a 6-year old tries to let go of its mother’s grip. No matter how worried or reluctant the mother may be, she has to learn to let go of the hand, acknowledging the gradual maturation of her child. No one will deny the importance of family to children. Strangely, though we all live in our family, feel its atmosphere and rely on its pulse and breath, we seldom look at the family from the point of view of children.

Many children express in their drawings the wish to have more power, more ability, and greater freedom. This is different from Parsons’ findings. Parsons (1955) thinks that through socialization, children learn to be the future parent, inheriting the instrumental and expressive roles in the family. But in their drawings, children do not indicate that they want to be a father or a mother in the future. They only address the current situation and wish to have more power, more ability, and more freedom. Parsons also thinks that family is the source of psychological gold, a place that can bring happiness. But what is expressed by the children in their drawings is all sombre faces of family. So in the minds of

children, family is not necessarily a happy place as maintained by Parsons, but a place that brings them problems and unhappiness.

Laing (1971) thinks that the family is about relationship between parents and children. But the children think otherwise. The family in the mind of the children is unique. In the children’s drawings, family is a clearly demarcated space. Everything inside the house is part of their family, while everything outside is not their family. Family is time. Some of the children think that their family in the past was happier and so they choose to draw their family in the past. Some of them think that their present family is happier, and so they choose to draw the present family. Some of the children yearn for the future family and draw the family they may have in the future. Children’s family can have three different times and spaces. Family is family members. The children think that family members are their family but some do not think so. Family is yearning. Some of the children are dissatisfied with their past and present families and they yearn for their future family.

Family is feeling. Some of the children think that the kinship feelings between them and their family are their family. Family is problems. Some of the children think that family is the site of problems.

The children interviewed think that in reality the family is the source of problems, which makes them unhappy. A children’s home can provide them with their daily necessities but not kinship feelings. Kinship, family members, and family are irreplaceable. The foster parents in Children’s Home cannot replace the children’s fathers and mothers. Neither does the Home enable these children from special families to regain the feeling of home. The ideal homes in the children’s minds are not homes in the eyes of the adults. By drawing “non-family homes” as ideal homes the children are expressing dissatisfaction with their families in real life. These “non-realistic” ideas represent their criticism of, and discontents with, family members, the Home, family, reality, life, and living.

Family is multi-faceted, with a tender and happy side as well as an unspeakable side. As Laing (1971) says, many people particularly



**Fig. 26.26** My family (Siu Si)

emphasize the up or bright side of family. In that kind of “harmonious” family atmosphere, all problems, resentment, and traumas cannot make their appearance. They are suppressed, repressed, shut out of consciousness and memory. As a result, what we see is a happy family photo, in which every member reveals a face that smiles, for the benefit of the outsiders and the insiders, while private bitterness is hidden away in the heart. Society has taught all of us through socialization to play the happy family game (Laing 1971).

Through socialization, children learn from their parents how to stress the good side of the family in front of others. But simultaneously they practise denial and repress unhappy thoughts. Just as the art therapist, Lu Yaqing (2000), and the artist, Wang Jiacheng (1975) have pointed out, drawing provides an opportunity for non-verbal expression and communication. The characteristic of children’s drawing is that their view of objects and events is pure and innocent and expressed very sincerely. They look at objects and events with “an innocent eye”, and put their internal feelings on the drawing paper, by way of images untainted by reason and driven by subjective emotions and feelings.

Take Fig. 26.26 as an example. At first sight, ordinary people may think that it is a drawing depicting a happy family on a day out. In reality, this is the 8-year-old Siu Si’s depiction of how she and her younger sister have to separate their parents, who are always fighting, before they can enjoy a day out together. If we are prepared to put aside the adult perspective, and to open our eyes to see what children’s drawings are really telling us, we will know that children have bad feelings about the down and dark side of their family. We will then learn of their grievances against family members, their dissatisfaction with the family home, their place in it, their reality: The drawings of children tell only one thing: the truth.

A child’s drawing is a key to open the door of the heart. When children draw, they do not follow the outer appearance of the object; instead they draw the image in their mind according to their own perspective. Children’s drawings reflect their internal world. Knowing how to read children’s drawings means finding the door or window to the inner secrets of children. So starting with children’s drawings, and assisted by their own explanations, we can find out what they think about

their family, and about themselves. If children's drawings are viewed in chronological order, they can be read as an epic of the life process. This epic is beautiful, splendid, full of fancies and miracles, and reveals the happenings in each and every stage of the child's development. In this epic we encounter the physiological and psychological story, the conflict within the individual, conflict between individuals, conflict between self and society. When carefully reading these children's drawings, which reflect their life process, we will notice the spindrift resulting from different kinds of conflict. It not only covers a wide range, but also involves individual orientations and forces constantly shifting between concealment and conspicuousness, strength and weakness, joy and sorrow. New-born babies are like a blank piece of paper, but society, parent-child relationships, and the family write on it, constructing babies' biographies and trajectories. May all the parents in the world be able to make good use of children's drawing as key to the inner yearning, needs, and desires of children and understand their inner world.

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