Differences in Values Between Mother and Daughter in *Cord**

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Edna O'Brien (1930-), an Irish novelist, poet, and short story writer, is considered as a pioneer for her frank portrayals of women and the most gifted woman writing in English at her time. Her first novel, *The Country Girls* (1960), was an immediate success. Her writing is lyrical and intense with passions and aspirations. Set in Britain, the short story *Cord* describes a story about how the mother and the daughter got along in the short reunion after a long separation. The paper mainly explores different religious values, cultural values, and social values between them which caused irreconcilable conflicts. The present paper concludes that the "Cord", the blood tie, can never get rid of the spiritual barrier. Only mutual understanding can eliminate the gap and acquire a harmonious relation between parents and children.

Keywords: *Cord*, religious values, cultural values, social values

Introduction

O'Brien's works often "revolve around the inner feelings of women, and their problems in relating to men, and to society as a whole" (Yang, 2012b, p. 262). The influence of her Catholic upbringing is apparent in much of her work, "which depicts both Irish village life during the 1940s and 1950s and contemporary urban settings" (Cooke, 2011, p. 6). Set in Britain in the 1960s, *Cord* describes a story about how the mother went to see her daughter, Claire, after they were separated for a long time. Claire was working in London as a poet after receiving a degree while her mother was chaining herself to the Irish village all her life. Someday, when the mother was told that Claire "lost her faith..." (Yang, 2012a, p. 342), the next day, she took a flight to London. The first evening at Claire's home passed well enough. However, from the second day, it seemed the conflicts emerged unexpectedly so that they quarreled a lot since then. The mother felt hurt and she left six days later. Another separation came as a great relief to both of them. After they kissed each other goodbye, they learned they could come back to their own life again. There is no denying that on one hand, there was a close blood tie between them which was called "Cord", on the other hand, the mother and the daughter were drifting irreparably further apart from each other. Although they were connected by the cord, however, their differences in various aspects could hardly be eliminated so that driven by the wide gap, they failed to understand each other.

What were the differences which caused irreconcilable conflicts between Claire and her mother? The present paper will comment the differences between the mother and the daughter from the perspective of

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Differences in Religious Values Between Mother and Daughter

Cord tells the story about how people are influenced by different kinds of values and how the mother and the daughter failed to establish mutual understanding. The mother-daughter tensions are mainly driven by different religious values.

Religious values play a leading role in the establishment of an individual's identity and have a great influence upon his whole life. Religious values refer to ethical principles founded in religious traditions and beliefs. "In contrast to personal values, religious-based values are based on scriptures and a religion's established norms" (Wilfred, 2004, p. 167).

"Various aspects of the significance of religious values have been considered with respect to novels, their relevance to a particular religious group (the Jains for instance or Latin Americans), and in relation to human society" (Ramsden, 2009, p. 241).

Based on such circumstances, when the mother was told that her daughter lost her faith, it was an actual heavy blow to her. Born and brought up in Ireland, the mother was a devout Catholic. She "believed totally in the God that created her, sent her this husband, and this daughter" (Yang, 2012a, p. 342). Owing to her firm belief, she thought Claire should be a faithful Catholic all her life. When facing the fact that Claire had no faith any more, she thought she should take some measures instantly so as to reconvert her daughter into a Catholic. The moment she stepped into Claire's house, she unpacked the gifts that she brought to her with true affections. A lot of wonderful things were scattered, including "a chicken, bread, eggs, a tapestry of a church spire which she'd done all winter, stitching at it until she was almost blind, a holy water font, ashtrays made from shells, and lamps converted from bottles" (Yang, 2012a, p. 343). For one thing, the presents, such as the chicken, bread, and eggs, actually demonstrated her deep love. Nothing could impair her sincere emotions to the daughter no matter where she was. For another, the gifts like the church-patterned tapestry and holy water font, which left Claire a deep impression, in fact, carried a religious significance which suggested her real purpose. She told Claire that she did the tapestry especially for her with which she preached the Cod's creeds speechlessly. Claire saw the church-patterned tapestry and thought "it was ugly". She thought of the winter nights and "the Aladdin lamp smoking, and her mother hunched over her work, not even using a thimble to ease the needle through, because she believed in sacrifice" (Yang, 2012a, p. 343). Though in the eyes of the mother the tapestry represented her determination to sacrifice her life to God, Claire thought in the totally different way. Obviously, ugliness of the church-patterned tapestry was her declaration to fight against religious forces. Nobody could tell exactly why she lost her faith all of a sudden and most probably the causes were really complicated. Furthermore, the mother "carried all her gifts to her daughter and put them in the front room alongside the books and some pencil drawings" (Yang, 2012a, p. 345). She learned it well that books were really important for her daughter because she was a poet. Now the church-patterned tapestry and the holy water font were standing alongside with the books, which implied the mother's hope to reconvert Claire by such sacred things. However, to her disappointment, her daughter was neither likely to be touched nor to be reconverted because Claire thought "...how incongruous they looked" (Yang, 2012a, p. 343) while they were placed in the front room.

The mother spared no efforts to reconvert the daughter into a Catholic, Claire could hardly satisfy her

mother's desire for her loss in faith was out of her choice. What's worse, the obvious differences in religious values between them separated them apart irreparably, which widened the gap and the "Cord", the blood tie, lost its strength to repair the relation. In fact, they appeared united outwardly but divided at heart.

Differences in Cultural Values Between Mother and Daughter

Besides the differences in religious values, there also existed differences in cultural values between the mother and daughter in *Cord* which could be well reflected in the cultural symbols, to be exact, the signs of counter-culture like Claire's bohemian friends and the drawing of the nude that she collected.

Cultural values refer to the values that permeate a culture which are derived from larger philosophic issues that are part of culture's milieu. "Cultural values guide both perception and communication which are translated into action" (John, 1995, p. 96). In the 1960's Britain, the counter-culture movement was prevailing among pioneering young people which was symbolized by hippies, marijuana, and sexual revolution. Working in London, Claire, a 28 young woman, could hardly avoid the influence of the new things. She made bohemian friends, spokesman of her ideology, who represented the anti-tradition thoughts in the counter-movement. One night, three of them visited her, a man with a wife and a lover. "Music, brandy, cigarettes" (Yang, 2012a, p. 347) they were voicing their needs. Undoubtedly, bohemian friends were the symbols of hippies, the trio symbolized chaotic sexual relationships and brandy and cigarettes were symbols of material pleasures like marijuana. In this sense, it is evident that Claire was one of those who supported counter-culture movement. However, her mother was exactly standing on the opposite side of her. Living in the traditional British village and receiving little education, the mother was never exposed to the pioneering counter-culture thoughts so that she was "severely critical when she saw the drawing of the nude" (Yang, 2012a, p. 345). Obviously, she was a warrior of traditional culture norms whereas her daughter was a supporter of counter-culture movement. Such led to the great differences in their cultural values and it seems that nothing could get rid of such a spiritual misunderstanding.

Differences in Social Values Between Mother and Daughter

Apart from the differences in religious values and cultural values, in *Cord*, the mother and the daughter showed their great differences in social values as well, that is, the mother typically showed altruistic orientation and cooperative orientation whereas Claire revealed her individualistic orientation and competitive orientation.

Social value orientation (SVO) refers to "a person's preference about how to allocate resources (e.g., money) between the self and another person. That is, SVO corresponds to how much weight a person attaches to the welfare of others in relation to the own" (Raman, 2004, p. 131). According to such norms, it is clear-cut that the mother was altruistic and cooperative because while she was staying with Claire in London, "she was worried about her husband, her fowls, the washing that would have piled up, the spring wheat that would be sown" (Yang, 2012a, p. 349). She almost devoted everything to her husband and her family since she got married, and in this sense, she was not self-centered but altruistic. Each time when her husband told her to do anything, she would never disobey his order, and from this perspective, she was quite cooperative. However, Claire was the opposite, in other words, she was individualistic and competitive. Claire "had not asked how her father was" (Yang, 2012a, p. 344) though she did not see him for over a year and the mother became nettled due to her selfishness. What she really concerned was whether or not she could "seek people, ...one of them might fit, might know the shorthand

of her, body and soul” (Yang, 2012a, p. 348). Her outcomes always outweighed her parents’. For another, in fact, she was absolutely not family-centered like her mother, instead, she always had a hot pursuit of career—poetry-writing. How competitive she was! It was unlikely to find out some common ground between them. Thus, the great differences in cultural values led to a larger gap.

Conclusion

As we all know, there always exist differences between people, especially old generations and young generations because they come from various social background and historical background. The story *Cord*, set in Britain in the 1960s, just follows the pattern of this kind. The mother, a devout Catholic, was born and brought up in the county of Ireland who was isolated from modern things—new culture and new civilization. She neither desired to see the outside world nor dreamed of living a different life. Believing in God means all her life to serve her husband and the family. However, her daughter was totally different from her. Claire was working in London as a pioneering poet. She was a capable career and full of independent awareness. Living in the 1960’s Britain, she was alert enough to smell the great social changes—counter-culture movement and feminist movement, thus, much influenced by them and later became a supporter for the new movements. Driven by different educational background and social background, the mother and the daughter established different values respectively. What are the differences of values between them? Firstly, they had different religious values, that is, the mother was a pious Catholic while Claire lost her faith and became an atheist. Secondly, they had different cultural values, that is, the mother was a warrior of traditional culture whereas the daughter was a supporter of counter-culture movement. Thirdly, they had different social values, that is, the mother had altruistic orientation and cooperative orientation while Claire showed her individualistic orientation and competitive orientation. Even though the two were closely linked by the “Cord”, the blood tie, the great differences drifted them apart to the different spiritual world, that is, the blood tie could never get rid of the spiritual barrier. Only mutual understanding can eliminate the gap and acquire a harmonious relation.

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