

The American Overbearing Mother Syndrome



Hey there,

My name is Lisa. I am Dutch, born and raised, but currently reside in the US. I was asked to write an article for this magazine, sharing something typically American with you. Well, I have come up with something I encounter regularly that strikes me as Very American indeed. Let's call it the American Overbearing Mother Syndrome.

This phenomenon reduces human beings to creatures with limited brain capacity that need guidance every step on the way. Let me give you some examples:

I use a hormone pill for birth control. Every month, I get a strip with 28 pills: 3 rows of 7 blue pills, one row of 7 white pills. The white pills are "reminder" pills. There are no hormones in them, but they allow you to keep to your daily routine of taking the pill. So there is no "stop week", after which it is your own responsibility to remember to start the pill again. See, you are probably stupid and will screw up that stop week thing. After mentioning multiple times that the white pills are inactive and do not contain hormones, the directions specify, "*If you miss any white pills, you may throw them away. You will not need a back-up method for birth control.*" Yes, I believe I grasp the concept vaguely.

The customer service help desk of the supermarket has three windows. I have never seen more than one person at their desk, and yet, they are prepared for a crowd. Poles and lines are permanently in

place – much like you see at an airport security check – in order to help the imaginary crowd queue up in an imaginary line. A sign at the beginning of the pole field says "*Welcome. Start here,*" and at the end near the windows of the help desk, another sign announces "*End.*" Phew, glad they cleared that up; because for a moment I thought you had to get in line in order to exit the help desk.

I work with a refugee family who recently moved to the US. The family members need to complete their immunization records. Besides the family doctor who tends to all family members, the health of the children is also monitored by the school nurse. The 9 yr old boy of the family was excluded from school last week, because he was overdue for his polio shot. The school nurse told me she wasn't afraid of him infecting other children. No, she was protecting him. Excluding him from school seemed like an extreme measure to me, but she said it was the best way to ensure that he would get his shot asap. She explained that the school can get fined by the state government, if the kids are overdue for immunization shots. Later, the family doctor who gave the boy his shot, refused to send the school nurse his updated immunization record without a written consent from his parents.

In any public space, you may encounter a yellow sign on the floor that reads "*Caution, wet floor.*" A supermarket is a likely place to find one. Very useful signs, because after

mopping up some spilled substance, the floor can be slippery. I think I've seen them at Albert Hein too. In the US, however, these signs are much more abundant. The wet floor sign will be in place for hours after a floor has dried. Rarely have I actually seen a wet floor. The other day, I even saw that sign in a museum with carpet on the floor. Hah!

That is Overbearing Mother Syndrome. Some days it makes me smile and shake my head, other days it makes me roll my eyes. Perhaps this overbearing attitude

comes from the claiming culture that exists in the US. Or perhaps Americans simply have a different sense of responsibility. Better safe than sorry, instead of the Dutch straightforwardness "*Kijk uit je doppen, je ziet toch dat de vloer nat is!?*"* Ah well, it seems we all have our culture quirks...

Lisa K.

* "Use your eyes, can't you see the floor is wet!?"