*The New York Times*

August 31, 2013

**“Explaining Twerking to Your Parents”**

 By TEDDY WAYNE

Every child dreads this day: sooner or later, your parents will come to you, innocently wide-eyed, to ask you about twerking. How you handle this difficult conversation is extremely important and could have a significant impact on the way your parents think about twerking for years to come. You may prefer to put off the big “twerk talk,” but remember that it’s far better for you to be the one to explain than for them to learn on their own by searching YouTube.

A critical first step is to acknowledge that twerking is a normal part of life and that there is nothing shameful in their questions. They’re parents, after all, and this is the sort of thing they hear about on NPR, and, well, they’re curious.

Explain that twerking is a dance move typically associated with lower-income African-American women that involves the rapid gyration of the hips in a fashion that prominently exhibits the elasticity of the gluteal musculature.

They will reasonably wonder why Miley Cyrus, who is white and wealthy, does it at every opportunity. Patiently respond that, for Ms. Cyrus, twerking is a brazenly cynical act of cultural appropriation being passed off as a rebellious reclamation of her sexuality after a childhood in the Disneyfied spotlight, but, in the end, who are we really to judge? I mean, it can’t be a picnic being Billy Ray’s daughter, and remember that *Vanity Fair* picture of them? That was just ...weird.

Though they won’t comprehend the Billy Ray references, they will nod, understanding that Ms. Cyrus’s motivations to twerk are complicated by a raft of personal, socioeconomic and third-wave-feminist issues.

Upon hearing what twerking is, it is natural for your parents to want to experiment with it. They may even proudly announce, “Look at us, we’re twerking!” not recognizing the inappropriateness of their actions and words. Try to resist the urge to chastise them; doing so will only increase their desire to twerk in defiance, perhaps in private.

It is also possible that your parents may suggest twerking at their next dinner party, after the radicchio salad with caramelized pears. Adopt a strict no-tolerance policy for group twerking unless you are there to supervise, other parents’ children are informed beforehand and have given permission, and everyone in attendance is invited to participate, including the Pearlsteins.

There’s a chance some of their peers are already twerking — most likely the younger parents. If they feel pressure to twerk to feel accepted, point out that anyone who forces you to twerk when you’re not ready for it isn’t a real friend, and that you think it’s just as “cool” not to twerk but instead to do, say, the jitterbug.

They may ask if you twerk with your significant other. Tell them that when a young man and young woman love each other very much and are in a packed, sweaty nightclub playing commercial hip-hop, yes, they sometimes twerk to express their affections. Assure them that just because you twerk with someone else and not with them doesn’t mean you love them any less — just that you show your love for them in a different way; for instance, by having strained three-day visits over Christmas.

With a no-nonsense yet empathetic approach, you can create a safe space in which to discuss twerking with your parents. If handled sensitively, a positive twerking dialogue will prepare them for future conversations concerning a host of other topics they’ve heard about but don’t understand, such as grinding, Ecstasy dance raves and the Instagram.

Teddy Wayne is the author of the novels *The Love Song of Jonny Valentine* and *Kapitoil.*