Proper Parenting: Tips for Future Me

Shauna Soule

East Carolina University

Proper Parenting: Tips for Future Me

**Parenting: A Reflection**

 While parenting is an experience many people plan to have in their lifetimes it is more complex than meets the eye. A simple search on the Internet will tell you not to tell your children they are smart while your own parents explain how important this phrase is for your children’s development. In hopes of getting some groundwork on how to raise my future child, if it ever occurs, I sought information from my own parents, Internet articles, and books detailing the best ways to raise a child. Three main topics I found information on include vaccinations, gender-neutral parenting, and educational goals.

**Vaccination: The Final Decision**

 The debate over vaccinations is something I was unfamiliar with as a child. This is mostly because there was no debate within my family or the school system when I was a child. Much of this debate follows that the vaccination for Mumps, Measles, and Rubella (MMR) has a direct link to autism (Novella, 2007). This is because in 1998 Andrew Wakefield, an English scientist, published a paper making such a claim fueled by parents seeking his assistance. This was one of the biggest influences on the growth of the anti-vaccination movement. The reasoning behind these beliefs come from the fact that in the 1990’s the diagnosis of autism drastically increased from previous years. Along with this development, the amount of vaccines required in childhood increased significantly as well, although there are only thirteen required ones. It is easy to see how, without any scientific data at all, the information presents its self as a direct link. However, around this time period the diagnosis of autism changed to a spectrum and became much more accurate which caused an increase in the diagnosis of autism in general. This was just the beginning of information being found to disprove Wakefield’s theory that MMR vaccines cause autism (Novella, 2007).

 Many studies were performed after the increase of debate to find information that consistently proves that MMR vaccines do or do not cause autism. Studies from England to Japan have all found that the prevalence of autism does not increase or decrease with the decrease of MMR vaccines being administered to children (Novella, 2007). While scientific information was being sought so too was information on Wakefield as to make sure that there was no bias or skewing of the information for personal gain. When looking at Wakefield’s other interests surrounding the MMR vaccine he had applied to patent an alternative MMR vaccine that tackled the new found issues he would publish in his findings. There was also the nice bonus of getting paid by the lawyers which sought his assistance in the first place to prove that the clients’ autism diagnosis came as a direct cause of the MMR vaccine. Many of the scientists who worked alongside of Wakefield began to leak information about how the findings were reached and that many of the samples used were contaminated to begin with or were contaminated by the setting (Novella, 2007).

 My final decision would be to vaccinate my children. The only reason I would stray from this decision would be based on allergies my child had. Some children are allergic to medications within vaccines or other components, but there are many alternatives to the main vaccines that allergic children may take. The final piece of information I have on the topic comes from an article authored by Terry Connolly which states that when the risks of both the disease and the vaccination were neutral in outcomes most parents chose to vaccinate their children (Connolly, 2003). When looking at the overall information I do not believe the risk of autism is equivalent to losing a child in the worst case scenarios so I would absolutely vaccinate my children.

**Gender Neutral Parenting**

 When performing tasks based around discussion board three I realized how important having a gender neutral parenting style was for me. While my parents did their best to present the world as an open opportunity for their three daughters their commentary led to a different conclusion. We were discouraged from certain activities, discouraged from certain life goals, and in the end we were trapped in a box designed only for feminine women. I want more for my children, no matter the sex or gender they hold.

 Most of the research on this information points to there being a more flexible set of gender based activities female children can perform over male children (Cherney & Dempsey, 2010). These two authors performed studies around toys and how having ambiguous gender ties rather than obvious ones led children to have strong/weak stereotypes about them. This in turn could give information about what they consider to be masculine or feminine objects and activities in the future. One of the major findings was that color distinctions were one of the strongest indicators of gendered stereotypes adopted by the children. Another one of their findings, which would be very important to look at if my future child is a boy, is that girls tended to be more flexible and complex with toys and what they played with (Cherney & Dempsey, 2010).

 This was a commonly supported ideal by other respondents on the discussion board and other examples from my life. Many of the female respondents saw no real necessity to parent in a gender neutral manner because they were not specifically parented in that manner but still had benefits similar to it. Some of them mentioned being a ‘tomboy’ or talked about how they played with toys marketed towards males. This, however, was not a sentiment repeated by the males of the class even if the males disagreed with gender neutral parenting. In my childhood I recall having little biases when it came to playing with toys, but I had many male neighbors and day care playmates who did not share that sentiment. If we played with male toys they did not mind playing with me in the open but when we played with dolls or other feminine toys we would have to play somewhere more secluded as to avoid experiencing bullying.

 Many books related to this topic go into identifying not just the benefits of this on children born with male or female genitalia exclusively but also those that have overlapping representations. There are intersex persons who have both genitalia, females that have a penis-like clitoris or males that have an open mid-line between the testicles which is similar to a labia (Lucas-Stannard, page 178). There is also the need for gender neutral parenting when a child has a different set of sex organs on the inside and outside of the body. These are representations of children who do not fit the standard sex binary and may have a harder time understanding how gender roles pertain to themselves. There is also the fact that when developing in the womb male and female babies develop differently and certain developments in the body can create testosterone and estrogen hormone differences that change the appearance in comparison to the XX/XY identification (Lucas-Stannard, pg. 261-273). All of these examples nullify the idea that penis=masculine and vagina=feminine. In my opinion this information is a strong ground to base the idea that denying my child the right to participate in certain activities because of what is between their legs is unacceptable. I want my child to be free to choose what gender roles and activities they participate in so that I never end up hurting my child over something that has no structured basis.

**Educational Goals**

 When doing research on this topic I realized that it was just as much about my education as it is my future child’s education. In *The Process of Parenting* by Jane Brooks discusses the importance of a mothers education on everything a child did from the extracurricular activities to the schools they attended (Brooks, 2013, page 61). This specific mention is discussing how, no matter the SES of the family, when the mother has more education they tend to ensure their children are participating in more developmental and social activities. There is also a difference in upper class families’ choice in schools for their children and the mentalities behind them versus lower class families. Upper class families ensure that their children participate in activities that enhance their skills and also send their children to private schools to ensure their education will lead them to succeed in the future (Brooks, 2013, page 62). I want for my future children to have the best education available to them so that they will be given all opportunities in the future. While I originally scoffed at Amy Chua when learning about her book *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother* but after reading many reviews of her book and the book its self I am truly convinced that pushing my children to deny defeat is best in this society.

 Pulling directly from Chua’s book, her manner of parenting can be applauded in the fact that she went through every challenge with her children. I believe this is what truly made the difference in her parenting style. This note of information come from people asking her “are you doing this for your child or yourself” to which she notes that if it was for herself she would not sit through all of their extra lessons and homework when she could simply brush it off (Chua, 2011, page 147). The first time she mentions this method of parenting is when her daughter Sophia was learning piano and instead of letting her child work on learning all on her own Chua employed the Suzuki method which has the parent learn everything with the child so that practicing would receive the best criticism (Chua, 2011, page 34). This method of parenting, to me, seems like it would seem much stricter if Amy Chua was not sitting there grueling through all of the tasks with her children. The final thing I see as important in Chua’s book was this statement “I did not want her to end up like one of those weird Asian automatons who feel so much pressure from their parents that they kill themselves after coming in second on the national civil service exam” (Chua, 2011, page 18). This shows that she really does care and does not want to put too much pressure on her children but just enough to keep them the top of their peers and on top of all opportunities. I want to employ these techniques to ensure my children never suffer through being average and struggling to make their way in life.

**Final Decisions**

 From the very first vaccination in the hospital to my children’s final college graduation, I plan to be prepared and ready to sacrifice so that they end up on top. I want to promise that I will always vaccinate my children so their life is not cut short by a preventable disease. I want to deny the limits that gender roles have so that my son or daughter may achieve anything the world has to offer. Finally, I want to ensure the best education and life for my child, even if I have to become an intense Tiger Mother to see results. All of these decisions will bring promising results in my future children and eventually, after their final graduations, the world.

**References**

Brooks, J. B. (1981). The process of parenting (9th ed.). Palo Alto, CA: Mayfield Pub.

Cherney, I. D., & Dempsey, J. (2010). Young children’s classification, stereotyping and play behavior for gender neutral and ambiguous toys. Educational Psychology, 30(6), 651-669. doi:10.1080/01443410.2010.498416

Chua, A. (2011). Battle hymn of the tiger mother. New York: Penguin Press.

Connolly, T., & Reb, J. (2003). Omission bias in vaccination decisions: Where’s the “omission”? Where’s the “bias”? Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 91(2), 186-202. doi:10.1016/s0749-5978(03)00057-8

Lucas-Stannard, P. (2013). Gender neutral parenting: Raising kids with the freedom to be themselves. Verity Press.

Novella, Steven. "The Anti-Vaccination Movement." - CSI. Center for Inquiry, Dec. 2007. Web. 29 July 2015. <http://www.csicop.org/si/show/anti-vaccination\_movement>.