Culture is part of our biology: genes and environment

Cultural relativism: no culture superior to other cultures
  • No parenting style is superior to other parenting styles

When thinking about how parents around the world raise their children, I never really thought that there could be such drastic differences between cultures. I certainly never thought about how babies can be positively or negatively affected by the relationship that they have with their parents immediately following birth. This could be due to the fact that I am only 21 and haven’t really considered children yet.

  • When did you first read this book? Before the birth of your first child? Or second?
  • Did it make a difference in the way you parented?

One of the thoughts that I kept having while reading was about how we are ceaselessly denying any link to animals. Forgetting that we are in fact animals. By denying this we have strayed from what is natural and biological. Our babies have evolved slowly over hundreds of thousands of years to be what they are today. Culture on the other hand as evolved extremely quickly and our babies are not able to cope with the extreme change in culture.

  • One of the few species to birth such biologically immature babies
  • Takes years for the brain to develop
  • Dependent for long periods of time

Parenting styles differ from culture to culture.
  • Is there a right way to parent? A perfect formula to produce the “perfect” child?
  • Each culture emphasizes and appreciates different aspects of intelligence
    o Infant mortality: focus on keeping the child safe from harm
    o Is there something to be said that neurologically children will learn more when exposed to more while young?
    o What the child will become
      ▪ Different focuses depending on socioeconomic class and culture
  • Parents might be a part of the same culture, but they create different “microenvironments.”
    o Chatty families v. quiet families

It was also very interesting to me to see the act of crying dissected. I knew that studies had been conducted in which mothers can recognize the cry of their own
child amongst others as well as what the child was crying for, but I never thought how crying could have such an impact on parenting.

- Colic
- Crying is now a maladaptive signal
  - Used to keep the baby alive and well fed, but now Western babies are on such a strict schedule that crying is seem as more of an annoyance than anything else.
  - Tests the patience of the parents

I was aware of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS), but I did not know that it was so much more prevalent in the United States and the United Kingdom that in other parts of the world.

- 2 per 1000 in US
- 0.3 per 1000 in Japan and Hong Kong
- Why are these numbers so different
- Parenting styles
  - Importance of Co-sleeping
  - Sleeping with the infant so that they can learn to regulate their breathing.
  - Babies do not know how to sleep. In the womb there is no night and day.
  - Babies sleeping on their backs versus on their stomachs

It was crazy to me how it takes modern technology and scientific knowledge to get the facts straight on how it might be more beneficial for babies, who are animals, to be treated like a chimpanzee mother might treat her child. Keeping the child close and succumbing to its every need. Chimp mothers don’t just sit around while their babies cry they do something. So why did we stray so far from doing what is natural? One possible explanation for this that I thought of was the fear that parents have while raising their children. They are so afraid of doing the wrong thing that they will try anything that might work.

I am sure you can provide more insight into why parents do the things they do.

Inborn versus learned personality
- Can lead to poor/lazy parenting (extreme cases)
- Influences how parents approach their babies

WHAT IS NORMAL?