Vaccine Selectivity
Or: Herd Immunity is for Sheep
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Conflicts of Interest

• I have provided consultant services regarding parent perspectives to two pharmaceutical corporations.
• I have no relevant vested financial interests.
• I am not a well-informed healthcare consumer: I am a compliant (sheep-like) vaccinator.
• I am a Waldorf parent.
This presentation builds on a talk given as part of the American Anthropological Association’s ‘Measles Outbreak’ webinar.

• WEBINAR: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aLmswTRpHOY

• PODCAST: https://www.sapiens.org/culture/vaccination-belonging/
"Whoever is not with me is against me"

Oppositional Framing is Self-Reinforcing*

False binary:
- Masks complexity
  - Disease, vaccine, child
- Catalyzes pro/con identities
  - Details of dissent matter less than dissent itself

"Whoever is not with me is against me"

- Sides, once taken, hard to un-take
  - Economics
    - Sunk Costs
    - Divestiture Aversion
- Identifying with a position has social benefits
Qualitative & Quantitative Data from Ethnographically-informed Interview Projects

Healthy Schools Study (N=36)
Representative random sample

Community-based Vaccination Confidence Project (N=53)
Convenience sample
Experiential learning, developmentally appropriate holistic approach, no standardized testing, etc.
Wholesome nutrition, Lots of sleep, Outdoor play, No screens, Movement in the classroom...

“Salutogenic Education ...
Whole Child Health in a Waldorf (Steiner) School.” MAQ 2014.
“We don’t vaccinate” = something intensely social going on

Selectivity *not* deficit-based (self-education)

“Social Cultivation of Vaccine Refusal and Delay” (MAQ 2015)
Some vaccine caution likely predated matriculation, but...

- More years, fewer vaccinations
  - Notable post-enrollment *falloff among younger siblings*
  - Grade-related *exemption increase*:
    - 51% at Kindergarten (2/29 fully unvaccinated)
    - 72% at 7th grade

- Small, Relationship-intense, Independent School = Perfect Incubator
• Emphasis on independent thinking (seen in school choice) favors alternative information sources
  • Computer browser algorithms
  • State PSAs not broadcast
  • Non-vaccination not officially promoted
    • Not reason for joining; complaint: waiver option not shared
• Rejection of mainstream > Intense, inward-pointing, multiplex social ties; some such communities are self-sealing
Two caveats:

1. History matters
   • Communities targeted by bigotry and institutionalized racism
     • Legacy of Nazi crimes, Tuskegee study...

2. Waldorf Schools are NOT alone
   • Home schoolers
   • Many other alternative schools with libertarian bent
Small, Independent School = Perfect Medium

✓ Intense, inward-pointing, multiplex social ties
✓ Emphasis on independent thinking favors alternative information sources

• Vaccine refusal norms keep vaccinators quiet
  • Vaccinators feel like outliers erroneously (2/29)
  • Silence = stereotype fulfillment
What can be done?
Change the narrative:
Refuse to fuel stereotype

• Publicize uptake facts
  • Few students have no vaccinations
  • Most students have many vaccinations
Leverage Cultural Priorities

Social Belonging: Encourage identification with pedagogy (why we really joined) vs (mythical) vaccination norms

‘This is the school where nobody is vaccinated students make their own textbooks!’

Savvy Consumerism: Redirect caution back toward anti-vax extremists

‘This anti-vax website manipulates vulnerable parents for profit.’
Change the narrative:
Refuse to fuel stereotype

✓ Publicize uptake facts
  • Few students have no vaccinations
  • Most students have many vaccinations

• Carrots not sticks
  • Mandates → unintended consequences (e.g., PMEs)
Kindergarten vaccination rate drops below 95%

Source: California Department of Public Health

Los Angeles Times

Soumya Karlamangla & Melody Gutierrez (LA Times 7-1-19)
Change the narrative: Refuse to fuel stereotype

- Publicize uptake facts
- Carrots not sticks
  - Unintended consequences of mandates
  - Praise parents’ engagement in their children’s healthcare: they are model parents
System Requires Self-responsible Healthcare Consumption

Knowledge of prior government/expert failure to protect (asbestos, thalidomide, DDT, opiates)
All participants (N=53)  Partial or selective vaccinators (n=13)  Full or up-to-date vaccinators (n=33)

| Score (average)a | 70.94 | 76.15 | 71.21 |

a. TRAILS does not offer benchmark data for this component only but, nationally, the average general TRAILS assessment score is 51.9% (see Kent State University Libraries, 2014)

Social Value of Vaccination Stance goes Both Ways (Study #2)

• Full vaccinators had lower ‘correct’ herd immunity knowledge scores (46%) than Selectives (69%)
• People did not vaccinate for the social good
• To vaccinate is ALSO to affiliate (as SVs know)
  • “It’s part of the program. I’ve never had a second thought about not doing it. But I think the decision—I know I’m doing the right thing—is based mostly on previous experience with my parents, [what they] did for me.”
Change the narrative:
Refuse to fuel stereotype

• Publicize actual facts:
• Carrots not sticks
• Address Concerns w/out Condescension
  • Engage vs giving orders
  • Don’t pretend away problems
Put concerns in context:
Relative Risks (USA)

- Every 5 days, a child chokes to death on food
  (https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2010/02/100226212559.htm)

- About 2 children drown every day and another 10 have nonfatal injuries, which may result in long-term disabilities including permanent loss of basic functioning
  (https://www.cdc.gov/homeandrecreationalsafety/watersafety/waterinjuries-factsheet.html)

- 1 in 10,000 get struck by lightning

- 1 in 30,000 patients die as a result of antibiotics

- Severe allergic reactions occur after about 1 in 1,000,000 vaccine doses
  (https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vac-gen/side-effects.htm)
Treat self-responsible individuals as such

Respect American Values
“I'm proud to be an American Where at least I know I'm free”
(Greenwood 1984)
Conversation requires collaboration

• Putting people on the defensive reinforces division
• Finding *common cause* helps build bridges
References: Social rewards of vaccine cultures?


See also:
