

**Valparaiso University**  
**ValpoScholar**

---

Graduate Academic Symposium

Graduate School

---

Spring 4-30-2015

# Who Should Parent? Parenting Fitness as Determined by the Five-factor Personality Module

Lydia Seifner

Valparaiso University, [Lydia.Seifner@valpo.edu](mailto:Lydia.Seifner@valpo.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholar.valpo.edu/gas>

---

## Recommended Citation

Seifner, Lydia, "Who Should Parent? Parenting Fitness as Determined by the Five-factor Personality Module" (2015). *Graduate Academic Symposium*. Paper 11.  
<http://scholar.valpo.edu/gas/11>

This Oral Presentation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at ValpoScholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Academic Symposium by an authorized administrator of ValpoScholar. For more information, please contact a ValpoScholar staff member at [scholar@valpo.edu](mailto:scholar@valpo.edu).

Who Should Parent?

Who Should Parent? Parenting Fitness as Determined by the Five-Factor Personality Module

By Lydia Seifner

## Introduction

In the United States, being able to bear and rear one's children in the manner in which one sees fit is one of the most fundamental rights under the fourteenth amendment, (*Skinner v. Oklahoma*, 1942; *Santosky v. Kramer*, 1982; and *Prince v. Massachusetts*, 1944). For the vast majority of the population, this right is a valid one to protect. Most people make for at least adequate, if not adept parents, (Hoghugh & Speight, 1998). This is known as "good enough" parenting, (Hoghugh & Speight). Most individuals are perfectly capable of raising children to be functional, well-adjusted adults, (Hoghugh & Speight). Good parenting transcends age, education, gender, geography, race, socio-economic status and family composition; children can be successfully raised under a myriad of parenting styles, (Maccoby & Martin, 1983). However, what happens when someone's parenting isn't "good enough". What happens when children are raised with sub-par parenting, raised in neglectful or damaging homes? In 2012, an estimated 686,000 children were victims of child abuse and neglect, with 1,640 child deaths as a result of non-accidental child maltreatment, (Child Maltreatment Report, 2013). Poor parenting can also occur regardless of age, education, gender, geography, race, socio-economic status and family composition. According to, Maccoby & Martin, there are four main types of parenting styles: authoritarian, authoritative, indulgent, and neglectful. There is a strong correlation to an individual's personality and the way that they parent, (Metsapelto & Pulkkinen, 2003). It stands to reason that people with certain personality deficits, being abnormally high in neuroticism, abnormally low in agreeableness, abnormally low in conscientiousness, being closed to new experiences, and either unusually high or low in extraversion, may need interventions and training in order to engage in beneficial parenting techniques, (Metsapelto & Pulkkinen). It is important that all parents avoid the use of neglectful parenting which inevitably causes harm to a

## Who Should Parent?

child's physical, emotional and cognitive development, (Metsapelto & Pulkkinen; Skowron, Kazlowski & Pincus, 2010). Personality traits have a tendency to remain relatively stable over a person's lifetime and follow a predictable course of maturation throughout an individual's life, (Srivastava, John, Gosling & Potter, 2003; De clerq, van Leeuwen, De Fruyt, Van Heil, & Merviedle, 2008). Therefore, individuals can be tested for their basic personality traits relatively early in life, such as in late adolescence and early adulthood to determine their future aptitude for parenting, (Metsapelto & Pulkkinin; Skowron, Kozlowski & Pincus. It is common in the American education and disability system to assist people when they show a deficit in some way to teach them skills to match the average population, (NCLD, 2014). Since society, as a part of our education system, administers a host of aptitude tests to adolescents and young adults on a yearly basis; it should also be possible to screen at risk individuals, those with extreme personality deficits, early in life for potentially abusive or neglectful parenting behaviors. Once identified; those adolescents and young adults who possess a hindered ability to nurture others; can then receive training in healthy interactions and parenting behaviors well before they become parents to avoid neglectful or abusive parenting.

## **Parenting in the Eyes of the Law**

It is difficult to define exactly which actions comprise "good parenting". Everyone parents in a different way and every child has different needs. In the United States, the right to have and raise one's children in the manner that they wish is considered essential, (Santosky v. Kramer, 1982). As most people are "good enough" parents, (Hoghughi & Speight), there is no need to regulate how most parents decide to raise their children. "Good enough" parents, manage to raise children to be average and functional adults in society, (Hoghughi & Speight). However, the state and federal governments have a long history of intervening when families do

## Who Should Parent?

not and cannot properly nurture or care for their children. In the past, the states sterilized individuals found to be mentally incompetent or feeble-minded, to control the public gene pool (Lombardo, 2003). This was the case with Carrie Buck; Carrie Buck was a seventeen year old girl who became pregnant after being raped by a member of her foster family in the 1920s, (Lombardo). As was usual in that day and age, girls who became pregnant outside of wedlock were usually sent to asylums so the families could avoid community scandals, (Lombardo). Though Carrie and her daughter both made the honor roll during their respective educations, they were both determined by social workers to be feeble-minded, (Lombardo). Carrie's mother had also been hospitalized for mental disabilities so the community felt as though the genetic line was damaged, (Lombardo; Tartarsky, 2011). The state of Virginia, where Carrie was hospitalized had passed a sterilization law allowing the reproductive sterilization of mental patients deemed to be feeble-minded, epileptic or an imbecile; thus Carrie was sterilized during her hospitalization, (Lombardo; Tartarsky). Carrie's sister was also later sterilized, (Lombardo; Tartarsky). The Supreme Court reasoned that "three generations of imbeciles were enough", and upheld Carrie's sterilization as lawful, (*Buck v. Bell*, 1927). Since *Buck v. Bell*, the court has taken a very different approach to the idea of restricting an individual's right to bear and give birth to children. In *Skinner v. Oklahoma* (1942), a habitual inmate was sterilized against his will, because of the state's desire to suppress possibly inherited "criminality" traits from entering the gene pool of the general population. The court reasoned that since no evidence existed to indicate that such crimes as robbery, theft, fraud and embezzlement were genetically motivated, it made little sense to further punish inmates for their crimes by depriving them of the ability to produce offspring, (*Skinner v. Oklahoma*). Though, the opinion did not address other forms of sterilization, the ruling essentially overturned *Buck v. Bell*, as the court held that forced

## Who Should Parent?

sterilization was a violation of one's basic fourteenth amendment rights under the equal protection clause, (*Skinner v. Oklahoma*). Today, citizens have a constitutional right to procreate. Everyone has the right to bear children; but sometimes, because of abusive or neglectful parenting, individuals may forfeit their right to raise their children, and custody over a child may be seized by the state. The legal term for this occurrence is *parens patriae*, (15 U.S.C.A § 15c), it translates into the father of the nation and indicates when the government steps in to play parent to children who are either orphaned or taken away from their parent's custody.

The court in *Santosky v. Kramer* stated that, it is "the fundamental liberty interest of natural parents in the care, custody, and management of their child does not evaporate simply because they have not been model parents." "Good enough" parenting is the understanding that just as no one is a perfect person, no one can be expected to be a perfect parent, (Hoghughi & Speight, 1998). It is important to note, "good enough" does not exactly mean well adjusted, instead it merely indicates that children are able to develop into functional adults in society without a significant hindrance to their physical, mental or emotional development, (Hoghughi & Speight). Many researchers have expressed, it is less important to focus on specific parenting techniques and practices as an indicator of child well-being, and to focus instead on the broad and general pattern of parenting behaviors, (Darling, 1999). Most parents do a perfectly adequate job of raising their children and meeting their needs, (Hoghughi & Speight). This is evidenced by the fact that the great majority of individuals are average and functional adults. However, sometimes parents are "not good enough", these parents engage in abusive and neglectful parenting which can have serious and lifelong negative effects upon their children, (Hoghughi & Speight). It is highly likely that the rates of abused and neglected children are

## Who Should Parent?

underreported. Those parents who are abusive but affluent can hide the maltreatment of their children from state authorities. Sometimes children from very poor families go unnoticed and manage to fall through the cracks of the system. Of those cases of abuse or neglect that are reported, the most recent data hails from a Children's Bureau report for 2012. In 2012, there were an estimated 74,577,451 children in the United States, (Child Maltreatment, 2013). In 2012, there was also an estimated 686,000 children who were victims of child abuse or neglect; and 1,640 non-accidental child deaths, (Child Maltreatment). This is actually an amazingly small number; only .009% of children population in the United States experienced child abuse in 2012, and only .00002% of country's children population died from non-accidental deaths in 2012. But, regardless of the percentage, 1,640 non-accidental child deaths are 1,640 deaths too many. The federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act, 42 USCA § 5106 g. (2010), defines child abuse as,

“any act or failure to act on the part of a parent or caretaker which results in the death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse or exploitation; or an act or failure to act which results in an imminent risk of serious harm.”

Although, each state is responsible for its own definition of child abuse, most states recognize four major categories of maltreatment: physical abuse, neglect, sexual abuse, and emotional abuse, (Children's Bureau, 2013). Abuse or neglect should be suspected when the child demonstrates sudden changes in behavior, unexplained learning problems, is overly withdrawn or reluctant to be around specific individuals, (Children's Bureau). Concern for the child's well-being should occur if the child is excessively watchful or on edge, often lacks adequate supervision, and does not wish to go home to his or her caretaker, (Children's Bureau). The parent/caretaker should be suspected of maltreatment if they blame the child for all of the

## Who Should Parent?

child's problems at home and school, or asks others to use harsh physical punishment in place of discipline, (Children's Bureau). Abusive caretakers generally treat the child as burdensome and worthless, showing a general lack of concern for the child, (Children's Bureau). Most importantly, in the interest of child safety, disclosures of abuse by a child should never be ignored, (Children's Bureau).

Physical abuse is defined as the non-accidental striking, throwing, biting, shaking, burning, beating, kicking, choking, stabbing, or otherwise harming of a child by a caregiver, (Children's Bureau). Physical abuse does not include spanking; spanking is viewed as a valid form of discipline so long as it is reasonable and does not cause bodily harm, (Children's Bureau). Signs of possible physical abuse may include unexplained wounds on the child that happened away from school and while under the caretaker's authority, (Children's Bureau). Behavioral signs of the child sometimes include seeming afraid of one's caretakers, or professing a wish to not enter their care, (Children's Bureau). The child may display fear of all adults, (Children's Bureau). Physical abuse is considered a possibility when the caregivers use unreasonably harsh discipline and gives conflicting or suspicious explanations of a child's injury, (Children's Bureau). The caretakers may describe the child as "evil" and have a history of being abused as a child themselves, (Children's Bureau).

Neglect is defined as the failure to provide for a child's basic physical, medical, educational or emotional needs. This includes a failure to provide adequate supervision, shelter or food; necessary medical or mental health treatment; failure to educate, and inattention to emotional needs, (Children's Bureau). Neglect makes up 78% of the child maltreatment experienced by the adolescent population in 2012, (Child Maltreatment 2012). Neglect should be suspected if a child is in regular need of medical care, fails to be sufficiently hygienic, begs or



## Who Should Parent?

steals food, lacks proper clothing for the weather, or admits that there is no one to look after them at home, (Children's Bureau). Neglectful caretakers may appear indifferent to the child's needs, (Children's Bureau).

Sexual abuse is classified as the fondling of genitals, penetration, rape, sodomy, incest, indecent exposure to or exploitation of a child for prostitution, (Children's Bureau). Signs that a child has been the victim of sexual abuse include an unusual sexual knowledge or bizarre sexual behavior, difficulty walking or sitting and a sudden refusal to take part in physical activities, (Children's Bureau). The child may become quickly and oddly attached to new people, (Children's Bureau). Sexually abusive caretakers may appear secretive and jealous with the child; they may become excessively protective and controlling of the child and of his or her contact with other children, (Children's Bureau).

Emotional, sometimes known as psychological abuse is any behavior that routinely diminishes the self-worth of a child and inhibits emotional development, (Children's Bureau). This can include regular threats, criticism, and rejection; or a refusal to provide guidance, love, affection, and support, (Children's Bureau). Psychological abuse is often unseen and can be subjective unto the child so it may be difficult to prove, sometimes it is difficult for social services to intervene unless another form of abuse is present, (Children's Bureau). Signs of emotional abuse may appear in the form of delayed emotional development, or a lack of attachment with the parent, (Children's Bureau). The child may demonstrate either inappropriately adult or inappropriately infantile behaviors, (Children's Bureau). Emotionally abusive parents may regularly reject the child, and openly blame or berate them, (Children's Bureau).

## Who Should Parent?

Many states now also recognize abandonment and substance abuse as a form of child neglect, (Children's Bureau). Abandonment is characterized as when a child has been left alone and the parent has made his or her whereabouts and identity unknown, failing to maintain contact with child, (Children's Bureau); though this could also be seen as an element of emotional abuse on other states. Some states also consider a child's exposure to substance abuse a form of child abuse, (Children's Bureau). Exposure to substance abuse can be construed as prenatal exposure through the mother's substance use, the selling or distribution of illegal or restricted substances to a child, allowing a child to be present during the manufacture of methamphetamines, and the use of controlled substances by a caregiver that significantly impairs his or her ability to care for the child, (Children's Bureau).

Children are the most dependent on their care takers during their first five years, (Hoghghi & Speight). This also happens to be when children are the most likely to be abused by a parent or caretaker, (Child Maltreatment, 2013). Children under 3 years of age received 26% of the abuse and neglect reported in 2012, and comprised 70% of the non-accidental child fatalities, (Child Maltreatment). While children ages 3-5 received 20% of the abuse and neglect reported in 2012, (Child Maltreatment). The group who is at the greatest risk for maltreatment is those children under a year old, (Child Maltreatment, 2012). This early and critical stage of life necessitates consistent and stable "good enough" parenting to build attachment skills and self-esteem, (Hoghghi & Speight, 1998). Good enough parenting can be defined as adequately meeting the child's needs beyond that of basic physical care. Children possess emotional needs of 1) love, care and commitment, 2) consistent limit setting, 3) facilitation of development, (Hoghghi & Speight). Though particularly important during early childhood, these elements need to be present throughout the child's upbringing, not just during the first five years,

## Who Should Parent?

(Hoghughi & Speight). If children are deprived of these elements during childhood, they become at risk of developing social handicaps, delinquency, insecure attachments, and personality disorders, (Hoghughi & Speight). As a part of basic emotional care, children need to feel loved to develop proper self-efficacy and emotional bonding, (Hoghughi & Speight). A lack of loving care may inhibit normal attachment, creating a low self-esteem, relationship problems and an insecure personality, (Hoghughi & Speight). In extreme result of a lack of loving care may result in an inability to express and understand affection also known as psychopathy, (Hoghughi & Speight). Children need reasonable, set boundaries to help the child understand what constitutes acceptable behavior in society and the resulting consequences of violating those behaviors, (Hoghughi & Speight). If the boundaries are too strict or inconsistent then the child will be unable to internalize expected behaviors and consequences, leading to delinquency, (Hoghughi & Speight). Finally, children require physical and cognitive stimulation to support their mental and physical development, (Hoghughi & Speight.) Deficits in these emotional and developmental needs are all are strongly linked to criminal behaviors in later life, (Hoghughi & Speight).

When social services receive a referral for child abuse or neglect, they first investigate the claim to substantiate the charges, (Children's Bureau, 2013). After questioning the parents, child and any others involved, if it is believed that the child is in substantial and immediate risk of bodily harm, the service worker then conducts an emergency removal of the child from the home and a court action is initiated to determine the safest living environment for the child, (Children's Bureau, 2013). Family reunification is the preferred permanency plan for most court systems, however in order to be eligible for reunification, parents often have to accept and complete a set of requirements and services designed to help the parent avoid future incidents of

## Who Should Parent?

abuse or neglect, (Children's Bureau). Caretakers must then demonstrate that they possess the ability to parent the child in a safe and beneficial way, (Children's Bureau). Some common services and interventions include, parenting classes, therapy, and a demonstration of responsible and correct behaviors, (Children's Bureau). However, the state and federal governments only assess the parenting of individuals who already have harmed their children's development in some way. Sometimes the inability of an individual to successfully parent is not discovered until long after the child has left the parents care. According to Skowron, Kozlowski & Pincus (2010); and Metsapelto & Pulkkinen (2003), parenting styles and child maltreatment risk strongly correlates to personality type and make up. Accepting this correlation, it is reasonable to infer that individuals likely to engage in child abuse and neglect could be preemptively identified and their deficits addressed before they have and begin to raise their children; avoiding severe child maltreatment.

## **Five- Factor Personality Model**

The Five -Factor Personality Model, designed by Costa & McCrae measured five main traits that make up an individual's personality without overlapping: neuroticism, extraversion, openness to new experiences, agreeableness, and conscientiousness, (Costa & McCrae, 2009). Originally designed in 1985, this model has been refined and updated over the years and has been found to hold its validity over time, inter-generationally and cross-culturally, (Costa & McCrae; Soto, John, Gosling & Potter, 2011). Each major trait can be broken down into smaller more comprehensive components and when tested along with these smaller, specific components demonstrate a thorough diagnostic of an individual's psychological and emotional makeup, (Costa & McCrae; Soto, John, Gosling & Potter; Bagby, Sellborn, Costa Jr., & Widiger, 2008). By assessing the big five personality factors along with the smaller trait components, the five

## Who Should Parent?

factor model can determine a person's expected performance in education, aptitude for specific professions, likelihood of criminal behaviors and probable parenting behaviors, (Costa & McCrae; Bagby, Sellborn, Costa Jr., & Widiger). This model is said to even outperform the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory for predicting personality disorders, (Bagby, Sellborn, Costa Jr., & Widiger).

Neuroticism is described as the tendency to experience negative emotions like anger, depression and anxiety; it is linked to a low tolerance for stress and irritating stimuli, (Costa & McCrae, 2009). Those who score low on the neuroticism scale tend to be calm and emotionally stable individuals, they are less likely to be affected by negative feelings, (Costa & McCrae). This does not mean that those who score low on the scale never get upset or experience emotional upheaval, but rather that they are largely even tempered and majority of the time. Those who score abnormally high on the neuroticism scale however, are typically quite vulnerable to stress, irritability, mood swings, depression, anxiety, paranoia, and suspicion, (Costa & McCrae). They are likely to view ordinary and common experiences as threatening and hopeless, (Costa & McCrae). These individuals are more likely to experience negative feelings for long periods of time, diminishing the individual's ability to think clearly and cope with stress, (Costa & McCrae). Neuroticism tends to spike somewhat during adolescence, especially among teen girls, because of adolescences' focus on social pressures, (Soto, John, Gosling & Potter, 2011). Young females experience greater neuroticism in general compared to young males, but they are most susceptible to feelings of anxiety in late adolescence; these scores temper and decrease over adulthood, (Soto, John, Gosling & Potter). This is thought to be because concerns over peer pressure, body image, and awareness of gender stereotypes during the teenage years, (Soto, John, Gosling & Potter). Young males are most likely to experience

## Who Should Parent?

increased feelings of depression into young adulthood, (Soto, John, Gosling, & Potter). It is believed that this occurrence results from facing the realities of finding a career path and disappointing life expectations, (Soto, John, Gosling & Potter). This is normal personality development, as adolescences mature into adulthood, most learn coping strategies and develop supportive relationships that help mitigate these negative feelings, (Soto, John, Gosling & Potter). Though adolescences in general have higher scores of neuroticism compared to their adult counterparts; those who score as abnormally high compared to their peers are likely to retain increased levels of neurotic tendencies compared to their peers into adulthood. This means that though an individual's levels of neurotic behaviors and tendencies might fluctuate and change over the course of his or her life, compared to that individual's peer group, his or her level of neuroticism is likely to remain relatively stable; so if one is an abnormally neurotic adolescent, then he or she will remain abnormally neurotic later as an adult. In general, those who score abnormally high in neuroticism tend to be less competent parents because it is more difficult for those individuals to be emotionally responsive to their children, (Metsapelto & Pulkkinen, 2003). Highly neurotic individuals usually display restrictive discipline strategies along with little emotional warmth; they tend towards an authoritarian parenting style when paired with low levels of extraversion and a permissive/indulgent parenting style when paired with high levels of extraversion, (Metsapelto & Pulkkinen). Mothers who score low in neuroticism, tend to be highly nurturing and knowledgeable about their children, and fathers who score low in neuroticism tend to be more emotionally available than their highly neurotic counterparts, (Metsapelto & Pulkkinen).

Extraversion is characterized by the level at which one engages the external world. Those who score high in extraversion enjoy social interactions and appear to be full of energy

## Who Should Parent?

and action oriented, (Costa & McCrae, 2009). Extraverts enjoy people and social interaction, preferring to be the center of attention, (Costa & McCrae). However, those who score excessively high in extraversion may be unable to develop deep connections with others, preferring intense social interactions over substantial relationships. Those who score low in extraversion, more commonly known as introverts, are more reserved and deliberate; they require less external stimulation to feel balanced. Introverts prefer to stay in the background and feel overwhelmed by large crowds and social interactions, (Costa & McCrae). It is cautioned that introverts should not be thought of as shy or depressed, but merely independent of their social world, requiring more time to themselves than extraverts to become energized, (Costa & McCrae). Those who are extremely low in extraversion may be unable to understand and make social connections due to approach and respond to others. Children are typically much more extraverted than adults because they are so much more active, (Soto, John, Gosling & Potter, 2011). An individual's childhood activity levels will usually decrease significantly into adulthood, somewhat decreasing the overall trait score, (Soto, John, Gosling & Potter). Females tend to be more extraverted and assertive than males, being more expressive, talkative and social in mid adolescence; this trend generally continues into adulthood, (Soto, John, Gosling & Potter). Though an individual's extraversion changes throughout adolescence and into adulthood, an individual who scores significantly higher in extraversion compared to his or her peer group as an adolescent is likely to always be higher in extraversion compared to his or her peers even as an adult; and an individual who scores significantly lower in introversion compared to his or her peer is likely to always score lower in extraversion compared to his or her peers. As a parent, extraversion correlates to warmth and responsiveness; and when coupled with high agreeableness scales, is often associated with optimum child care (Metsapelto &

## Who Should Parent?

Pulkkinen, 2003). One's fathering ability is most consistently predicted by his extraversion, as fathers higher in extraversion tend to be more emotionally responsive to their children than those who are low in extraversion, (Metsapelto & Pulkkinen). Those individuals who score high in extraversion when paired with low levels of neuroticism tends to use an authoritative discipline style, while those who score high in both neuroticism and extraversion tend to be permissive "helicopter" parents, (Faye, 1981; Metsapelto & Pulkkinen).

Openness to experiences is characterized by one's imagination, curiosity and sense of adventure, (Costa & McCrae, 2009). Open individuals are typically aware of their feelings, intellectually curious, interested in abstract ideas and willing to try new things, (Costa & McCrae). Closed people tend to be straightforward, conventional, traditional and resistant to change, (Costa & McCrae). Though one might assume that openness would grow during adolescence as opposed to childhood, it actually decreases during adolescence but then grows again over adulthood, (Soto, John, Gosling & Potter, 2011). Females sharply decrease in their openness during adolescence more than males, and typically do not grow more open than males during adulthood, (Soto, John Gosling & Potter). Men do not typically develop a negative trend in openness to aesthetics until early adulthood and middle age, when it will taper and remain constant, (Soto, John, Gosling & Potter). Women will typically begin with a much higher interest in aesthetics than men, which will not generally change until middle age when it slightly increases, (Soto, John, Gosling & Potter). The largest gender discrepancy concerning the openness trait resides with openness to ideas, with men being much more willing to accept and try new ideas across their lifespan than women, (Soto, John, Gosling & Potter). Though openness changes greatly between adolescence adulthood, those individuals who score significantly higher in openness compared to their adolescent peer groups; are likely to remain



## Who Should Parent?

significantly higher in openness compared to their adult peer groups. Likewise, individuals who score significantly lower in openness compared to their adolescence peer groups tend to remain significantly lower than their peer groups in adulthood. Parents who are high in openness tend to engage in authoritative parenting practices, (Metsapelto & Pulkkinen, 2003). Open parents are more likely to be less restrictive and encourage verbal communication with the child; tending to be more nurturing parents, (Metsapelto & Pulkkinen). These individuals are largely considered to be “engaged” parents, (Metsapelto & Pulkkinen). Highly open parents have been shown to respond empathetically to others even when they themselves are stressed and experiencing conflict; the researchers found levels of openness to be an important indicator of paternal nurturing, (Metsapelto & Pulkkinen). Open individuals were found to be more capable of considering their child’s needs and are more aware of their own behavior due to a “wider scale of emotional experiences”, (Metsapelto & Pulkkinen at 73) .

Agreeableness is a trait characterized by one’s concern with social harmony and having an optimistic world-view. Those who score high in agreeableness are typically kind, trustworthy, generous and considerate; they have an optimistic view of human nature and are concerned with the welfare of others, (Costa & McCrae, 2009). Agreeable individuals tend to have quality relationships; they are often inspirational leaders, (Costa & McCrae). While those low in agreeableness are typically self-serving, selfish, uncooperative, uncaring and suspicious of others, (Costa & McCrae). Typically individuals become less agreeable during adolescence but then increase in agreeableness during adulthood and continue to increase in their agreeableness into middle age, (Soto, John, Gosling & Potter, 2011). Though, those that are significantly higher or lower in agreeableness compared to their adolescent peers, are likely to remain significantly higher or lower in agreeableness than their peers as they age in adulthood. Females tend to be

## Who Should Parent?

more agreeable at every age than males of the same age group, and are usually more altruistic than males in every age group, (Soto, John, Gosling & Potter). Agreeableness was found to be the most consistent indicator of one's mothering ability and is positively related to one's ability to nurture others, (Metsapelto & Pulkkinen, 2003). Unsurprisingly, those parents high in agreeableness were found to be highly responsive to their child's needs, (Metsapelto & Pulkkinen).

Conscientiousness is characterized by one's sense of duty and self-discipline, (Costa & McCrae, 2009). High levels of this trait are indicative of an individual who values order, often regulates his or her impulses, and is meticulous concerning details and planned activities, (Costa & McCrae). Low level scores of this level are indicative of an individual who prefers spontaneity and may shirk their responsibilities or enjoy chaos, (Costa & McCrae). Typically individuals decline significantly in their levels of conscientiousness from childhood to adolescence, and then climb rapidly in their levels through adolescence and into adulthood, (Soto, John, Gosling & Potter, 2011). Individuals who demonstrate significantly higher or lower scales of conscientiousness compared to their peer groups in adolescence are likely to remain significantly higher or lower in conscientiousness compared to their peers in adulthood. Females were shown to be more conscientious, specifically by being more orderly upon and continuing through adulthood than their male counterparts, (Soto, John, Gosling & Potter). In rating parenthood, conscientious parents have demonstrated restrictive control over their children, but are also highly responsive to the children's needs resulting in a high quality of child care, (Metsapelto & Pulkkinen, 2003). Conscientious parents tend to show a high level of parental knowledge about their children, that is to say that they are aware of their child's whereabouts and

Who Should Parent?

interests; this is a very important indicator in child's quality of care and results in fewer behavioral problems, (Metsapelto & Pulkkinen).

## **Parenting Styles**

While there are many variations upon and within styles of parental authority the main categories as discussed by Baumrind (1971), Faye (1981), and Maccoby & Martin (1983), are: authoritarian, authoritative, permissive/indulgent and neglectful.

Authoritarian parents described as largely inflexible and restrictive; they are generally focused on controlling the child's behavior rather than allowing the child to be expressive, (Baumrind; Maccoby & Martin; Faye). Sometimes referred to as drill sergeants because of their bossiness, authoritarians are most concerned with the power assertion over the child, (Baumrind; and Faye). Authoritarians compare proper behavior to an absolute standard based on obedience and tradition, (Baumrind). Authoritarians typically lack warmth and emotional availability, in favor of rules and structure. (Faye). This parenting style is abrasive and can lead to emotional abuse and neglect of the child even under what would otherwise be viewed as adequate and healthy parenting conditions, (Faye). Overtly abusive parents, high in levels of neuroticism and low in levels of extraversion are most likely to engage in this form of parenting above the other parenting styles, (Skowron, Kozlowski & Pincus, 2010; Metsapelto & Pulkkinen, 2003). Though this parenting style can be, and is most usually, used in an effective and healthy manner with children, there is also a possibility of it causing damage to a child's emotional well-being due to its restrictiveness and low perceived parental warmth.

Authoritative parents still seek to direct the child's activities in a structured manner, but these parents are more concerned that the child understands the reasons behind the rules than

## Who Should Parent?

merely acts with blind obedience to the commands, (Baumrind, 1971; and Faye, 1981). The authoritative parents desire to teach their children future independence and the consequences of his or her actions, they encourage dialogue and self-expression (Baumrind; and Faye).

Authoritative parents provide nurturing support of the child while still maintaining order, (Metsapelto & Pulkkinen, 2003). This parenting style teaches the child self-worth, and discipline, (Metsapelto & Pulkkinen; Faye). The child learns to be responsible for his or her own actions and feels comfortable discussing his or her emotional needs with the parent, (Faye).

Parents low in neuroticism but high in extraversion, and openness are most likely to engage in this parenting style; they also often display elements of agreeableness and conscientiousness, (Metsapelto & Pulkkinen).

Indulgent/permissive parents, also known as helicopters, make few demands about behavior and expectations, (Baumrind, 1971; Faye, 1981; and Maccoby & Martin, 1983). This parent spends a great deal of time rescuing child, refusing to let them be responsible for their own actions, (Faye). The parent acts as an unlimited resource for the child's wishes, (Baumrind; Maccoby & Martin). The permissive household is often centered around the child's wishes and needs almost exclusively, so that the parent is often resentful of the amount of time and care that the child receives, (Baumrind; and Faye). However, despite how much time and resources the parent spends on the child, the parent rarely will let someone else take over the child care due to his or her need to be present and available for the child, (Faye). The main folly of this parenting style is because it is not restrictive on the child at all, it often does not teach the child proper boundaries or consequences, which can lead to delinquency, (Faye; Maccoby & Martin; Baumrind). This parenting style sends the message to the child that the child is not capable of handling his or her own problems, (Faye). Individuals who rate both high in neuroticism and

## Who Should Parent?

high in extraversion are most likely to engage in this form of parenting, (Metsapelto & Pulkkinen, 2003).

Because the researchers Metsapelto and Pulkkinen (2003), studied volunteer data, they did not test for how personality traits correlate to the neglectful/uninvolved parenting style, and there is little information on neglectful parenting compared to the other forms of parenting styles. More research is needed to pinpoint which levels of which personality traits distinguish neglectful parents from other parenting styles. However, concerning parenting behaviors, Darling (1999), reminded the current study that parenting styles and effectiveness are based on two main parenting factors: parent responsiveness and parent demandingness. Neglectful parenting is distinguished by its lack of behaviors rather than its active behaviors, as neglectful parents are low in both their responsiveness and their demandingness (Darling; Maccoby & Martin, 1983). Neglectful parents often do not engage in household structure, they rarely have proper boundaries for the children to follow; and neglectful parents rarely offer or enforce consequences for the child's actions, (Maccoby & Martin). Neglectful parents often do not display emotional support to the child and do not offer emotional stability, (Maccoby & Martin). This style of parenting is extremely damaging to a child's self-worth, physical, emotional and cognitive development as the parent does very little to foster the child's development, (Maccoby & Martin). Over 70% of child maltreatment is a result of neglectful parenting, (Children's Bureau, 2013). Darling (1999), stated that, "the detrimental effects of uninvolved [neglectful] parenting are evident as early as the preschool years and continue through adolescence and into early adulthood." Though Metsapelto & Pulkkinen (2003), did not test for the facets of this parenting style's personality factors, choosing to only discuss Baumrind's parenting

Who Should Parent?

classifications; it can be presumed that these parents' most likely rate as low in in consciousness, low in openness, low in extraversion, and low in agreeableness.

### **Policy Implications and Conclusion**

The federal government requires under the Child Abuse and Prevention Treatment Act, 42 USCA § 5106g. (2014) that children be safe from physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, and neglect. However, in 2012, 686,000 children were victims of abuse or neglect by a parent or caretaker. Soto, John, Gosling, & Potter (2011), demonstrated that personality traits under Costa & McCrae's five-factor personality model follow a predictable pattern of maturation and growth into adulthood. It is against public policy and the fourteenth amendment to refuse individuals the right to procreate, public policy requires that individuals be given a chance to pursue happiness; a chance to beat the odds, (*Santosky v. Kramer*, 1982). But as a society, we are not precluded from preemptively giving those with serious personality deficits maladaptive to parenting some help. As a society, we are not prevented from preemptively identifying those who are highly unlikely to engage in healthy parenting behaviors and through early intervention, teach them techniques to supplement their natural personality deficits and bolster the ability to nurture others. In addition to bolstering an individual's future parenting ability, and considering that many abusive and neglectful tendencies are generational; learning about proper and beneficial parenting behaviors can help an individual better understand the parenting environment in which he or she was raised and aid with gaining closure, introspective reflection and self-understanding. Even if one does not initially plan on having children, everyone can benefit from understanding proper parenting behaviors and proper social interactions based on their particular personality cocktail and social deficits; especially with those who personality profiles which are outside the norm for their age group.

## Who Should Parent?

An individual's personality traits become the most set during the mid-twenties, after the brain has finished development, (Soto, John, Gosling, & Potter, 2011). However, many people in the United States begin to have children in early adulthood, or even in late adolescence. Since 70% of child maltreatment comes in the form of neglect, coupled with the fact that children under a year old are the most at risk of being victims of neglect, (Child's Bureau, 2013), it is imperative to screen, intervene and teach individuals with personality deficits indicative of future child maltreatment proper parenting techniques, before they have a chance to engage in abuse or neglect. Therefore, if society wants to reduce and even prevent the rates of future child maltreatment, the current study proposes that individuals should be tested for their personality make up and given preventative interventions before they have children, preferably in late adolescence. The American education system already requires elementary and high school students to submit to a barrage of standardized aptitude tests on an annual basis. Personality tests could be administered during this time, testing for an individual's ability to be nurturing and care for others. Those individuals with significant discrepancies compared to the normal personality measurement for their age group could then be offered training and services to increase social and cognitive functioning based on their personality, instead of just one's educational and cognitive faculties as social services is currently in the habit of providing. If personality tests to determine an individual's ability to care for another were added to those that the government already imposes on the average citizen during adolescent education; then society could preventively screen those who stand out as potentially neglectful or abusive individuals. Those at risk for child maltreatment could then receive skills training and intervention programs either to help them develop appropriate parenting skills; or interventions to help those individuals avoid parenthood, such as free long term birth control. It is predicted that by assessing the make-up of

## Who Should Parent?

one's personality, one could assess his or her ability to engage in compassionate and nurturing behaviors. By then determining that individual's probable behaviors based on his or her ability to be compassionate and responsive, the individual's ability to parent could be assessed and addressed. By correcting and supplementing an individual's ability to parent, assisting and encouraging every individual to engage in at least "good enough" parenting, the United States could significantly reduce or even eradicate the rates of child maltreatment across the nation.

The current study proposes the following: first, more research needs to be done on the personality traits which correlate most closely to neglectful parenting behaviors. It is suggested that those parents who have already been substantiated for abuse and neglect claims be tested for their personality traits in accordance with the five factor personality model to determine a supplemental baseline for a neglectful parenting personality type. Second, state governments must then add comprehensive five factor personality assessments to the yearly standardized tests administered as a part of the education system and are given to high school students. Third, adolescents that score significantly outside their peer group and in factors that indicate probable maladaptive parenting behaviors should then identified be screened or flagged as possibly abusive/neglectful personalities. Fourth, the vast majority of individuals would score within the range of those likely to engage in "good enough" parenting naturally. However those individuals who are then identified as potentially abusive can then be offered either free long term birth control options, or intervention tutoring to teach healthy social interactions and parenting behaviors based on the individual's specific personality deficits to result in future beneficial parenting nationwide. If people were assessed concerning their ability to care for another on their likelihood for compassion and nurturing, we could significantly reduce our current rates of child abuse in the United States.



References

15 U.S.C.A. §15c

Bagby, R. M., Sellbom, M., Costa, P.T. Jr., Widiger, T.A., (2008). Predicting diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders-IV personality disorders with the five-factor model of personality and the personality psychopathology five. *Personality and Mental Health*, vol. 2(2), 55-69, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.valpo.edu/10.1002/pmh.33> retrieved on August 4, 2014.

Baumrind, D., (1971). Current patterns of parental authority. *Developmental Psychology*, Vol. 4(1), 1-103.

Buck v. Bell, 274 U.S. 200, (1927) LEXIS.

Child Abuse Prevention Treaty Act, 42 USCA § 5106g. 2014.

Children's Bureau (2013), Child maltreatment report, retrieved on August 2, 2014 from <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/cb/cm2012.pdf>

Children's Bureau (February 2013), How the child welfare system works. *Child welfare Information Gateway*. Retrieved from <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/cpswork.pdf#page=3&view=WhatHappensWhenPossibleAbuseorNeglectIsReported> on August 4, 2014.

Children's Bureau (July 2013), What is child abuse and neglect? Recognizing the signs and symptoms. *Child Welfare Information Gateway*. Retrieved from [www.childwelfare.gov](http://www.childwelfare.gov). on August 1, 2014.

Who Should Parent?

Costa, P.T., & McCrae, R.R.; (2009). The five-factor model and the NEO inventories. *Oxford Handbook of Personality Assessment*, J. Butcher (ed.) New York, NY. 299-322.

Darling, N., (1999). Parenting style and its correlates. *ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education*, ED427896. Retrieved from GoogleScholar.

De Clercq, B., Van Leeuwen, K., De Fruyt, F., Van Hiel, A., & Mervielde, I.; (2008).

Maladaptive personality traits and psychopathology in childhood and adolescence: The moderating effect of parenting. *Journal of Personality*, Vol. 76(2), 357-383.

Faye, J., (1981). Three types of parents, <http://www.loveandlogic.com/t-Three-Types-of-Parents.aspx>

Hoghugh M. & Speight ANP, (1998). Good enough parenting for all children- A strategy for a healthier society. *Archives in Disease in Childhood*. 78, 293-300.

Lombardo, P.A., (2003). Facing Carrie Buck, *Hastings center Report* 33(2), 14-17 retrieved from Academic Search Complete on August 3, 2014.

Maccoby, E.E. and Martin, J.A., (1983). Socialization in the context of the family: Parent-child interaction. In P. Mussen and E.M. Hetherington, editors, *Handbook of Child Psychology*, volume IV: *Socialization, personality, and social development*, chapter 1, pages 1-101. New York: Wiley, 4th edition.

Metsapelato, R. L., & Pulkkinen, L. (2003). Personality traits and parenting: Neuroticism, extraversion, and openness to experience as discriminative factors. *European Journal of Personality*, Vol. 17 59-78.

Who Should Parent?

National Center for Learning Disabilities (2014), What is and IEP? Retrieved from <http://www.nclld.org/students-disabilities/iep-504-plan/what-is-iep> on August 3, 2014.

Prince v. Massachusetts, 321 U.S. 158 (1944) LEXIS.

Santosky v. Kramer, 455 U.S. 745 (1982). LEXIS.

Skinner v. Oklahoma, 316 U.S. 535 (1942). LEXIS.

Skowron, E. A., Kozlowski, J. M., & Pincus, A. L. (2010). Differentiation, self-other representations and rupture-repair processes: Predicting child maltreatment risk. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, Vol. 57 (3), 304-316.

Soto, C. J., John, O. P., Gosling, S. D., & Potter, J., (Feb 2011). "Age differences in personality traits from 10 to 65: Big Five domains and facets in a large cross-sectional sample". *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 100 (2): 300–348. doi:10.1037/a0021717

Tartakovsky, M., (2011). Eugenics & the story of Carrie Buck. *Psych Central*, retrieved on August 2, 2014 from <http://psychcentral.com/blog/archives/2011/01/24/eugenics-the-story-of-carrie-buck/>