

'Pierced' baby picture sparks outrage among parents

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STORY HIGHLIGHTS

A woman posts a picture of her baby that she edited to include a dimple piercing

The image has sparked a discussion about piercings and circumcision in children

(CNN) — Enedina Vance was fed up. She felt like other parents didn't understand her message. She felt like they weren't listening to her.

So she got on her phone, found a picture of her 6-month-old daughter and pasted a diamond stud over the infant's dimple to make it look like she had a piercing.

Vance, a strong advocate against piercing or circumcising children, posted the edited picture to Facebook, where it had more than 13,000 shares as of Thursday afternoon.

"I make all of her decisions until she's 18, I made her, I own her!!" she wrote.

What Vance didn't expect was the reaction she'd get from parents around the world. Outrage. Hate mail. Threats to call Child Protective Services.

But the image also proved her point, and it got parents talking.

"The reaction that parents have when they see this beautiful perfect baby being ... mutilated, that initial shock, that reaction of anger, I want them to hold on to that," the 35-year-old said.

Many thought photo was real

The stay-at-home mom from Fostoria, Ohio, knew that seeing a picture of a baby with a dimple piercing would get her family and friends talking, so she shared it in parenting Facebook groups.

The post quickly incited outrage among the parenting community, and she was called “a bad mother” and worse.

Many people assumed the piercing was real and lambasted Vance for her apparent decision.

“I seriously can not believe how many people missed that this was purely satirical, I actually used the hashtag #sarcasm,” Vance wrote on Facebook. “Yet people were still threatening to beat me to death, call child protective services, & take away my children.”

Other parents simply disagreed with her stance on piercing.

One woman wrote, “I got my ears pierced as a baby. I grew up just fine. ... I’m having a girl and I will get her ears pierced.”

Ohio law allows children under age 18 to get piercings and tattoos with a parent or guardian present. Most states allow minors to be pierced with parental consent.

Tattoos and piercings: How young is too young?

Amid the death threats and hate mail, Vance said she also got countless positive messages from parents. Some said they felt they didn’t have a choice in whether their sons were circumcised. Another was told it was a “cleanliness thing.”

“A lot of this responsibility lies on our medical community. They encourage parents,” Vance said. “It shouldn’t be an option. It shouldn’t be a question.”

’Not a good enough reason’

Vance didn’t always feel so strongly about circumcision.

Coming from a family of all women, she said she didn’t know a lot about circumcision until she became pregnant for the first time in the late ‘90s. Vance had twin girls, but the research she did stuck in her mind.

“It felt so outdated, so primitive,” she said. “We as a civilized society should have grown past this and (I) was shocked that cutting my infant’s genitals was even an option.”

Many parents choose to circumcise their children because of hygienic, health or religious reasons.

In 2012, the American Academy of Pediatrics found that the health benefits of circumcision outweigh the risks. However, the academy said the benefits weren't great enough to recommend that all newborn boys be circumcised.

"There is no compelling reason to deny boys their legitimate right to make their own informed decision when they are old enough to do so," the report said.

Vance sees this as a call to action and will tell anyone she meets how she feels if it comes up in conversation. She protested last fall in Cleveland with the Bloodstained Men & Their Friends, an organization that advocates against circumcision.

But her beliefs extend beyond circumcision.

"No one has the right to alter, modify, or mutilate another human being's body for aesthetic purposes, not even parents," she said.

Vance has argued that ultimately, children should be able to decide for themselves.

"What 1-week-old is asking to have earrings?" she said. "Just because it looks cute, just because it looks better – that's not a good enough reason."