

This is going to hurt you more than it hurts me

**A good spanking, say behavioral scientists and educators,
may hurt the spanker but it is also likely to have some
undesirable side-effects on the spankee and on society**

by Robert J. Trotter

Terry ate pencils and the teacher beat him. Michael came late to gym class so the teacher knocked him down. The teacher slapped Karen's face for chewing gum in class. The teacher cracked Billy's knuckles with a ruler every time he wet his pants. The teacher picked Jimmy up by the ears and shook him because he kept his hands in his pockets. The teacher screamed at Susan and then sent her to the vice principal for a paddling because she forgot her homework.

These incidents of physical punishment in schools may be extreme but they are not rare. Last year in the Dallas school district alone there were more than 20,000 reported cases of paddlings, some resulting in physical injury. In a 1970 Gallup poll, 62 percent of those surveyed favored "spanking and similar forms of physical punishment in the lower grades. A 1969 survey taken by the research division of the National Education Association found that 65.7 percent of the teachers queried favored the use of corporal punishment in elementary school; 47.5 percent favored such punishment in secondary schools.

Despite the fact that such violence against children is a widely accepted practice, there is a growing movement to have it outlawed. At least three states (New Jersey, Massachusetts and Maryland) and several cities (including New York, Washington, D. C., Boston, Pittsburgh, Baltimore and Chicago) have banned the practice in their school systems. In May of this year a resolution against corporal punishment was passed at a conference sponsored by the American Civil Liberties Union, the American Orthopsychiatric Association and the NEA Task Force on Corporal Punishment. The resolution states, "The use of physical violence on school children is an affront to democratic values and an infringement of individual rights. It is a degrading, dehumanizing and counterproductive approach to the maintenance

of discipline in the classroom and should be outlawed from educational institutions as it has already been outlawed from other institutions in American society."

More recently, at the meeting of the American Psychological Association, a group of mental health professionals and behavioral scientists took an even stronger stand against corporal punishment. Adah Maurer of Berkeley, Calif., chaired a symposium that indicted corporal punishment as one of the roots of violence in society. "It is the thesis of this panel," she says, "that physical violence imprinted at an early age and the modeling of violent behavior by punishing adults induces habitual violence in children." In other words, the child who learns the golden rule to the tune of the hickory stick is likely to apply the hickory stick unto others.

Studies of child-rearing practices, assessing the effects of physical punishment, yield a consistent outcome, says Norma D. Feshbach of the University of California at Los Angeles. In general, she says, the degree of parental punitiveness has been found to be positively correlated with various forms of psychotic pathology; especially delinquency and aggressive acting-out behavior. Physical punishment becomes a source of frustration and pain and, as such, it may stimulate anger and aggressive tendencies. Feshbach admits an occasional spanking is not going to traumatize a child, destroy his spirit or make him anxious and hostile. But, she says, the use of corporal punishment by schools and parents is objectionable because the child, through imitation, may be acquiring aggressive response patterns. The child learns that physical punishment is the appropriate response to use in conflict.

Documented the theme of violence-begets-violence, Alan D. Button of Fresno State College presented clinical examples from an ongoing study on the role of punishment.

Case I: Howard, a black 17-year-old, has been in Juvenile Hall 19 times: four for petty theft, six for burglary, once for strong arm robbery, once for malicious mischief (this was his first offense at age 13), three times for grand theft, auto, twice for drug charges, once for truancy and once for rape. His mother died when he was six, and he lived after that, variously, with his seven older sisters. His father, a construction worker, didn't want him. The father never used physical punishment, Howard emphasized, only profanity. His sisters whipped him regularly, but Howard said, "They didn't whip me hard enough, 'cause I'd turn right around and do it again." There was one sister who "never gave me rules or whipped me, and so I didn't do nothing wrong when I lived with her, 'cause it would've hurt her."

Case II: Jim, a white 15-year-old from a large family, has two offenses, both grand theft. His father, currently in jail, said about Jim, "We communicate only when I discipline him." His discipline consisted mainly of swearing and yelling at the boy. Jim's mother, however, spanked him repeatedly.

Case III: Cabe, a 12-year-old, has 24 offenses beginning when he was eight with burglary. He was jailed at nine for strong-arm robbery. His father's whereabouts have been unknown since Cabe was two. He has one full sister and eight half siblings, each by a different father. His home is characterized by yelling, cursing and turmoil, and the court has officially noted in his record that there is "no hope for this young man." Cabe's discipline was severe. Since infancy his mother burned him frequently with cigarettes.

From these and similar cases Button concludes that verbal violence and name-calling by teachers and parents against children is almost as psychologically destructive as physical violence. "Name-calling sets up the conditions for a self-fulfilling prophesy," he



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explains. The delinquents he has studied absorbed the shouted messages that went along with the beatings: You are bad, you are hateful, you deserve this beating, etc. Now, in their teens, they agree, "I am bad. I deserved the beatings I got. My parents were justified in knocking the hell out of me. If I ever have any children, that's the way I'll treat them."

Thus "the violent society is promoted through its educational systems where corporal punishment is socially condoned," says Doris Jefferies of the University of Indiana. But, she says, paddling may also have other psychological effects. The trauma of a child receiving a paddling in school could later cause that child to experience frigidity or sexual impotence. Or, she continues, a child could be so sexually excited and stimulated by the paddling as to later in life become masochistic (find erotic gratification in being beaten) or perhaps sadistic to others.

The possibilities of harm to the individual and to society are not the only arguments against corporal punishment. Behavior research has long since demonstrated that this type of aversive stimulus does not produce the desired effect. As early as 1938 B. F. Skinner found that punishing animals acts temporarily to suppress a response, but does not extinguish it. In *Walden Two* Skinner said, "We are now discovering at an untold cost in human suffering . . . that in the long run punishment doesn't reduce the probability that an act will occur. . . . It works to the disadvantage of both the punished organism and the punishing agent."

Not only does physical punishment not work, it also alienates children from learning, says Robert Hagebak of the Timberlawn Psychiatric Center in Dallas. Children who are having trouble in the learning process and who express their frustration, anxiety or guilt in aggressive actions that draw punishment learn to associate the learning

setting with pain. Also, explains Hagebak, the punishing teacher proves his enemy status in the eyes of the child.

Despite the abundance of evidence arguing against the use of corporal punishment, teachers and parents continue to find a variety of reasons for its continuance. Seymour Feshbach of the University of California at Los Angeles has worked to have corporal punishment eliminated as an official method of discipline in the Los Angeles School

"My mother must have thought I was a canoe, she paddled me so much."

The diary of
Arthur Bremer

District. His efforts were unsuccessful, he says, because of the opposition of the professionals of the school district. High school and junior high school administrators, elementary school principals, some teachers and even some school counsellors, were reluctant to give up the use of corporal punishment.

One of the arguments Feshbach encountered in favor of corporal punishment came from school authorities who said not every teacher is permitted to hit a child. The child is sent out of the room to be punished by an objective and detached authority figure (similarly a mother may send a child to the father for punishment or vice versa). This, it is believed, will protect the child from overpunishment delivered out of anger. But Feshbach says this cold, instrumental utilization of corporal punishment also has its drawbacks. It violates the natural order of events. For the child, the punishment may be too far removed from the behavior to have much effect. For the adults who are given the responsibility

of administering the punishment, it is likely that they may experience a loss of empathy. They become inured and indifferent to the pain they inflict.

When the NEA Task Force on Corporal Punishment held hearings, similar arguments were voiced by both teachers and parents. Some said corporal punishment is necessary to protect teachers and maintain a functioning learning environment. Some said corporal punishment is good for the students (the school of hard knocks builds character, etc.). Others just said they use it because everyone else does.

The report of the NEA task force rebuts each of these arguments (using evidence similar to that presented at the APA symposium), and concludes that corporal punishment (except for the use of physical restraint in the protection of persons and property from serious harm) should be outlawed in all state school systems. In its place, the NEA suggests a variety of techniques for maintaining discipline without inflicting physical pain. Most of the alternatives are based on student-teacher agreement on discipline policy procedures. Behavior modification methods (privileges to bestow or withdraw, approval or disapproval) are encouraged as are the provision of alternate experiences for students (and teachers) who are bored, turned off or otherwise unresponsive to particular educational experiences. Independent projects, alternative schools and programs and early entrance to college are suggested. Also, the report calls for the use of professional specialists such as psychiatrists, psychologists and social workers when necessary.

Both the NEA task force and the APA symposium stressed that when teachers and parents are retrained in the use of such nonviolent methods, or when laws force the discontinuance of violent methods, children will be able to learn through desire instead of through fear. And the first lesson they learn will not be that might makes right. □