

Discipline in Early Childhood

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During an informal observation made by one of the authors of this chapter, a mother and toddler were playfully interacting in the waiting room of a crowded customer service office for a utility company. Smiling adults looked on, seemingly entertained by the exchange. This local office, located in the southwest area of Chicago, was a hub that connected a rich diversity of the city's population for several surrounding neighborhoods. Unquestionably, it was paradise for an ethnographer or sociologist, but on this day it was especially valuable for thinking about the diverse ways people understand and think about the needs of young children and ways to respond.

In the waiting area, a number of customers appeared pleasantly caught up and entertained by the interaction as the young mother and toddler playfully exchanged conversation, pats, tickles, and giggles. At one point, however, the interaction increased in intensity as the young child playfully hit his mom in the face with the palm of his hand. "Ouch, that hurts," responded the mom as she grabbed the toddler's hand to restrain him. The toddler giggled and struggled to free himself from his mother's grip in an apparent effort to continue the playful interaction. This time, the blow to his mother's face was with greater force as she cried out "Stop!" and struggled to once again restrain the child.

The collective gaze and mood of the onlookers was suddenly transformed, as strangers connected in social conversations shared their opinions and unsolicited advice. "Can you imagine?" asked one observer in a somewhat judgmental, yet rhetorical, manner. "No child of mine would ever get away with hitting me---his mother. It is not only unacceptable, but also downright disrespectful!"

"She better nip that in the bud now and let him know who runs the show," replied another. "If she can't control him now, what will she do when he is older?"

"Pobrecito [poor little thing]," responded one person. "I think he's very tired; they have been waiting a long time."

Another observer determined that the second hit was deliberate. She firmly believed that the child was fully aware of his action and deliberately cast the second blow. The first hit could be interpreted as playful, but the second time, she explained, was a calculated act of hostility. It is the parent's responsibility, she insisted, to communicate to the child what behaviors are acceptable or unacceptable.

As another observer attempted to defend the toddler, based on the argument that the child was too young to fully understand inappropriate behaviors, an unforgiving onlooker insisted that he needed his hands slapped. She contended that it was the quickest way to convey appropriate behavior and to extinguish inappropriate actions early in a child's development: "He has to learn early about what's appropriate. He just can't go through life hurting others, especially the person who brought him into this world."

The waiting room, as this scenario illustrates, was filled with an array of spontaneous and diverse opinions from a group of "public strangers" who had their own ideas and experiences about what they deemed to be appropriate child behavior and how children should be disciplined and socialized. Their perspectives, like many among the families and providers we encounter in homes, child care, and clinical settings, generated a number of important questions and issues that parents and practitioners struggle with daily. What is developmentally appropriate? How do parents appropriately shape and influence their children's behavior? What are reasonable expectations? How should parents prepare their children for the world ahead? What are the dreams and goals parents have for their children? What is the role of parents in helping their children to achieve successfully? How should children respond to others? What is the role and influence of context? For example, to what extent does culture or environment play a role in parental expectations and the process of parenting? How do parents---and the wider social context---think about child rearing and the notion of discipline? To what extent are these issues and concerns culturally determined and how do minority cultural norms fit into mainstream standards? What

is the role of factors such as ethnicity, social class, place, and migration? How do these factors determine what might be acceptable and unacceptable forms of parent-child interactions? And to what extent do they shape and influence the expectations of parents about what their children can or cannot do?

How parents—and other caregivers—attempt to shape their children, their behavior, and how they would like them to be and respond are all highly culturally determined processes. In the United States, parents and teachers at times talk about giving children “natural consequences” for their behavior. These consequences are really not natural, but are dictated by the parents’ world view, their beliefs about why children behave the way they do and how children should be, in an attempt to prepare their children for the future. These practices are shaped by the customs and usual behaviors in which parents and children grow up. Like fish in water, we often think that our world view and practices are the correct, obvious, or natural ones. People adhere to their practices quite strongly and defend them tenaciously with very intense emotions, as, for instance, the literature on the topic of spanking children reveals.

There is very little empirical evidence about the sorts of discipline used by caregivers in various cultural contexts, their consequences, and whether they achieve the caregivers’ short- and long-term goals. Moreover, little is known about the long-term effects of various disciplinary strategies, particularly from non-Western and nonindustrialized societies. There are, however, several observational studies, which we review here. We also share our observations about the controversial issues surrounding the disciplining of young children.

In this chapter, we will undertake four tasks: (a) We will explore how—with what strategies—parents from different cultures attempt to “discipline” young children. This involves an exploration of differences in approach in various parts of the world or specified ethnic groups within a given country. (b) We will examine the possible consequences of those strategies and practices. (c) We will explore some “dominant themes” in groups of cultures; such themes are often determined by the culture’s social/economic organization, the beliefs of parents about human nature, and the parents’ hopes for their children when they become adults. (d) Finally, we will suggest a way of thinking about parents and discipline from a complex point of view, reflecting on the multiple factors operating in the minds of parents and families. We base our description on the most relevant available evidence in the published literature and on the experiences of clinicians who work with children and families under various conditions. We focus on discipline and refrain from tackling the complex issue of maltreatment, which merits a separate chapter.

1. What is Discipline?

Etymologically, the word discipline comes from the Latin *disciplina*, which means “instruction given to a disciple or student.” It means something like “order necessary for instruction,” or “education of a disciple to carry out certain tasks.” In the case of children, parents establish a discipline regime to teach them particular behaviors or attitudes and to prepare them to function eventually as adults.

In everyday life, discipline is a set of behaviors, responses, and attitudes endorsed by those in a higher hierarchical position to shape, guide, or mold those under their care or responsibility. In terms of our subject, it involves caregivers with a parental-like function (parents, siblings, relatives, other caregivers) toward infants and young children. This view entails the notion of asymmetry in the relationship, in which the caregivers are stronger, have authority, and make decisions about what to do regarding those they look after. Probably in all societies caregivers/parents engage in some sort of discipline, but how do they do it? What strategies are used? What is their purpose? What are the consequences of these actions?

We take a “macro” view of disciplinary strategies. The only way to offer a description of cultural strategies for discipline is to do an injustice to individual families. What one says, for instance, about “African American parents” may be completely inapplicable to a specific family or group of families. We make generalizations that are not useful at the individual level. We use these generalizations to illustrate some common themes and topics, rather than trying to say that all members from a particular group believe the same things or use the same methods. This discussion is difficult because societies are becoming increasingly multicultural and “mixed.” In a “third-world country” like Mexico, for example, there are marked differences between groups of people. The life experience of the minority of very wealthy families is far different from that of the marginalized “Indian” groups in remote, non-urbanized areas, even though both groups are “Mexican.” We attempt

to make further distinctions and specifications when it seems necessary.

2. Different Forms of Discipline

It may seem surprising to speak of “discipline” during infancy and early childhood. To some people, it may seem foolish to use the word discipline to describe one’s dealings with an infant or toddler, whereas other families easily use this term to describe the task of beginning to start shaping and modifying the behavior and attitudes of their child as early as possible.

From our review of the available information on discipline, there appear to be several schools of thought among parents about how to teach important lessons in life to their young children and how to eliminate undesirable behaviors. One can distinguish three main general trends and parental beliefs/attitudes about children, which we will describe as: (a) the innocent child, (b) the perfectible child, and (c) the intentional child.

(a) **The innocent child.** According to this view, infants and young children are a gift from a God or creator and are very fragile. They do not yet understand adult expectations and behavior. They should be nurtured and cared for, and parents must work to ensure their well-being and survival. Parents and other caregivers must try to protect them from immediately surrounding dangers (e.g., illness, spirits). Very few explicit expectations should be placed on young children; they will learn things only from observing their parents. Any undesirable behavior is part of the child’s nature. Parents will have to work with certain negative tendencies in their children and modify them very gradually. There is very little need for any formal, particularly verbal, teaching. When children are older, more active teaching can be used. This may be the view in some traditional African and Asian cultures, and it may also be prevalent in some Native American traditional families in the United States.

(b) **The perfectible child.** This belief holds that children are indeed very fragile but can be taught things gradually. This process takes a long time and much patience. It is the work of the parent or caregiver to teach the child as much as possible the values and behavioral repertoire that are desirable. However, this can be done only in the context of an intimate relationship between parent and child and with minimal or no confrontations, and it requires a great deal of patience from the caregiver. This may be a characteristic way of thinking in Japan and other Asian cultures.

(c) **The intentional child.** According to this perspective, children are born with animalistic inclinations or with sinful tendencies (or “original sin”; Stork, 1986). Although dependent, they are strong and intentional. It is the work of parents to “humanize” the child by actively curtailing the negative inclinations and substituting more desirable ones for them (e.g., how to sleep, how to eat). From the start, caregivers should discourage negative attitudes or behaviors (e.g., crying, clinging, demanding or expecting too much from parents). This may be a prevalent view in the United States and some European countries (Keller, 2003).

Each of these three views is an oversimplification, but they help orient the observer when trying to understand parental beliefs and actions. They provide a rationale for what parents and caregivers do and helps to explain their specific efforts to instill certain values and behaviors in their children. A specific family might fall within a triangle formed by these three polarities and lean toward a particular model of the child and role of the parent, as illustrated in Figure 1.

[Insert Figure 1 about here]

3. Parental Beliefs and Actions

A word of caution is necessary. Parental beliefs about children and discipline guide their actions and help them direct their behavior more or less rationally. It is very important to listen to parents’ accounts of what they do and why, because this explains and makes their behavior understandable. However, this is only the first step. It is also necessary to observe directly what caregivers actually do. Thus, studies examining what parents implement are crucial to compare the beliefs with the actions. At times there is a contradiction between beliefs and actions, which Gramsci (1971) called “contradictory consciousness.” This is illustrated by Gutmann (1996) in his observation of the behavior of fathers toward their young children in a poor neighborhood in Mexico City. Most of the fathers endorsed the ideology of “machismo,” in which the father is the boss of the family and does not take care of the children, which is the mother’s responsibility. What Gutmann actually saw, however, was different: Many fathers did participate in household chores, change diapers, carry their

children, and feed them. So even when they maintained an “official belief system,” many were nurturing and involved with their young child.

We now explore some of the main parental beliefs and practices along the lines of the three schools of thought described earlier.

Innocent Child

In this parental belief system, the child is completely dependent on the parent/caregiver and for a long time is in need of help, assistance, nurturance, and protection. The child is a precious “gift” of great value. In some groups, the infant may be conceived of as a reincarnation of an ancestor spirit that has to be convinced, cajoled, or wooed to stay in this world, rather than return to the world of spirits. Parents may have to dress the baby in beautiful clothes, put jewelry on the child, and sing songs so as to try to keep the baby alive. In Bali, some families of a Hindu religion may believe that the baby is the reincarnation of a spirit, so the young child should be treated as a god and with respect. Strong emotions expressed by the child, such as being upset or angry, are to be avoided through the careful ministrations of the caregivers. The baby is thought to have a fragile soul (*bayu*), which is weakened even more by strong emotional states (Diener, 2000), particularly negative ones. Also, the parents themselves should avoid displaying strong negative emotions, which might upset the baby and convince the child to return to the world of spirits by dying.

Among some Native American groups (e.g., Navajo; Tharp, 1994), parents do not really “talk” to their children about what they should do. The children are expected to learn through seeing how adults conduct themselves and do things. It is thought to be unnecessary to explain things (which young children would not understand) because the best way to learn is by seeing rather than with words. Parents communicate with their body and gestures, and the child should learn to “read the context” of what the parents are doing and what is going on around the child, paying attention to gestures and moods. Similar styles are described among the Inuit and some groups in Africa.

Among the Fulani, a very large ethnic group in Western Africa (comprehending parts of Mauritania, Senegal, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Sierra Leone, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Ghana, Cameroon, and Chad), mothers are eager to help their children acquire “Fulani-ness,” which implies being reserved and acquiring patience, care, and forethought (Johnson, 2000). That culture values social concerns and sees the child as having to be quiet, careful, and patient. In order for the child to learn his or her place in the world, the mother may occasionally insult the child during late toddlerhood. In this way, the child is thought to accept the authority of parents and will not insult older children (but can insult younger ones).

A theme that runs through these examples is the hope that the young child will learn how to fit in and coexist within the larger social group (not only with parents and immediate relatives). In this style of parenting and “discipline,” the child is gradually taught to become part of a larger social group. Respect and knowing one’s place in the world are very important.

Parents who use these techniques tend to say that they hope their child will be respectful, obedient, and a part of society. Selfhood tends to be defined mostly in the context of others, of relationships. Parents place more value on being socially intelligent than on being cognitively good at solving problems, knowing things, or using complex words or language. The folklore and children’s stories (used to teach children lessons in life) as well as old sayings emphasize the value of a person who gets along with others and avoids conflicts, and who can read other people’s behavior.

Perfectible Child

In this set of beliefs, parents have full confidence and hope that every child can learn good and appropriate behavior, be kind and thoughtful, and learn “social behavior” or adapt one’s behavior to the needs of society. Parents feel responsible for the outcome of their children, so if a child does not learn to behave well, something may have failed in the teaching. Parents try to give the child firsthand the experience of feeling loved, valued, and respected and of being the object of forbearance, kindness, and compassion. In Japan, mothers say that they hope their child will learn to be *kojime*, that is, learn how to behave acceptably in social circumstances. Japanese parental discipline is strongly geared to teach the child to behave in a socially adequate manner as an adult (Rothbaum et al., 2000). The difference from the previous perspective (the innocent child) is that this view focuses more on the beliefs (the so-called naïve theory of personality) about children

and on the techniques used to achieve the goal. With the perfectible-child belief, parents actively try to reduce the young child's individualistic tendency to do what he or she wants. From very early on, children are encouraged to cooperate. This style of child rearing is valued in many traditional societies, but also in highly industrialized ones that are going through rapid social change, such as in Japan, Korea, and other Asian cultures (Liamputtong, 2002. Kim, 1994. Rice, 2001).

In these cultures, parents readily accept that children need to rely on them to a very high degree, compared, for instance, with customary practices in the United States. In Japan and other Asian societies, children need to be fed, dressed, and assisted with everyday activities for a much longer time than in other countries. Thus, dependency is not discouraged but is allowed and fostered. Dependence on other people---particularly on one's family---is not frowned upon, but is celebrated. This has also been observed in India (Saraswathi and Garapathi, 2002).

Some studies have highlighted the importance that Chinese, Japanese, and Vietnamese parents attach to "training" the child in the parental beliefs (Chao, 1994, 2001; Pomerleau et al., 1991). This tendency seems related to the Confucian idea that people are perfectible and that with proper training everybody can change, provided they are given the proper models and opportunities (Kojime, 1996; Pomerleau et al., 1991). The overall Confucian goal is to make the child "kindhearted" and socially acceptable (Naito, 2003). How do parents try to make the child kindhearted?

The central goal of the parent (usually mothers or their substitutes) is to establish a very intimate relationship with the child, a partnership where there is a "shared mind" rather than two separate or independent minds. The Japanese ideal of *amae* (see corresponding chapter) helps explain this notion. In the state of *amae*, there is an intimate connection between mother and child. The mother understands the child, and her son or daughter is acutely involved in and aware of the mother's emotions, gestures, etc. She promotes this closeness and tries to maintain a positive relationship as much as possible, reinforcing the sense of intimate dependency. In Korea, mothers talk about a "maternal dew," which is a sort of maternal presence, and of its impact on the child. This means to take a position of unquestioned acceptance and devotion toward the child (Kim, 1994). Any correction has to be conducted within the context of a supportive and deeply involved parent-child relationship.

Kornadt's studies (Kornardt, 2002) in Japan suggest that, in general, mothers tend to use persuasion, suggestion, encouragement, and at times shame and teasing, but they avoid direct confrontations with their young children. Mothers tend to see themselves as devoted to the child and do whatever they can to maintain a sense of harmony and good will between the partners. This also minimizes the child's tendency to be difficult, defiant, or aggressive. Children are interested in maintaining a state of harmony with their mother and do not want to upset her.

In a detailed description of the techniques used by middle-class mothers in Japan (sometimes described as "professional mothers" because they are entirely devoted to being mothers during the child's early years), Kobayashi (2001) notes strategies such as suggestion and request. When a child is expected to do something, the mother may prefer to ask the child a question about the task instead of issuing a direct command; for instance, she may say, "What about the toys?" instead of "Pick up your toys!" This allows the child an escape to "save face" if he or she is not willing to comply; for example, the child can pretend not to have heard the question or suggestion.

At times, there can be mild teasing of the young child. The child may then develop a fear of being shamed if he or she does not comply. The mother suggests something and then her face conveys that it would be surprising if the child does not do as expected, while maintaining the possibility that the child may not carry out the expectation. The mother does not punish or admonish the child directly. Rather, a tension is created in the child about disappointing the mother. The mother works "within the relationship," as the child is as interested as the mother in preserving a state of harmony and nonconfrontation. Sometimes a third person is used to avoid direct commands. The mother might say, "Should I call your grandfather and tell him about what you are doing?"

Mothers change their technique by reading the mood of the child and discerning whether he or she is in a state to be joked with or whether his or her mood is amenable to drawing the right inferences by reading the mother's behavior and context. At times, the mother may avoid making a request entirely if the child does not appear to be in the mood to comply. The request comes when it is opportune and is likely to succeed.

In an empirical study comparing three groups of Asian (Japan, Bali, and Batak) and European (Germany and Switzerland) mother-preschooler dyads and of adolescent aggressive behavior, Kornadt (2002) encountered important differences

between the Asian and European families. The study consisted of interviewing and observing interactions between mothers and preschool children in several hundred dyads from these countries. Acknowledging that there are no easy generalizations and many individual variations, Kornadt noted that, in general, Asian mothers used fewer negative strategies to interact with their preschool children and deal with their difficult behavior, compared with the European mothers. Mothers from Asia used more benign attributions to explain the behavior of their young children. For instance, if the son or daughter did not want to pick up toys, the mother would explain that the child was “not ready developmentally” to do it, or perhaps was too tired or just too interested in playing at the moment. On the other hand, European mothers tended to attribute more negative intentions to the young child and more readily felt that the child was being deliberately defiant. These mothers also verbalized that the child needed to be disciplined. With the European mothers and children, there was more a sense of two people facing each other in opposition.

In Latin America, particularly among the more “aboriginal people” and the more traditional groups of the population, many of these ideals and beliefs (of the child as perfectible) about child rearing are also prevalent, even among Latinos in the United States (particularly among those who have recently migrated there). Several observations and studies suggest that parents want to ensure that their young child will be respectful of the adults and elders, and they frequently remind the preschool-age child not to be *malcriado* (literally, reared poorly, meaning disrespectful; Delgado-Gaitan, 1994). Through home observations of Mexican immigrants in the United States, Delgado-Gaitan documented the fact that young Latino children, even of preschool age, are not coaxed to develop self-care skills as much as is typical with Euro-American children, for instance, to get dressed, to pick up their toys, to feed themselves, and to get themselves ready for bed. Mexican parents expected that their children would be dependent on them for a comparatively long time and gave considerable assistance in all of these activities (e.g., spoon feeding, bottle feeding, dressing). At least with the very young child, these mothers tend to be indulgent, and families idealize the mother-child relationship as the closest relationship in life between human beings. Mothers believe they should be totally devoted to their child, deny their own personal needs, and put the parent-infant relationship above all other relationships (Maldonado-Durán et al., 2002). However, in contrast to the strategies of Asian mothers mentioned earlier, Mexican mothers are also likely to use punitive measures “if need be,” particularly with the preschool age child, even when they may later regret using the harsher strategies (see following).

Intentional Child

Many parents in the United States and other westernized countries want their children to be assertive, to speak their mind, and to maximize their individual potential so that they can succeed in a competitive society. More self-control is expected and children are encouraged to exert more individual freedom. In practice, the expectations are at times enforced to the point that the child has to “fit” into a model of a well-regulated and highly competent little boy or girl, when sometimes this is very difficult for particular children to achieve (Maldonado-Durán et al., 2003).

According to this set of beliefs, which lead to strategies widely practiced in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and other countries in Europe, parents believe it is important to eliminate undesirable behaviors as soon as possible and to promote healthy habits from then on. Stork (1985) refers to this strategy as rooted in a naïve theory of original sin of infants: The notion is that children come into this world with negative biases that have to be carefully corrected by their parents. Caregivers see the child as an individual from the start and as someone who needs help to develop self-control and self-soothing mechanisms soon. Instead of the model of a “shared mind,” here there are two separate minds—let us say mother and child—from the start and with perhaps different agendas. The child has a tendency to cry, to want to sleep with the parents, to require assistance to go to sleep, and, as a toddler, to exert his or her own will. How can the child be taught to curb all these tendencies?

One controversial strategy, but one clearly endorsed in survey after survey in the US, the UK, and elsewhere as a reality and a necessary intervention, is spanking and other physical punishments (Nobes, 1997; Strauss, 1999). In several surveys, mothers (and fathers) in the US and the UK readily reveal their belief in the importance of spanking as a disciplinary method even for very young children, with higher endorsements by those of lower socioeconomic status (Socolar and Stein, 1995). In a study conducted by Strauss (2000) in Minnesota, of 1,002 mothers interviewed, 53% had been advised by a family member or a friend to spank their child as a primary discipline strategy. In the US, a Gallup poll conducted in 1995 showed that 74% of children under 5 years old have been hit or slapped by their parents as a

disciplinary means (Gallup Organization, 1995). In the US and Canada, there seems to be a difference in strategies depending on the age of the child. The frequency of spanking is highest with preschool-age children and lowest with adolescents (MacMillan et al., 1999). Even in “wealthy” countries like Switzerland, a third of parents say they believe in physical punishment and may use it regularly.

Spanking might be an “end behavior” that may be correlated with other beliefs and actions. Socolar and Stein’s 1995 survey of over 200 parents indicates that parents believe that even very young children should be spanked (19% endorsed spanking during the first year of life). Socolar and Stein encountered a correlation between the belief in spanking and a general interest in harsher discipline and a more negative view of children. Smith and Brooks-Gunn (1997) reached a similar conclusion in a follow-up study of 715 premature infants at age 3. These authors found that less interpersonal warmth, less parent-child interaction, and harsher discipline were correlated. Parents of lower socioeconomic status practiced harsher discipline, particularly with boys. Smith and Brooks-Gunn also found that the daughters of parents who used harsher disciplinary strategies rated 12 points lower on an IQ test.

In two meta-analyses of studies of spanking, Lazerele (1996, 2000) examines those that show positive results from “nonabusive hitting,” and also what factors lead to negative behavioral results. In Lazerele’s analyses, success is defined only as the fact that the child (including toddlers and preschoolers) complies promptly with parental commands, which some have criticized as not looking at the long-term goal of developing a positive and warm parent-child relationship. Lazerele’s study also compares the effectiveness of “withdrawal of love” and ignoring the child (e.g., timeouts). Lazerele concludes that spanking might be as “effective” in producing that success: compliance with commands as those episodes of withdrawal of love. An important cultural bias of the study is the importance assigned to compliance on the part of the child as the definition of success.

By comparison, in a study in seven Latin American cities and Madrid, Spain (Orpinas, 1999), a smaller proportion of parents reported using spanking during the past month (24% of women and 15% of men). In general, even when parents practiced spanking with the young child, they readily said they wished they could use other methods because spanking was not desirable. They ascribed its use more to frustration with stressors such as financial and environmental problems (Lopez-Stewart et al., 2000). That is, they saw a problem with spanking and did not endorse it as a good strategy. Also, a study by Hashima and Amato (1994) found that a relatively lower proportion of Hispanics in the US used physical punishment with their children.

In focus groups conducted by researchers in Chile and Costa Rica (Lopez Stewart et al., 2000), the authors found somewhat higher rates of physical discipline: About 30% of parents said that children should be hit sometimes or always when they misbehave, although the parents also listed different responses for different transgressions.

A majority (about 80%) of parents in the English-speaking West Indies believe that it is necessary to use physical punishment to raise children (Gopaul-McNicol, 1999). Many of these parents see mild forms of spanking as an act of love, the necessary ingredient to teach children limits, for instance, to punish disobedience, “talking back” (questioning or challenging the parent’s directives), laziness, and aggressiveness toward others.

Baumrind (1996), who is widely recognized for her studies on the effects of parenting styles in the US, suggests that the effects of a disciplinary method are determined in part by the child’s perception of the legitimacy of the method or how reasonable it is. So in a culture that widely endorses spanking, the child may not perceive spanking as an unusual or cruel disciplinary technique on the part of the parents. There is evidence of transgenerational transmission of spanking and yelling, which is used much more frequently by parents who remember having experienced those strategies as children (Homenway et al., 1994. Howard, 1996).

One important question is whether the effect of spanking or physical discipline is different for Euro-American children than for African American ones. It has been suggested without empirical evidence that spanking may or may not have a negative impact on the development of children, specifically in terms of aggressive behavior later on, depending on the meaning of spanking within that culture. In a study of 1,112 children in the National Survey of Families and Households, Gunnoe and Mariner (1997) suggested that spanking had a negative effect only for Caucasian boys between 8 and 11 years old, but not for other ethnic groups or other ages. In fact, it seemed to inhibit interpersonal aggression in preschool African American boys. Gunnoe and Mariner’s idea is that if spanking is culturally condoned and considered a

manifestation of care and parental involvement, it may not have such a negative effect as when it is seen by the child as a manifestation of parental aggression. Specifically, there is the suggestion that in African American families, spanking might be correlated with more parental warmth and reasoning with children. Some authors have offered the explanation that a higher degree of parental control is protective in such minority families against the negative influences of deprived/stressful neighborhoods (Forehand and Kotchick, 1996; Walker-Barnes and Mason, 2001). Also, it has been suggested that African American children report more positive emotions vis-à-vis the controlling behavior of their parents, which they may interpret as an expression of concern and caring (Deater-Deckard et al, 1996; Whaley, 2000).

In an observational study in several public places in a large urban area of the United States, Davis (1996) observed another strategy commonly used by parents with toddlers and preschool children: “verbal discipline” in several forms. This study of “naturalistic” situations details what parents do verbally, what causes them to do it, and what is the meaning of the verbal statements. First, these verbal strategies were quite frequent, and it was therefore hypothesized that they are often used by parents. The verbalizations consisted of threatening to spank the child, yelling angrily, or involving a stranger by saying that the stranger (e.g., a store clerk) would scold or spank the child, as well as “counting off.” Counting off means counting from one to three, gradually raising the voice and indicating the imminence of a very negative consequence. Other, less frequent strategies were calling the child unfavorable names, cursing, yelling, making fun of the child, or making sarcastic remarks about the child’s character. About half the time, the threats were followed by an actual spanking. Two additional components are important: (a) Uniformly, the child is held entirely responsible for the situation, highlighting in this way that the child caused the punishment. (b) Bystanders and other people appear fairly indifferent to the situation and act as though nothing were happening. Davis concludes that there is a code of “nonintervention,” at least for the threats and denigrations. In addition, adults often appeared to feel that because they had issued a warning or threat, the entire responsibility for the next steps rested with the small child; thus, the adults justified the subsequent physical discipline. Verbal threats appear more innocuous but may be a source of considerable emotional distress and fear for the young child (Davis, 1996).

A variant of threats and counting off is “scaring the child.” This is usually practiced during the preschool years but can start earlier. It consists of frightening a youngster with the police (“a police officer will take you”) or with a scary being from another world (witches, boogymen, monsters) taking the child away for misbehaving. This is also practiced by parents in Latin America, where parents may tell their children that if they do not behave properly, an animal (e.g., a scary dog) might be called or a witch might come in the night, and there would be permanent and severe consequences. There is no information about the link between these practices and anxiety disorders or fearful behavior later on.

Parents in the United States are often advised to give “timeouts” to children, during which they do not interact with the child. A standard suggestion is to give 1 minute of timeout per year of age. There is no empirical basis for this recommendation, which has been readily accepted by the public. There is little information about what timeouts do to children, although they may be highly stressful (see following). They are clearly an artificial device suggesting withdrawal of love and “cutting off” the child temporarily until he or she can “decide to be nice,” or simply a sentence for a transgression (“serving time”). For many parents, it is very important that no transgression go unpunished, because otherwise the child might become spoiled (Maldonado-Duran et al., 2003).

Parents also use often techniques-at-a distance (as opposed to using body contact) to try to redirect their toddler’s behavior, for instance, saying “stop” or “no” and expecting even very young children to heed those proscriptions. As in many other aspects of this way of thinking, these strategies demand a lot of self-control in the child, and more temperamentally intense, energetic, or persistent children fail to comply with those standards, eliciting frequent negative behaviors. Unfortunately, the parental response is often to redouble the effort—through punishment—to teach the difficult child to comply, setting off a spiral of negative interactions (“us vs. them,” parents vs. children). Several authors (Howard, 1996, Strauss, 1994) advocate more positive strategies such as praising and working to maintain a positive parent-child relationship.

As Wissow (2001) has emphasized, parents tend to use a variety of strategies to discipline or educate their children, and not just one or two methods. Besides depending on parental beliefs, the strategy depends to some extent on the style or personality of the child (a more difficult vs. an easy child), the gender, and the stressors that may affect the family.

Wissow's review of a national sample of 2,017 parents (Survey of the Commonwealth Fund of Parents with Young Children) with telephone interviews found some tendencies. In this sample of US parents, those who used spanking with young children also tended to use other strategies that were less physical, such as giving timeouts, taking things away from the child, and reasoning. However, those parents who spanked the most, more frequently, or more intensely tended to have higher psychosocial stress, more aggravations at work, and more depressive symptoms. These parents also did fewer "positive" things with their child, such as reading stories, playing, and hugging. Using a cluster analysis, Wissow found a sort of "split" between parents: Yelling, spanking, and screaming are strongly correlated, and those parents who use them more are precisely those who experience more poverty, have lower education, and have more stressors in general.

The studies of Kochanska in the US suggest that more gentle child-rearing strategies with young children, in which the mother does not emphasize her power, are generally more effective in modulating behavior with children who are more sensitive and anxious. With children who are more "bold" or intense, it appears that the mother's effort to be more responsive and to establish a close emotional bond with the child fosters the development of the child's conscience and self-monitoring (Fowles and Kochanska, 2000; Kochanska, 1995, 1997; Collins et al., 2000). It also seems clear that with the more difficult child, more punishments and negative feedback or lack of responsiveness not only do not help, but also tend to worsen the behavior problem (Caspi and Elder, 1988; Van den Boom, 1989). This effect has been observed even in adopted children; the more negative the predisposition of the child, the more parents tend to use negative strategies (O'Connor et al., 1998).

Gender Differences

In the United States (and elsewhere), boys are at higher risk of more severe physical punishment (Smith and Brooks-Gunn, 1997). There is a strong suggestion that even from infancy, boys are treated somewhat differently than girls. Girls may be more expressive of emotions such as sadness, interest, and concern for others, whereas in boys this may be less encouraged by parents. Boys appear to be more intense in their expression of discontent, anger, and pain. It is likely that parents may not encourage as much expression of emotion in boys (Underwood, 2003). Anger may be more suppressed in girls and more tolerated in boys. There is also some suggestion (Wissow, 2001) that spanking (but not physical abuse strictly defined) of African American girls might be associated with fewer behavioral difficulties, whereas in Caucasian boys it seems related to higher rate of interpersonal problems.

Preschool girls may experience more feelings of guilt (compared with boys), which in turns inhibits their transgression of rules and elicits less negative interactions (Kochanska et al., 2002). In a study of 103 children, this author noted that the children of mothers who used more assertive discipline or more intense strategies experienced less guilt. Also, girls tend to imitate more what their parents do and are easier to engage in a relational regulation of behavior (Forman and Kochanska, 2001; Maccoby, 1990).

A related question is whether fathers and mothers have different beliefs about children's behavior, or a different attributional system. In a study of parental attributions and beliefs in which 142 parents answered a questionnaire about attributions for children's behavior, McGillicuddy-DeLisi (1992) found a relatively high level of correspondence between spouses on their beliefs.

What is the Impact, Effectiveness, or Consequences of Discipline?

There is scarce empirical information about the effects of discipline on the development of children, except for the case of harsh physical discipline in several Western countries. More intense physical punishment is associated with more aggressive behavior and more violence as the child grows older. Even more subtle harsh discipline, such as timeouts in infancy, has been shown to have negative effects in terms of altering the stress response of infants (Bugental et al., 2003), leading to elevation of serum cortisol, which may have a disorganizing effect on the child. If chronically elevated, serum cortisol may have an effect similar to that of repeated traumatic experiences.

An analysis of a segment of the 1970 National Cohort Study carried out in Great Britain (Thompson et al., 2003), which consists of follow-up of 16,151 children (born between April 5 and 22, 1970, in England, Wales, and Scotland), found an association between "harsh parenting" during the preschool years and a significantly greater likelihood of behavioral

problems at ages 5 and 10. "Harsh parenting" meant the belief in authoritarian practices. The most significant items were obtained from the Maternal Opinions Questionnaire. The markers of harsh parenting were statements such as the following (applicable to a preschool-age child):

- Children under 5 should always accept what their parents say as being true.
- Nothing is worse than a person who does not feel great love, gratitude, and respect for his/her parents.
- A well brought up child is one who does not have to be told twice to do something.
- A child should not be allowed to talk back to his parents.
- Preschool children should pay more attention to what they are told.
- Children should not be allowed to talk at the meal table.
- There are many things a 5-year-old child must do with no explanation from his parents.

This study found an association between those beliefs/practices and higher rates of externalization symptoms such as lying, stealing, bullying, aggressive behavior, and hyperactivity. There was also an association with lower socioeconomic status and high maternal stress or depression.

Similar findings are reported by Jackson et al. (2000) with 188 families. Poverty, single parenthood, and maternal depression were associated with more difficult behavioral problems in the preschool-age child. The mediating effect of poverty on deteriorating maternal attitudes is an important element found in other studies as well. A study in Australia also found a correlation between "working class" parents and more use of corporal punishment in comparison with middle-class parents (Najman et al., 1994).

There may be a dose-effect relationship between spanking/slapping during childhood and alcohol abuse and interpersonal difficulties later on, as shown by a survey conducted by MacMillan and her group (MacMillan et al., 1999) in Canada with almost 5,000 adults, excluding a history of physical abuse. The association was particularly strong in adults who reported that they had been slapped or spanked "often." Strauss (1995) found an association between physical discipline and depression in adults, again with a dose-effect relationship: The harsher the discipline, the more likely the adult would suffer depression.

In Sweden, physical punishment has been outlawed for over 10 years, and the results suggest that it might lead to fewer cases of child abuse and a reduced incidence of the finding of child abuse in emergency rooms. These results have been questioned, and some authors argue that there has been no change in the parents' private behavior at home (Lazerele, 1999). However, harsh discipline could only be curtailed when coupled with an educational component about alternative ways of disciplining.

In a study of the transgenerational transmission of parenting attitudes, Holden and Zambarano (1992) found that when parents have a positive attitude toward spanking and report using more physical discipline, their children as young as 5 years of age already endorse more the idea of spanking and say they would use the technique with their own children. These authors refer to "passing the rod" between one generation and the next.

In the study by Kornadt (2002) mentioned earlier, in the adolescent samples, Asian teenagers tended to have less interest in aggressive responses and even when frustrated they more readily reacted with empathy toward the aggressor. It is also very clear that in those Asian groups, the episodes of aggression and crime are much less frequent than in the European countries or the US. It is tempting to wonder whether the experience of less coercive discipline by parents is related to those outcomes.

In another study of teenagers (McAlister et al., 2001) comparing the attitudes of students toward war, killing, and punishment of children in several countries (US, Estonia, Finland, Romania, and the Russian Federation), American students in general endorsed the more aggressive means to address problems, including physical punishment of children (27% of American students vs. an average 10% of the other groups). These teenagers will become parents eventually and will have to face the challenge of preparing their own children for life in society.

Final Considerations

Parental beliefs and the adults' "working model" of what a child is are important factors leading to different strategies of child-rearing and discipline, together with social and economic realities and the amount of psychosocial support experienced by parents dealing with young children. From the present review, it would seem clear that the harsher strategies of discipline do lead to worse interpersonal outcomes in the child, and that these outcomes may be correlated with symptoms of depression and a less intimate relationship between the young child and his or her caregivers.

A major consideration to take into account is "who is in charge of the child" in different social groups. For instance, in traditional societies that are matrilineal, the strongest attachment and duty to rear the child fall on the mother and the mother's brother, that is, the child's uncle; the biological father takes a secondary role. In those societies, the role of the "father" falls on the maternal uncle.

The picture is also complex considering cultures with very active involvement by the extended family. In those groups, the "family" is not father, mother, and children, but includes grandmothers, grandfathers, aunts, uncles, and cousins. They are "the family." An important factor is that other people, in the family and outside the family, may provide more or less informal discipline to any given child, particularly as the child reaches preschool age. Also, there may be a hierarchical order of "who is in authority," and the final authority or say on a given topic may not rest with the child's parents, but with the grandparents or the eldest relative in the family. This elder and presumably wiser person has the most authority and nothing can change without this person's permission. In dealing with families, a clinician not versed on this issue may assume that the biological parents are in charge of a given child, when every decision has to be "cleared," for instance, with the grandmother.

Also, it has been suggested that in cultures where the family has become almost exclusively nuclear, there are some disadvantages for the children and the parents. One disadvantage is the diminished support and "wisdom" in child rearing and discipline from experienced people. Another is that the children and the parents share a more intense and constant interaction compared with what would happen if more relatives or neighbors were involved with the children. Those "others" are agents of socialization, models and identification figures, as well as occasionally "disciplinarians." Little is known about the comparative effect of growing up with these influences versus the impact primarily from the biological parents.

Another important issue is that immigrant parents may have a psychic model of parenting and child rearing and they may face a very different model in the host culture. In leaving their country of origin, they may lose all those additional people in the young child's life and be left as the only influential figures for their child. These parents may face a number of expectations by the host culture regarding how to "control" their children, the kinds of discipline or consequences that should be used, and parental behavior in general. Those expectations may be at odds with the practices and values of the immigrant parents. This clash of cultural values, expectations, and practices may lead to serious misunderstandings and prejudices on both sides.

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