This book is appearing in America some two and a half years after its first publication in Germany, and it is probably just as well that it wasn’t available before now in this country. Had it appeared here earlier, American readers might well have asked: “Why should we still bother with Hitler today? That’s all ancient history,” and “Who is this Christiane F.?” But now, after so many young Americans have seen their own tragedies mirrored in the film and book about Christiane F., the teenage German drug addict, and after all the talk in the media the past few years about the danger of nuclear war, it should come as no surprise that I have chosen Adolf Hitler and Christiane F. as representatives, respectively, of extreme destructiveness on a world-historical scale and of extreme self-destructiveness on a personal one.

Since the end of World War II, I have been haunted by the question of what could make a person conceive the plan of gassing millions of human beings to death and of how it could then be possible for millions of others to acclaim him and assist in carrying out this plan. The solution to this enigma, which I found only a short while ago, is what I have tried to present in this book. Readers’ reactions to my work convinced me how crucial others find this problem too and how the terrifying stockpiling of nuclear weapons worldwide raises the same question in an even more acute form: namely, what could motivate a person to misuse power in such a way-

-as to cause, completely without scruples and with the use of beguiling ideologies, the destruction of humanity, an act that is altogether conceivable today? It can hardly be considered an idle academic exercise when somebody attempts to expose the roots of an unbounded and insatiable hatred like Hitler’s; an investigation of this sort is a matter of life and death for all of us, since it is easier today than ever before for us to fall victim to such hatred.

A great deal has already been written about Hitler by historians, sociologists, psychologists, and psychoanalysts. As I attempt to show in the pages that follow, all his biographers have tried to exonerate his parents (particularly his father), thus refusing to explore what really happened to this man during his childhood, what experiences he stored up within, and what ways of treating other people were available as models for him.

Once I was able to move beyond the distorting perspectives associated with the idea of a “good upbringing” (what is described in this book as “poisonous pedagogy”) and show how Hitler’s childhood anticipated the later concentration camps, countless readers were amazed by the convincing evidence I presented for my view. At the same time, however, their letters expressed confusion: “Basically, my childhood differed little from Hitler’s; I, too, had a very strict upbringing, was beaten and mistreated. Why then didn’t I become a mass murderer instead of, say, a scientist, a lawyer, a politician, or a writer?”

Actually, my book provides clear answers here, although they often seem to be overlooked: e.g., Hitler never had a single other human being in whom he could confide his true feelings; he was not only mistreated but also prevented from experiencing and expressing his pain; he didn’t have any children who could have served as objects for abreacting his hatred; and, finally, his lack of education did not allow him to ward off his hatred by intellectualizing it. Had a single one of these factors been different, perhaps he would never have become the arch-criminal he did.

On the other hand, Hitler was certainly not an isolated phenomenon. He would not have had millions of followers if they had not experienced the same sort of upbringing. I anticipated a great deal of resistance on the part of the public when I advanced this thesis—which I am convinced is a correct one—so I was surprised to discover how many readers, both young and old, agreed with me. They were familiar from their own backgrounds with what I depicted. I didn’t have to adduce elaborate arguments; all I needed to do was describe Hitler’s childhood in such a way that it served as a mirror, and suddenly Germans caught their own reflections in it.

It was the personal nature of their responses to the three examples I present in my book that enabled many people to understand in a more than purely intellectual sense that every act of cruelty, no matter how brutal and shocking, has traceable antecedents in its perpetrator’s past. The diverse reactions to my book range from unmistakable “aha” experiences to angry rejection. In the latter cases, as I have already indicated, the following comment keeps recurring like a refrain: “I am living
STUDY: THOSE AT HOME IN MOST DANGER OF RAPE

RICHMOND—Women and girls have long been warned to beware of the stranger lurking on a dark street, but they face a greater danger of sexual assault at home by someone they know, a state study shows.

More than half of sexual assaults take place in the victim's home and more than a third of the attackers are relatives, according to the study of 1,149 convicted sexual assault offenders in Virginia. Slightly more than half of those convicted go to prison.

"Felony sexual assaults aren't really the stranger lurking in the bushes at night," said Tammy Poulos, a senior research analyst with the state Department of Criminal Justice Services.

"Most sexual assaults occur in homes and the victims are often young children," she said. "The findings are pretty frightening. I think it's going to shake up people's view of what they view as the typical rape."

Poulos said this is the first Virginia study that examines details of felony sexual assaults. She randomly picked 1,149 cases that occurred between 1986 and 1990.

Some findings are similar to those in a national study of rape victims done by the National Victim Center in Arlington last year. Both studies found that about 20 percent of the attackers are strangers. More than a third are relatives, usually a parent; and the rest are friends or acquaintances.

The national survey found that 61 percent of the rapists involved victims younger than 18. Poulos said she found three-quarters of the sexual assault victims were under age 18 and more than half were under age 13.

"People think of it in terms of child abuse, but we need to think of it as rape," she said.

The study also found a pattern of rapists being convicted of a lesser offense. Presentence reports showed that 42 percent of those convicted of aggravated sexual battery had actually raped their victim, Poulos said.

In Virginia, rape and forcible sodomy carry a maximum sentence of life in prison. Aggravated sexual battery, which is a sexual attack that does not include penetration, carries a maximum penalty of 20 years in prison.

About 55 percent of those convicted of any felony sexual assault were sent to prison. Poulos said. The rest received probation or less than a year in jail.

Prosecutors often have difficulty proving a rape, particularly when the victim is a child, said Alexandria Commonwealth's Attorney John Kloch, member of Lt. Gov. Donald Beyer's commission on sexual assault.

A conviction for aggravated sexual battery is "a fallback situation," he said. "It still has a pretty hefty penalty."

As for the sentencing, Kloch admitted that courts and the victim's families sometimes do not treat rape by a relative as seriously as an attack by a stranger.

"It shouldn't make a lot of difference, but the fact is sometimes it does," he said. "It's a phenomenon that society suffers by."

Kloch said he hoped sexual assault prosecutions would become easier under bills passed by this year's General Assembly at the urging of the commission. One says a witness cannot be barred from testifying solely because of age. Others expand the definition of certain sexual assaults, require victim impact statements for child victims and add a $100,000 maximum fine for aggravated sexual battery.

Nancy Brock, executive director of the Response rape crisis center in Norfolk, said in some ways the study is encouraging because it shows that relatives are being convicted of sexual assault.

When she began rape counseling 18 years ago, most convictions were for rapes by a stranger, she said.

"Just in the last few years have we reached the state in our society where we understand that rape is committed by relatives and acquaintances and friends," Brock said.

Although people tend to make a distinction between "spanking" and "beating" a child, considering the former a less severe measure than the latter, the line between the two is a tenuous one. I just heard a report on an American radio station about a man—a member of a Christian fundamentalist sect in West Virginia—who "spanked" his son for two hours. The little boy died as a result. But even when a spanking is a gentler form of physical violence, the psychic pain and humiliation and the need to repress these feelings are the same as in the case of more severe punishment. It is important to point this out so that readers who receive or give what they call "spankings" will not think they or their children are exempt from the consequences of child beating discussed in this book.

Probably the majority of us belong to the category of "decent people who were once beaten," since such treatment of children was a matter of course in past generations. Be that as it may, to some degree we can all be numbered among the survivors of "poisonous pedagogy." Yet it would be just as false to deduce from this fact of survival that our upbringing caused us no harm as it would be to maintain that a limited nuclear war would be harmless because a part of humanity would still be alive when it was over. Quite apart from the culpably frivolous attitude toward the victims this view betrays, it also fails to take into account the question of what aftereffects the survivors of a nuclear conflict would have to face. The situation is analogous to "poisonous pedagogy," for even if we, as survivors of severe childhood humiliations we all too readily make light of, don't kill ourselves or others, are not drug addicts or criminals, and are fortunate enough not to pass on the absurdities of our own childhood to our children so that they become psychotic, we can still function.
hood sufferings, the more we pass them on unconsciously to the next generation. For this reason, I attempt to point out in these pages some underlying connections, with the hope of breaking a vicious circle. For a decisive change could well come about in our culture if parents would only stop combating their own parents in their children, often when the latter are still infants—something they do because their parents were able to attain a position of guiltlessness and inviolability by forcible means, i.e., thanks to the Fourth Commandment and to the methods of child-rearing they employed.

On a recent trip to America I encountered many people, especially women, who have discovered the power of their knowledge. They do not shrink from pointing out the poisonous nature of false information, even though it has been well concealed for millennia behind sacrosanct and well-meaning pedagogical labels. The conversations I had in the United States gave support to my own experience that courage can be just as infectious as fear. And if we are courageous enough to face the truth, the world will change, for the power of that "poisonous pedagogy" which has dominated us for so long has been dependent upon our fear, our confusion, and our childish credulity; once it is exposed to the light of truth, it will inevitably disappear.

A.M.
November 1982
Corporal Punishment and Adult Use of Violence: A Critique of “Discipline and Deviance”*

Demie Kurz

While the corporal punishment of children is an important topic for investigation, Straus’ model fails to demonstrate how the physical punishment of children results in the adult use of violence towards children, “spouse abuse,” assault and homicide. The model is not based on an adequate conception of human learning or development; nor does it provide a suitable theoretical basis for privileging corporal punishment as a major cause of adult violence. Finally, the model fails to provide a context of gender, class, and race for interpreting an individual’s experience and use of violent acts.

Murray Straus has once again drawn attention to an important issue concerning violence in the family—the physical punishment of children. His proposed research project is in the tradition of “family violence” research which Straus helped establish in the 1970s. Straus has written extensively on this topic and has been instrumental in shaping the dominant conceptions of “family violence” in social science research in the United States.

This paper addresses Straus’ proposition that corporal punishment is a major factor promoting adult use of violence. The subject of the corporal punishment of children, its causes and effects, is an important one and deserves careful study. However, there are serious problems with the proposed research project. First, Straus fails to provide a rationale for why corporal punishment should be privileged as one of the major factors contributing to adult use of physical force. Second, the proposed research is not based on an adequate model of human learning and development. Straus’ model fails to locate the study of violent acts in their structural contexts, particularly in the context of gender, class, and race.

The Role of Corporal Punishment in Adult Use of Violence

Straus hypothesizes that children who were physically punished will, as adults, use physical force towards others. Specifically he argues that there is a strong relationship between experiencing corporal punishment as a child and committing child abuse, “spouse abuse,” assault, and homicide as an adult. Straus claims that his hypothesis has empirical support, and he provides data showing a strong statistical relationship between the amount and severity of physical punishment received as a child and physical acts committed as an adult. The premise of this work is that children who experience corporal punishment will both learn to use physical punishment by example and will learn that hitting and the use of physical force is legitimate. Straus theorizes that this happens through “cultural spillover,” a process by which violence in one sphere of life tends to promote violence in other spheres.

On the face of it, the idea that violence begets violence, or that those physically punished as children will in turn use physical force as adults, seems to have a certain commonsense validity. We live in a violent society. Many citizens of the United States would probably agree that parental and teacher use of force are at least vaguely associated with violence elsewhere in society.

However, both in theory and in method Straus fails to provide convincing evidence for his hypothesis. First, he fails to present a sufficient rationale for privileging corporal punishment as a major cause of adult use of violence. Straus presents two arguments for his hypothesis: one is that corporal punishment is experienced by almost everyone; the other is that the physical punishment of children begins in the first year of life and continues during the preschool years “when the deepest layers of personality are presumably formed.” For half of all children, physical punishment continues into the teen-aged years. Straus concludes that “consequently i
ONLY ONE U.S. FAMILY IN FOUR IS TRADITIONAL

WASHINGTON, Jan. 29 — The decline of the traditional family—two parents with children—continued in America in the 1980's but at a slower pace than in the 1970's, the Census Bureau said today.

In 1970, 40 percent of the nation's households were made up of a married couple and one or more children under age 18. That proportion dropped to 31 percent in 1980 and to 28 percent last year, the bureau said.

The information came from a survey of 57,400 housing units conducted in March 1980. Household information from the complete census, conducted a month later, will not be available for several months.

"All of the things we saw happening at a rapid and destabilizing rate in the 1980's are continuing, but at a more moderate pace," said Steve Rawlings, a family demographer at the bureau who wrote the report.

"There's also a slowdown in the net increase of total households and a slowdown in the creation of new households," he said. "It may be the aging of the baby boom. And economic factors may well be depressing the ability of young adults to form their own households."

In other respects, the report depicted a nation leveling off from the breakneck pace of change in the 1970's:

While the number of single parents hit 9.7 million last year, the growth in that category, 41 percent over 10 years earlier, was half the 82 percent increase in that category in the 1970's.

The number of single mothers (8.4 million of those 9.7 million single parents) was up 35 percent from 1980, as against an 82 percent increase in the 1970's.

The number of divorced mothers was up only 1.6 percent annually in the 1980's, as against 9 percent a year in the 1970's.

Household size continued to decline, but at a slower pace. The size of the American household was 2.63 people in 1990, down from 2.76 in 1980 and 3.14 in 1970. In 1940, it was 3.67 people.

The number of traditional families remained fairly stable throughout the 20-year period: 24.5 million in 1970, 24.2 million in 1980, and 25.5 million in 1990. But the total number of households grew at a more rapid pace.

"You could say that all the increase in households has taken place outside of traditional families," said Linda Waite, a sociologist with the RAND Corporation, a California research group. Thus, anything that tended to slow the growth in family households would increase the proportion of traditional families.

Late marriage delays formation of new families and can increase single households. Divorce increases the number of single households.

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is reasonable to assume that there may be lasting effects."

We need much more of a rationale for this research strategy than Straus provides. Efforts by social scientists to predict adult functioning based on childhood experiences have been disappointing. Some children in adverse circumstances appear to be relatively invulnerable and thrive, while other children in privileged circumstances falter (Emde and Harmon 1984; Macfarlane 1964). Straus does not adequately explain how physical punishment received in childhood becomes translated across the life cycle into adult acts of violence. Because interactive effects are critical in human development, research on violence must examine the interactions between children's biographies, their point in the life cycle, and structural conditions.

Instead of considering interaction, Straus focuses only on physical acts of violence, which limits the validity and usefulness of the proposed research. Although he makes strong and comprehensive claims about the effects of corporal punishment, he ignores many aspects of this topic. He does not propose to investigate differences between "typical punishment" and child abuse, and he does not discuss the difficult methodological issues involved in defining abuse (Giovannoni and Beccerra 1979).

Straus is not researching the causes of child abuse, the general impact of physical punishment or abuse on children, or the social-psychological dynamics of how a child who is mildly or severely punished becomes an adult who commits assault, homicide, "spouse abuse," or child abuse. Nor does Straus discuss any other kinds of abuse, such as the sexual abuse of children, a prevalent but often ignored aspect of childhood abuse which particularly affects girls (Russell 1984).

Straus' proposed methodology relies heavily on the Conflict Tactics Scales (CTS), which he developed to measure the frequency and severity of specific acts of physical force. The Conflict Tactics Scales list violent acts. Respondents check off specific acts of physical force, listed in ascending order of severity, which they used in a particular time period. I will discuss the Conflict Tactics Scales below; however, I want to note here that the CTS measures physical acts of force only, without reference to the context within which they occur.

Secondly, with its limited focus on acts of physical force, Straus' research proposal does not provide an adequate
model of human learning and development. Straus’ model is too mechanistic and fails to account for how children negotiate and interpret their experiences. It also gives little attention to the agency of individuals. What about those individuals who were severely physically punished who do not go on to commit violent acts as adults? How do people interpret their experiences of physical punishment as children in relation to other events in their lives? Does it make a difference how people interpret the motives of their parents? What about adults who commit violent acts who were not physically punished as children?

Straus also gives no attention to the agency of parents. They appear as cardboard figures, living out norms of “spare the rod and spoil the child,” rather than as people thinking or making choices about physical punishment. Nor do we have a context for interpreting their behavior. Social groups have different standards for the discipline and punishment of children. Giovannoni and Beccera (1979) found significant differences among class, race, ethnic, and cultural groups in what they considered appropriate punishment of children and what they considered abuse. Finally, by defining a variety of kinds of punishment and abuse as “violence,” Straus makes no attempt to address the point of view of parents, but rather imposes his own definitions of punishment and abuse on their behavior. The question remains however, how can one hope to change parents without understanding the context from which they operate? The success of the primary prevention which Straus proposes to under-take will be limited without the parents’ point of view.

Thirdly, Straus’ model of social learning does not provide a theoretical basis from which to assess the impact of institutional contexts on individual development. In his model illustrating the causes and effects of corporal punishment, Straus lists many structural factors which he believes are causes of the corporal punishment of children: capital punishment, sports violence, media violence, war, legal norms, and sanctioned corporal punishment in schools. This model makes society look like a system in which all parts have somewhat equal input into the creation of violent acts. The model assumes too much equivalence between different kinds of institutions in their power to produce and reproduce violence. For example, there is no discussion of the power of the state to use violence or the state as a source of much of the legitimation of violence through war, the military, or the police. Neither are the “outcomes” of corporal punishment, assault, homicide, “spouse abuse,” or child abuse, contextualized. The family is a different environment from the public world, with different traditions and prescriptions about the use of violence.

Straus does offer a theory, “Cultural Spillover,” to interpret his findings. As noted above, he defines cultural spillover as the process by which violence in one sphere of life tends to engender violence in other spheres. “Cultural spillover” has a certain commonsense logic; violence is a pervasive feature of American society, and it appears logical that violence in one sector should reinforce violence in another. However, this framework is too general. Sociology is the study of the “spillover” of phenomena from one social arena to the next. We need to know how specific cultural and social phenomena are connected. As it stands, “cultural spillover” does not provide us with a framework with which to interpret statistical relationships between childhood punishment and adult use of violence.

In conclusion, we are left without a rationale for privileging corporal punishment as a major causal factor in the study of child abuse, “spouse abuse,” assault, and homicide. Further, Straus assumes a theory of learning which is mechanistic and fails to specify the contexts in which corporal punishment and adult acts of violence are committed. I will now discuss the particular contexts of gender, class, and race, and how they mediate an individual’s experience and use of violent acts.

The Effects of Gender, Class, and Race on Adult Use of Violence

Straus writes as if the use of violence takes place in a non-gendered world. First, Straus makes a major misstatement in his basic hypothesis that there is a strong relationship between the severity of physical punishment children receive and the acts of child abuse, “spouse abuse,” homicide, and assault they will commit as adults. It is not “all” punished children who will grow up to do these things. Adult males and females show very different patterns in their use of physical force. Some girls, possibly influenced by physical punishment they received when growing up, will commit child abuse; comparatively few will commit “spouse abuse,” assault, and homicide. Some boys, possibly influenced by physical punishment they received when growing up, will as adults commit child abuse, wife battery, assault, and homicide. By failing to differentiate males and females, Straus is misleading about the phenomenon he purports to be describing. The pathway to the use of violence by adults is heavily linked to gender.

Straus’ lack of concern for who is committing acts of violence in adult life calls into question the premises and assumptions underlying his work—that violence begets violence, that the victim becomes the victimizer. Straus could presumably add more data about girls and women to his proposed research agenda; however, the fact that he does not view these very major gender differences as significant suggests that his findings with regard to gender will be difficult to interpret. For example, to
understand the connections between corporal punishment and adult use of violence we will need to know more about the differences in how boys and girls are physically punished. Given Straus’ context-free methodology, it will be difficult to determine this, or to determine whether the differences in the physical punishment of boys and girls account for their differential use of violence as adults, or whether it is other institutional and structural factors.

Straus makes a second major error in regard to gender in his assessment of women’s role in “spouse abuse.” Both in this paper and elsewhere, Straus insists on conceptualizing the violence between adults as “spouse abuse.” In this paper Straus assumes that wives’ assaults on their husbands are similar to husbands’ assaults on wives. Straus has always asserted that husbands and wives use equivalent amounts of violence (Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz 1980) and that “in marked contrast to the behavior of women outside the family, women are about as violent within the family as men” (Straus and Gelles 1986:470). Straus’ treatment of “spouse abuse” has been heavily criticized by a number of social scientists (Berk et al. 1983; Dobash and Dobash 1979; Saunders 1988; Yllo 1988) who argue that women do not commit “spouse abuse” the way men do.

Critics dispute Straus’ findings of equivalent amounts of violence between husbands and wives and cite a number of problems with the Conflict Tactics Scales (Berk et al. 1983; Dobash and Dobash 1979; Saunders 1988; Yllo 1988). They point out that respondents were not asked how much violence was done in self-defense, who was injured, or who initiated the violence. Further, the continuum of violence in the scale is so broad that it fails to discriminate among very different kinds of violence. The validity of the data is also in question because of differences in how men and women report information about their use of violence. Finally, other types of data, including police records, hospital records, and surveys (e.g., the National Crime Survey) demonstrate that women are overwhelmingly the targets of violence, not equal partners in that violence.

As for conceptual weaknesses, Straus uses “the family” as his unit of analysis and argues that violence in the family occurs because of the stresses on the family. However, the “family violence” paradigm is incomplete because Straus does not take into account structural differences in power between husbands and wives. Women’s economic vulnerability compared with men, combined with norms favoring the husband’s role as “head of household” and the historic view that men may use force to control wives if necessary, mean that wives do not typically bargain with husbands from a position of equality.

Despite extensive criticism of the idea of “spouse abuse,” Straus has continued to use the same instrument and has repeatedly asserted that women’s use of violence is a serious problem (Straus 1989). Straus’ use of large amounts of Federal money for research whose conclusions have vastly underestimated the harm done to women and greatly exaggerated their responsibility for that violence has provided a distorted picture of this problem to policy makers. It has also directed scholarly attention away from critical questions of how and why so many American women are beaten each year.

Similarly, the proposed research, if carried out, will divert attention away from the structural nature of gender and its effects on the use of corporal punishment, and may distort our understanding of some basic aspects of the physical punishment of children. While Straus focuses on how being hit as a child is a major predictor of “spouse abuse,” others have argued that wife-battering is predictive of child abuse. Bowker, Arbitell, and McFerron (1988) found that 70 percent of wife beaters also physically abused their children and argue that the most important cause and context of child abuse is current abuse of a woman by a male intimate. They also found that the severity of wife beating predicted the severity of child abuse, and that the greater the degree of husband dominance, the greater the likelihood of child abuse. Similarly, Stark and Flitcroft (1985), in their review of medical records, found that children whose mothers were battered were more than twice as likely to be physically abused as children whose mothers were not battered. They also believe that purposive violence by male intimates against women is the most important context for child abuse.

Another example of Straus’ failure to consider gender is his focus on parents’ rather than mothers’ and fathers’ use of punishment. Unquestionably there are mothers who abuse children although they themselves are not battered. However, it is important to understand the differences between mothers and fathers who do not necessarily operate out of the same context since mothers are usually the primary caretakers of children. In fact, Breines and Gordon (1983:504) pose the interesting question “Why do men who do so little child care physically abuse so much?” As the previous discussion suggests, some of fathers’ abuse may be connected to battering, while some of mothers’ abuse
may be connected to the lack of choice about the conditions under which they will bear and raise children—the lack of available birth control, limited access to sex education and abortion (Breines and Gordon 1983), and the isolated conditions under which they do child rearing (Bernard 1974)—structural conditions outside the individual learning model which Straus advances in his paper.

Class and race are also key structural factors in shaping individuals' personal and social experiences. It is surprising to find that Straus assigns these factors such a minor position in his model. "SES" appears in his model as one of 17 "causes of corporal punishment" and is listed under the category "family." We know, for example, that a person's class or race is a key factor in their exposure to violence, both as perpetrators and as victims. We know that there are higher rates of assault and homicide in the lower class (Luckenbill 1984), and that black homicide rates are higher than white rates (Jaynes and Williams 1989:459). Higher rates of crime mean higher victimization rates for these groups. Some believe that social class affects the police disposition of cases (Thornberry 1973), with lower class people being given more serious dispositions. Black people have consistently received harsher dispositions at the hands of the police than whites (Dannefer and Schutt 1982; Fagan, Slaughter, and Hartstone 1983) and are killed by the police more often than whites. There is also more violence in lower class schools (Gotfredson and Gottfredson 1985; Toby 1983) as a result of both student violence and the use of corporal punishment by teachers.

Committing and experiencing violence is clearly related to poverty, unemployment, and racism. Given that this is so, how can we privilege corporal punishment as a primary cause of violence in adult life for those whose lives include unemployment, discrimination, and violence in neighborhoods and schools?

Straus will undoubtedly report his findings by class and race. The problem is that class and race are not endogenous variables; they pervade the entire social context in which a person lives. While childhood experiences, including interactions with parents and parents' methods of punishment, are very influential factors in one's life, they are not all-determining. We do not know how children will evaluate or act on physical punishment meted out by their parents given that they have also experienced violence at the hands of children or adults in their school or neighborhood.

In conclusion, while the causes and effects of the corporal punishment of children are an important area of study, Straus' proposed research plan does not address this subject in a satisfactory manner. With its focus on physical acts of violence, the proposed model of human learning and development is too narrow and too de-contextualized from gender, class, and race to provide an understanding of the connections between the physical punishment of children and adult use of violence. Moreover, if we really want to understand the causes of the adult abuse of children, "spouse abuse," assault, and homicide, we should invest in the study of the structural factors which lead to these behaviors, including poverty, racism, and sexism.

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Reply to Murray A. Straus:
Readings on “Discipline and Deviance”*

Donileen R. Loseke

This paper offers a critical examination of “Discipline and Deviance: Physical Punishment of Children and Violence and Other Crime in Adulthood” by Murray A Straus. It first examines Straus’ text in terms of its methodological rigor and theoretical contributions to sociology and then compares its scientific, abstract, context-free model of social life with the heterogeneous world of lived realities. Also, the likely social control consequences of the call to “stop physical punishment” are considered. Finally, since Straus references the work of Michel Foucault, insights from Fucauld’s Discipline and Punish will be used to raise questions about the possible unintended consequences of focusing attention solely on “physical punishments.”

For several reasons, I approached Murray Straus’ text positively. I agree that the cultural tolerance for “normal” violence sets the stage for “abusive” violence; my own studies on battered women (e.g. Loseke 1989, 1987; Loseke and Cahill 1984) have led me to be concerned with issues of preventing violence; I do not personally believe that children “should” be physically punished. However, after examining Straus’ text as an example of sociology and as an example of social problems discourse, I question both its sociological contributions and the political desirability of implementing its calls for social action, for these calls are based upon an abstract, theoretical, and context-free model of social life.

A Sociological Reading

With numerous figures, explicit attention to methodology, and many correlations and statistical tests, Straus’ text represents one type of sociology, an “academic” sociology that mimics the methods of the natural sciences, a sociology where the scientist claims expert status and tells others how they should think about their lives. Although proper scientific methodology is assumed to support theoretical statements in this type of sociology, Straus’ text raises many methodological questions. For example, there is a long series of two-variable analyses when more sophisticated methodology allows empirical examination of critical interaction effects; few figures show the number of cases upon which analyses are based; no theoretical logic is shown for grouping incidents of violence into categories such as “3-5” or “6-10” in some figures while using different groupings in other figures; and data from women and men often are separated and sometimes are not.

Even if the study were methodologically rigorous, at a more fundamental level I question the need for empirical proof of the “Cultural Spillover” Theory. This theory predicts that “approval” of violence is associated with the “use” of violence and that violence spills from “legitimate” to “illegitimate” uses, from one generation to the next, and from one institution to others. But sociologists know that humans learn from their experiences, that cultural and institutional patterns reflect and perpetuate each other, and that “attitudes” are vaguely and generally associated with “behaviors.” Finally, but critically, although the “cycle of violence” component of this theory has achieved a taken-for-granted status among the general population, it remains a folk theory, a commonsense theory that is true enough to find empirical confirmation, but for which there are more disconfirming than confirming cases (Stark and Flitcraft 1985; Wexler 1990).

Regardless of its contributions to academic sociology, this text develops a new social problem: the physical punishment of children. This claim is made by the text’s presence within a journal call Social Problems, and by the title linking physical punishment of children with other so-called social problems of “violence and other crime in adulthood.” The claim that physical punishment is a social problem is also made by the argument that these data have practical implications for parental and teacher behavior and for national social policy. This is the social problems talk lodged within the academic talk advancing the Cultural Spillover Theory. Social problems talk is political talk encouraging readers to take practical action in this case, to “stop physical pun-

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HARD TIMES SPLIT FAMILIES, REPORT SAYS

WASHINGTON—Poor parents are nearly twice as likely to break up than those with money, the government reported Thursday in its first study of how financial hard times cause families to dissolve. One out of seven married couples below the poverty line splits up, compared to one out of 13 couples with higher incomes, the Census Bureau reported in a study that tracked families for two years in the 1980s.

And when a marriage breaks up, three times out of four a mother and her children who were above the poverty line tumble below it, the study found. In 1990, a married couple with two children was considered poor if the family earned less than $13,254 a year.

"This report is a striking reminder of the ways in which strong family values have to include a strong economic foundation for families," said Clifford Johnson, family support director for the Children's Defense Fund. "We've known intuitively for a long time that poverty and other economic problems create a lot of stress for parents."

President-elect Clinton's newly named assistant for domestic policy, Carol Hampton Rasco, said Thursday she hoped the "exquisite beauty of parental love" would mark the relations of all children with their families.

However, she added, families need more than love. "These primary caretakers of these children must be empowered in their ability to be nurturing through economic security, health-care coverage, meaningful education for their children and themselves, as well as other quality, accessible services," Rasco said.

A marital split sends a poor family spiraling further into poverty, as the father's departure slashes income, Johnson said. For the children, it means inadequate nutrition, poor health, learning disabilities and eventual unemployment.

Sandy Green of Chicago was 33 last March when her husband of two years quit coming home. They had made a comfortable life with his pay as a carpenter and hers as a part-time secretary.

When the family split, Sandy and her newborn baby, Joshua, suddenly found themselves trying to live on less than $250 a week.

She had to pay $470 a month in rent. She owed $560 in emergency-room bills, and had no health insurance. "There was no way we could make it," she said.

They were evicted. "We didn't have a place to live," she said. "Our church helped us for a while."

"When I knew the whole responsibility of raising the baby was on my shoulders, and here it was wintertime, and he needed to be warm and safe and have food—I felt kind of helpless."

The traditional family—mom, dad and kids—has fallen from its central place in American society over the past two decades. In 1970, only one family in 10 was headed by a single parent. By 1990, nearly one family in four was headed by a single parent, usually the mother.

That trend put the "family values" issue at the heart of last year's presidential campaign.

But the Census Bureau study suggested a value that weighs heavily in keeping families together is money in the bank.

ishment." Hence, the academic, scientific and theoretical is offered to inform and shape the practical world. But certainly, these worlds differ in their methods, assumptions, and relevancies.

The Cultural Spillover Theory represents an abstracted, theoretical, and scientifically-created model of social life, a neat and tidy world where major concepts such as "legitimate violence" and "physical punishment" are theoretically defined, where "physical punishment" and "capital punishment" are defined as theoretically similar, where concepts such as "minor violence" and "severe violence" are distinguished via scientific probability theory, where only a limited set of behaviors are the primary data. Calls to "stop physical punishment" are justified by statistical analyses upon data constrained by these limitations and theoretical assumptions.

The world of lived realities is not so neat, tidy, and scientific. This is a world of heterogeneous experience where each unique, particular, situated context gives rise to situated meaning. In the world of lived realities, all meaning is context-dependent (Schutz 1962), and it is within this world of lived realities that the behaviors of "child punishment" now are given meaning (Giovannoni and Becerra 1979).

Straus asks practical actors to step outside the world of commonsense evaluations. He asks readers to suspend the folk methods for evaluating the meanings of violence, to condemn all violence on all occasions, and to judge all violence as morally equivalent. By this logic, the "spanking" of a child—as that behavior now is commonsensically understood—becomes equivalent to "child abuse"—as that behavior now is commonsensically understood. By this logic, violence yielding no injury is equivalent to violence yielding devastating injury, and violence by oppressors is equivalent to violence by the oppressed. By this logic, violence is violence; the meaning exists independent of context.
My perspective as an interactionist, feminist, and interpretive sociologist leads me to remain unconvinced that Straus’ text represents the world of real people in real time. I see abstraction on top of abstraction, rendering invisible the world of lived realities. Straus’ text represents a world constructed by the scientist and for the scientist; it is a world recognizable only to the scientist (Schutz, 1962:43-44). Yet Straus calls for practical action when he asks readers to add “physical punishment” to the list of social problems to be eliminated. Such a call raises a fundamental question: Would a new focus on the problem of “physical punishment” divert attention and resources from the problem of “child abuse” as it now is defined? But even if those most in need of public attention would not face reduced support by a new emphasis on the problems of “physical punishment,” I still ask: Is it a good idea to focus our efforts on stopping “physical punishment?”

Looking at Figure 2 in the text, I wonder why we should use resources to change the attitudes and behaviors of “physical punishment” when we could put our efforts toward eliminating poverty. After all, SES is in the model. Or, why should we use our resources to do the “difficult and expensive research” required to learn more about the effects of “physical punishment” when we might as well use resources for health care research and provision. “Child handicaps” is in the model. But in Figure 2, PHYSICAL PUNISHMENT is in the middle, surrounded by heavy black arrows. It is clear that individual behavior is the issue, and this is what must be changed. Hence, Straus’ proposed model incorporates the “physical punishment of children” into the already existing medical model of “child abuse.” Left behind are the social and cultural determinants of crime and violence. Yes, technically, these are in the model, but they are not in capital letters, they are not surrounded by dark arrows, and they are not in the center.

Although Straus repeatedly reminds readers that the physical punishment of children is only one of many determinants of crime and violence, he nonetheless claims that stopping physical punishment would reduce such deviance. So, I ask another question: If we wanted to “stop physical punishment,” what would we do?

It is unlikely that much change would come from simply telling practical actors that current attitudes and behaviors are wrong and must be changed. Massive education programs in recent years surrounding “child abuse,” “drunk driving,” and “drug abuse” have not yielded desired behavioral changes in and of themselves. Since Straus explicitly incorporates “physical punishment” into the category of “child abuse,” it follows that stopping “physical punishment” would require the same social interventions as efforts to stop “child abuse.” Where does such social intervention lead?

The construction of “child abuse” as a social problem led to myriad mechanisms of social control. In practice, racist and classist assumptions have led control agents to increase their surveillance particularly on African-American, Latino, and poor parents (Newberger 1983; O’Toole, Turbett, and Nalepka 1983). Straus’ proposed model offers seemingly scientific support for this practice, for despite his claim that child punishment is “nearly universal,” SES is in the model as a predictor. Furthermore, although Americans in general support a parental “right” to use physical punishment, modern-day child savers already actively promote the belief that all violence must be condemned. Observers have noted how such a belief gives these social control agents the mandate for early social intervention (Wexler 1990). Hence, Straus offers seemingly scientific support for lowering the threshold for social intervention and social control.

But perhaps this would be justified. If we trust Straus’ text, we would believe that stopping “physical punishment” would help lead to a physically non-violent world. Since disadvantaged groups are often the victims of such violence, it follows that they would benefit the most. Do then the ends justify the means? Only if we believe that the world of lived realities is accurately described by an abstract, theoretical, scientific model of the social world predicting less violence and other crime from “no physical punishment.” Yet even if this were true, there remains nonetheless a perplexing, unaddressed question. Straus calls for “helping parents use alternatives to spanking,” yet as asked by Michel Foucault (1979:16), “What would a non-corporeal punishment be?”

Social Problems Discourse

Straus references Michel Foucault (1979) to support his claim that physical punishment is embedded in the European tradition. Furthermore, the title of the text, “Discipline and Deviance,” implicitly invites readers to compare it with Foucault’s book, Discipline and Punish. So I will. While Foucault did say that punishment was deeply rooted in tradition, he did not focus on physical punishment in modern times. On the contrary, Discipline and Punish is about how punishment has been historically transformed from the brutal physical punishments of the past to the seemingly “gentle” punishments of the present; it is about how the executioner with power over the body has been replaced by psychiatrists, psychologists, and educationalists who employ the technology of the soul. While Foucault did not applaud this transformation, he noted the difference: Physical punishment controls the body, gentle punishment “acts in the depth on the heart, the thoughts, the will, the inclination” (Foucault 1979:16).

I believe that Michel Foucault would have noticed that Straus asks readers to
condemn only individual violence. The myriad forms of violence generated by the State are all but invisible. It is likely that Foucault would not have been surprised by Straus' claim that "no physical punishment" produces better behaved children. Physical punishment controls only the body, while better behaved children result from gentle punishment and disciplines controlling "not only what they do, but also what they are, will be, may be" (Foucault 1979:18). Finally, Foucault probably would not have objected to my use of his analysis to examine "child punishment." Indeed, he noted how family relationships had been absorbing "educational, medical, psychological, and psychiatric schemata," and he argued that the family was becoming the "privileged locus of emergence for the disciplinary question of the normal and the abnormal" (Foucault 1979:215-216).

I end my reading with a warning that Straus' text, and others like it, leave unexamined the amorphous categories of "authority" and "control." No doubt there are negative consequences of physical punishment; perhaps physical punishment may be vaguely and generally associated with "less well behaved" people. But my reading of Discipline and Punish leads me to doubt that other forms of disciplines, punishments, and controls are consequence free (also see McCord, this issue). Perhaps we should be asking what forms of control lead people to the psychiatrist's couch and what forms render humans "docile and useful" to the powers that be (Foucault 1979:305).

It is possible that eradicating physical punishment could lead us into a world with less physical violence, but failure to consider "non-corporal" controls also might lead us to a world where the object of discipline and punishment is to produce "submissive subjects," a world where power relations are rendered invisible (Foucault 1979:294-295). In its most extreme form, this is the world of Oceania in George Orwell's 1984. There was little need for physical control in Oceania because there was little rebellion, and there was little rebellion because the soul was controlled. Most certainly, I do not personally believe that physical punishment is "good," but I do believe that violence and control come in many forms, and that scientific studies narrowly focused on physical violence lead us to ignore the "steep rise in [medicine, psychology, education, public assistance, and social work] as mechanisms of normalization" (Foucault 1979:306).

In summary, implementing the social policy agenda advanced by Straus' text would be non-productive and a waste of social resources at best; at worst, such policies would justify more social control over disadvantaged groups and divert our attention from social practices promoting discipline and punishment in their many forms. Nevertheless, such text will likely find a receptive audience for the research funding and the social interventions it seeks. This type of discourse will live on not because it represents sophisticated academic theory, not because it is based on rigorous methodology, and not because it represents the lived realities and concerns of practical actors. It will likely live on because it can be read as seemingly scientific justification for replacing control of the body with the "innumerable mechanisms of discipline" (Foucault 1979:303) that control the soul.

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Schutz, Alfred

Stark, Evan, and Ann Flitcraf

Wexler, Richard
Questioning the Value of Punishment*

Joan McCord

The author critically examines and rejects the claim that physical punishments lead to aggression through the acceptance of norms of violence. She proposes an alternate theory to account for how children acquire norms and why they become violent. The proposed Construct Theory explains why abused, neglected and rejected children—as well as those who are punished—tend to become anti-social.

Spare the rod and spoil the child,” many have argued. “No,” say others, as they refer to evidence that physical punishment leads to, rather than prevents, violent behavior. Yet only a few, it seems, have whispered that we should question the value of every type of punishment, including psychological punishments and deprivation of privileges as well as physical punishments.

When attention has been focused only on physical punishment, critics typically note that such discipline provides a model for the use of force, thereby teaching people to use force. Murray Straus, for example, argues that corporal punishment contributes to a cycle of violence that includes violent crime, child abuse, spouse abuse, non-violent crimes, ineffective family socialization, and ineffective schooling. Straus accounts for correlations between the use of physical punishment, on the one hand, and antisocial or dysfunctional behaviors on the other by means of Cultural Spillover Theory. This theory is an amalgam of explanations that consider behavior to be learned through imitation of models and adoption of norms supported by groups with whom an individual associates. In this view, individuals come to accept the use of violence—and to be violent—because they see violence as legitimated through its use by role models, and they generalize the behavioral norm to include illegitimate uses of violence.

While Straus is correct that physical punishments tend to increase aggression and criminal behavior, I believe he takes too narrow a view about the mechanisms that account for the relationships. My conclusion is grounded in evidence from longitudinal studies about the transmission of violence from one generation to the next. I offer a competing theory, one that merges evidence from experimental studies designed by psychologists to understand the conditions under which children learn and that considers critical issues related to the learning of language. The competing theory, which I call the Construct Theory, suggests how the same mechanism that links physical punishments to aggression can be triggered by non-physical punishments and neglect. Before turning to the competing theory, I present empirical evidence that physical punishment leads to aggression and criminal behavior and then show that the Cultural Spillover Theory inadequately explains the relationship.

Problems with the Cultural Spillover Explanation

Much of the research to which Straus refers in his analysis of the relationship between physical punishment and misbehavior is cross-sectional. With such data, as Straus acknowledges, one cannot determine whether punishments were a cause or an effect of the behavior. Three longitudinal studies that measured discipline prior to the age serious antisocial behavior began, however, suggest temporal priority for punitive discipline. Comparing children whose parents depended on physical punishments with those whose parents did not in Finland (Pulkkinen 1983), Great Britain (Farrington 1978), and in the United States (McCord 1988), researchers found that those whose parents used harsh physical punishments had greater probabilities for subsequently committing serious crimes. Longitudinal studies of victims of child abuse, too, suggest that violence tends to increase the probability that victims will commit serious crimes (McCord 1983; Widom 1989).

The theory of Cultural Spillover, like similar theories that attempt to explain pockets of violence, postulates acceptance of norms exhibited by the subculture using violence. Although longitudinal studies suggest that violence in the family precedes violence in society, they contain data incongruent with a theory that explains the causal mechanism as socialization into norms that legitimize violence.

One incongruence is revealed in my study of long-term effects of child abuse in which I compared abused sons with neglected and rejected and loved sons (McCord 1983). The classifications

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TABLE 1
Paternal Criminality, Physical Punishment, and Criminality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Father's Physical Punishment?</th>
<th>% Sons Criminal</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>% Sons Criminal</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>52</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

were based on biweekly observations in the homes when the boys were between the ages of 8 and 16 years and living in high-crime areas. Records of major (FBI Index) crime convictions were collected thirty years after the study ended. Twenty-three percent of those reared in loving families and 39 percent of those reared in abusing families had been convicted; but the conviction rate was 35 percent for the neglected and 53 percent for the rejected boys. That is, the data show almost as much violence produced from neglect as from abuse, and greater violence from rejection without abuse than from abuse. Because neglect and rejection typically lead to socialization failure, these results raise doubts that acceptance of norms of violence account for transmission of violence. It would be an anomaly if the very conditions that undermine acceptance of other types of norms promoted norms of violence.

One might argue that Cultural Spillover Theory accounts for violence among the abused and some other theory accounts for violence among neglected and rejected children. Yet neglect and rejection have enough in common with abuse to suggest that a more parsimonious account would be desirable. Furthermore, as will be shown, when neglect is combined with abuse, the result is not increased violence as one would expect were there different causes involved.

My data from the Cambridge-Somerville Youth Study records permitted further checks on the Cultural Spillover Theory. The data include parental criminal records as well as coded descriptions of family life between 1939 and 1945. Sons’ criminal records had, as noted, been collected in 1978, when the sons were middle-aged. Among the 130 families containing two natural parents, 22 included a father who had been convicted for an Index crime. Fifty-five percent (12) of their sons were convicted for an Index crime. In comparison, twenty-five percent (27) of the 108 sons of noncriminal men had been convicted ($X^2_{(1)} = 7.60, p = .006$). The criminal fathers were more likely to use physical punishment: 75 percent compared with 48 percent ($X^2_{(1)} = 4.43, p = .035$). Further, the combined impact of a criminal father using physical punishment appeared to be particularly criminogenic (Table 1).

These data support the view that use of physical punishment increases the likelihood that sons of criminals will be criminals. Cultural Spillover Theory suggests that the increase comes about because sons adopt the norms displayed through physical punishments. If the theory were correct, then the transmission of norms of violence should be particularly effective under conditions that promote acceptance of other types of norms as well. The evidence, however, gives another picture.

Many studies have shown that warmth or affection facilitates acceptance of social norms (e.g., Austin 1978; Bandura and Huston 1961; Bandura and Walters 1963; Baumrind 1978; Bender 1947; Bowlby 1940; Glueck and Glueck 1950; Goldfarb 1945; Hirschi 1969; Liska and Reed 1985; Maccoby 1980; McCord 1979; Olson, Bates, and Bayles 1990; Patterson 1976). Parental affection for the child should increase concordance if a similar mechanism for acceptance of norms accounts for a connection between parents’ and children’s aggression. To test this hypothesis, the

TABLE 2
Child-Rearing and Criminality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>% Sons Criminal</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-punitive</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punitive &amp; Affectionate</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punitive &amp; Not Affectionate</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$X^2_{(2)} = 7.219, p = 0.27$
130 families were divided into three groups: those not using physical punishment, those using physical punishment and also expressing affection for the child, and those using physical punishment and not expressing affection for the child.

The data show that parental affection did not increase acceptance of norms of violence, but the opposite (Table 2). For individuals reared with physical punishment, those whose parents were affectionate were less likely to become criminals. This result does not easily fit an assumption that normative acquisition accounts for the violence.

Another inconsistency is apparent in a longitudinal study that at first glance might appear to support the Cultural Spillover Theory. Widom (1989) retracted children reported to have been victims of abuse or neglect prior to the age of 11. Using records from elementary schools and hospitals at birth, Widom was able to match 667 of 908 children on sex, race, and age with children not known to have been either abused or neglected. Widom’s analyses, based either on aggregate data combining abuse with neglect or matched and unmatched cases, have led her to conclude that violence breeds violence. I reanalyzed her data (Widom 1990) to differentiate effects of neglect from effects of violence.

The matched pairs were divided into those in which the child had experienced sexual abuse (85 females, 15 males), neglect but not physical abuse (205 females, 254 males), physical abuse but not neglect (14 females, 35 males), and both physical abuse and neglect (29 females, 30 males). Assuming that acceptance of a norm of violence accounts for the high rates of crime that Widom found to follow abuse, crime would be considerably more prevalent among those who had been physically abused than among those who had been neglected but not abused.

### TABLE 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sexual Abuse (N=85)</th>
<th>Neglect (N=205)</th>
<th>Physical Abuse (N=14)</th>
<th>Abuse &amp; Neglect (N=29)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Females</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control Worse</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Worse</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Males</strong></td>
<td>(N=15)</td>
<td>(N=254)</td>
<td>(N=35)</td>
<td>(N=30)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control Worse</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Worse</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:
*Percent in each category.

### TABLE 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sexual Abuse (N=85)</th>
<th>Neglect (N=205)</th>
<th>Physical Abuse (N=14)</th>
<th>Abuse &amp; Neglect (N=29)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Females</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>97</td>
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<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control Worse</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Worse</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Males</strong></td>
<td>(N=15)</td>
<td>(N=254)</td>
<td>(N=35)</td>
<td>(N=30)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>77</td>
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<tr>
<td>Control Worse</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Worse</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:
*Percent in each category.
Using Widom’s codes of the individuals’ criminal records, I compared each case with the matched control to see which had the worse criminal record. If both had been convicted of at least one crime, the one convicted for more crimes was counted as being worse.

The data show that neglect is about as crimogenic as sexual abuse and physical abuse (Table 3). Moreover, the combined effects of neglect and abuse are not worse than those of either alone as would be expected if each had separate causal impact. Comparisons of cases and controls for crimes of violence (e.g., assault, murder, attempted murder) produced similar results (Table 4).

These comparisons again suggest that continuity in violence among abusing families has been mistakenly attributed to transmission of norms of violence. Among males, neglect and sexual abuse were in fact more likely than physical abuse to lead to violence. Yet if transmission of social norms accounts for violence, physical abuse should create more. The reanalysis of these data suggest that one ought to search for a common cause, for something shared by neglect and abuse that might lead to violence.

In sum, violence seems to beget violence, but studies of child abuse and of family socialization undermine the argument that violence begets violence through acceptance of family (subcultural) norms of violence. Because neglect, rejection, and physical abuse result in similarly high rates of crime, it seems appropriate to search for a cause in terms of what they have in common.

A sound understanding of the way children learn can explain why physical abuse, neglect, and rejection lead to antisocial behavior. Below I develop such an understanding to show that a norm of self-interest, rather than a norm of violence, underlies the education shared by those who are rejected, neglected, and abused. It is the norm of self-interest that leads to violence in some circumstances.

**Undermining Some Assumptions**

Side stepping the issue of how infants learn, many psychologists have simply assumed that babies are completely self-centered. In contrast, the evidence shows that how much children care about their own pleasures and pains and what they will consider pleasurable and painful is largely a function of the way they are taught.

It may, for instance, be tempting to believe that an infant “instinctively” cries for food, to be held, or to have dirty diapers removed, but evidence points to large contributions from experience. In a study of neonates, Thoman, Korner, and Benson-Williams (1977) randomly assigned primiparous healthy newborns to conditions in which one third were held when they awakened. As anticipated by the authors, the babies who were held spent more time with their eyes open and cried less vigorously while being held; unexpectedly, however, they spent more time crying during non-stimulus periods. The babies had been equated for pretrial behaviors, so the authors suggest that the infants had come to associate their crying with being picked up during the 48 hour training period.

In another study also showing that neonates learn from their environments, Riese (1990) compared 47 pairs of monozygotic twins, 39 pairs of dizygotic twins of the same sex, and 72 pairs of dizygotic twins of the opposite sex. Using standardized tests for irritability, resistance to soothing, activity level when awake, activity level when asleep, reactivity to a cold disk on the thigh and to a pin prick, and response to cuddling, she found significant correlations for the dizygotic twins (both same and opposite sex), indicating shared environmental influences, but no significantly larger correlations among the monozygotic pairs. Riese concluded that “environment appears to account for most of the known variance for the neonatal temperament variables” (1236).

Just as neonates can learn to cry in order to be picked up, children learn what to consider painful. Variability in recognizing sensations as painful has been dramatically evidenced through studies of institutionalized infants, who received serious injuries without seeming to notice (Goldfarb 1958). During the period of observation, one child caught her hand in the door, injuring a finger so severely that it turned blue; yet the child did not cry or otherwise indicate pain. Another child sat on a radiator too hot for the teacher to touch. Observed injuries also included a child who was cutting the palm of his own hand with sharp scissors and another who had removed from her cornea a steel splinter that had been imbedded for two days without any report of pain. All the children, however, gave pain responses to a pin prick, dispelling the hypotheses that they had a higher than normal threshold for pain. Goldfarb reasonably concluded: “The perception of pain and the reaction to pain-arousing stimuli are episodes far more complex than is implied in the concept of pure, unencumbered sensation” (1945:780-781).

Often, children show no signs of pain after a fall until adults show that they expect a “pained” response. Studies with college students show that feeling pain is influenced by pain exhibited by models (Craig and Theiss 1971), role playing as calm or upset (Kopel and Arkowitz 1974), and feedback from one’s own responsive behavior (Bandler, Madaras, and Bern 1968). My personal experience and reports from students suggest that children whose mothers do not respond to their cuts with anxious concern do not exhibit such pain-behavior as crying when they fall.

Not only do children learn what is painful, but they attach pleasure to circumstances intended to result in pain.
Solomon (1980) demonstrated that over a range of behaviors, pain-giving consequences acquire positive value through repetition (see Shipley 1987; Aronson, Carlsmit, and Darley 1963; Walster, Aronson, and Brown 1966). Studies showing that children learn to repeat behaviors that result in “reinforcement” through negative attention demonstrate that expectations are only one basis for the attraction of “pain-giving” stimuli (Gallimore, Tharp, and Kemp 1969; Witte and Grossman 1971).

Children also learn without extrinsic reinforcement. Curious about why so many young children appeared to increase their aggressiveness in experimental situations, Siegel and Kohn (1959) measured aggression both with and without an adult in the room. Only when adults were present did escalation occur. The authors drew the sensible conclusion that young children assume that what is not forbidden is permitted.

The egocentric motivational assumption that underlies classic theories of socialization has been subjected to a series of criticism, most notably by Butler (1726) and Hume (1760 [1777]). These authors pointed out that the plausibility of the egocentric assumption rests on circular reasoning. The fact that a voluntary action must be motivated is confused with an assumption that voluntary actions must be motivated by desire to benefit from them. Often the only evidence for self-interest is the occurrence of the act for which a motive is being sought.

Raising further questions about the assumption of egocentrism in children, some studies indicate that altruistic behavior is not always egoistic behavior in disguise (Batson et al. 1988; Grusser and Skubiszki 1970). In fact, altruistic behavior turns up at very young ages (Rheingold and Emery 1986; Zahn-Waxler and Radke-Yarrow 1982; Zahn-Waxler et al. 1988), suggesting that even babies are not exclusively interested in themselves.

The prevalent view that children require punishment in order to learn socialized behavior rests on three erroneous assumptions. The first two—that children are motivated by self-interest and that what gives them pain is “fixed”—have been shown to lack support in empirical research. The third—that unless there are punishments rules have no power—is addressed in my proposal of Construct Theory.

An Alternative: Construct Theory

Construct Theory states that children learn what to do and what to believe in the process of learning how to use language. In simplest form, Construct Theory claims that children learn by constructing categories organized by the structure of the language in their culture. These categories can be identified by descriptions, much as one might identify a file, for example, “accounting,” “things to do,” “birthdays,” “Parsons, T. . . true.” Some categories are collections of objects, but others are actions that can be identified by such descriptions as “to be done” or “to be believed” or “to be doubted.”

Learning a language involves learning more than concepts. Children learn not only what to count as tables and chairs, cars and trucks, but also what to count as painful or pleasant, undesirable or desirable, and worth avoiding or pursuing. In learning labels, in learning how to name and to re-identify objects, children are constructing classifications. The classification systems they develop will permeate what they notice and how they act as well as what they say.

Construct Theory explains the fact that different people consider similar events to have different affective characteristics—for example, as undesirable and desirable—because individuals construct different classifications of the events. This theory can account for relations between knowledge and action that have led many theorists to conjure “pro-attitudes” as the means by which some knowledge sometimes changes behavior (e.g., Kenny 1963; Milligan 1980; Müller 1979; Nowell-Smith 1954). According to Construct Theory, those reasons that move one to action are classified as “reasons worth acting upon”; no special entity need also be attached to them.  

Learning a language involves learning to formulate sentences as well as learning how to use words. At its most fundamental level, sentences involve stringing together what logicians call “predicates” (which can be thought of as classes) and functional relations among them. Perhaps no component of a sentence is so critical to understanding how punishment works as the connective “if . . . then,” for on this connective punishments rely. This connective also gives linguistic expression to what the neonates described above learned when they cried and were picked up (if I cry, then I will be picked up), what an infant learns by pushing a ball (if I push, then it will roll), and what the child learns when discovering natural consequences in the physical world.

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1 This interpretation of language provides a modification of the Aristotelian notion that action is the conclusion of a practical syllogism: it adds a proviso that the syllogism must correctly represent the classification system of the actor, and then “straightway action follows.” The interpretation also reflects the Humean claim that reason alone cannot account for action. It does so by including motivational classifications as separate from purely descriptive classifications.

2 Wingenstein (1958) demonstrated the implausibility of accounting for language through private identification of meanings.
Both natural and artificial contingencies provide information to the child who is learning about consequences. When a child is credibly threatened with punishment, the information conveyed extends beyond the intended message that the child ought not do something. A punishment is designed to give pain. Unless the chosen event is thought by the punisher to he painful, it would not be selected as a means for controlling the child’s behavior. What is selected as a punishment, then, shows what the punisher thinks to be painful.²

A child also perceives the intention of the punisher to give pain (and may attempt to thwart the intention by saying such things as “I didn’t like the dessert anyway” or “There’s nothing good on TV anyhow”). So the use of punishment shows the child that the punisher is willing to hurt the threatened or punished child. This knowledge may decrease the child’s desire to be with the punisher or to care how the punisher feels, thereby reducing the socializing agent’s influence.

An interesting study illustrates another feature of punishment: it conveys information about what (according to the punisher) is valuable, thus potentially enhancing the value of the forbidden. Aronson and Carlsmith (1963) asked preschool children, individually, to compare five toys until they established stable transitive preferences. The experimenter then said he had to leave the room for a few minutes and placed on a table the toy ranked second favorite by the child. The child was told not to play with that toy but that playing with the others was permissible. Half of the 44 children were randomly assigned to each of two conditions. In the “mild threat” condition, the experimenter said he would be annoyed if the child played with the forbidden toy. In the “severe threat” condition, the experimenter said that if the child played with the forbidden toy, the experimenter would be very angry and would take all the toys and never come back. The experimenter left the child for 10 minutes. Approximately 45 days later, the children were again asked to rank the five toys. For this ranking 4 of the children from the mild threat condition ranked the forbidden toy as a favorite whereas 14 of those in the severe threat condition regarded the forbidden toy as the favorite. Conversely, 8 of those who were merely told that the experimenter would be annoyed had decreased their preference for the forbidden toy whereas none of the children who were threatened with punishment had they played with the toy decreased their preference for it.

In a near replication, Lepper (1973) found that, two weeks later, children from his stronger threat condition were more likely to cheat in a game. There are two explanations for this. Lepper explained the findings by suggesting that the children who resisted with severe threat reasoned: “I am the sort of person who would break the rules except for the fact that I would be punished.” In contrast, according to this self-referential theory, the children under mild threat defined themselves as the sorts of people who generally conform to rules and requests.

I suggest an alternative explanation: The different exposures in the experiment taught the children something about the world and about other people—not primarily something about themselves. The more severe threats taught the children that they ought to orient their behavior around estimates of consequences to themselves. In the process of assessing their self-interests, the children looked for attractive features of things that had been forbidden. The “mild threat” condition in both experiments, however, implied only that the child should be concerned about how the experimenter might feel.

Punishments are invoked only when rules are disobeyed, so that telling a child about rules in conjunction with information about punishments for infractions informs a child that he or she has a choice: obey, or disobey-and-accept-the-consequences named as punishment.

Negative correlations between a parent’s use of punishments and insistence that rules be followed were so strong in their study of misbehavior that Patiersi, Dishion, and Bank (1984) could not use both measures in their model. Believing that punishments were more important, they dropped the follow-through measure. The data, however, show equally that a parent who insists that rules be followed need not use punishments to socialize children.

It might be tempting to argue that rewards circumvent the unwanted effects of punishment as a means for teaching norms. That would be a mistake. Although using rewards does not hazard rejection of the purveyor, rewarding shares many of the characteristics of punishing. Rewards as well as punishments employ the “if ... then” relationship. Laboratory studies have demonstrated, as predicted from the Construct Theory, that contingent reinforcements sometimes interfere with the discovery of general rules (Schwartz 1982). Studies have demonstrated, also as predicted from Construct Theory, that incentives larger than necessary to produce an activity sometimes result in devaluation of the activity being rewarded (Greene and Lepper 1974; Lepper, Greene, and Nisbert 1973; Lepper et al. 1982; Ross 1975; Ross, Karniol, and Rothstein 1976).

Like those involved in punishments, contingencies that use rewards convey...
more information than intended when a socializing agent uses them to convince a child to do something. A reward is designed to be attractive, so rewards contain information about what the rewarder believes to be valuable. When a reward is clearly a benefit to the person being promised the reward, rewarding teaches the child to value his or her own benefit.4

In addition to learning that whatever requires reward is probably considered unpleasant, children learn that the reward is something considered valuable by the reward-giver. That children learn to perceive rewards as valuable has been demonstrated in the laboratory (Lepper et al. 1982). Children were told a story about a mother giving her child two supposed foods; children in the study were asked which the child in the story would prefer: “hupe” or “hule.” Children in the experimental group were told that the mother explained to her child that (s)he could have one (“hupe” or “hule” for different children) if (s)he ate the other. In this condition, the contingent relation led the children to suppose that the second food was a reward for eating the first. The children overwhelmingly thought the second food would be preferred—and gave grounds for the choice in terms of its tasting better. The experiment showed that the contingent relation, rather than the order of presentation, influenced preference because children in the control condition who were told only that the child’s mother gave the child first one and then the other food either refused to make a choice or gave no reason for a selection (which they equally distributed between the two). In other experiments with preschool children, play objects have been manipulated similarly, showing that an activity that is arbitrarily selected as the one to be re-

warded will be “discounted” whereas the arbitrarily selected inducement gains value (e.g., Lepper et al. 1982; Boggiano and Main 1986). These studies show that children learn what to value as well as how to act on perceiving the ways in which rewards are used.5

The Construct Theory explains why punishments tend to increase the attraction of activities punished—and why extrinsic rewards tend to reduce the value of activities rewarded. The categorizing that children learn as they learn sentences in a language can be schematically represented by formal logic. When children become aware of the logical equivalence between the conditional (if x then y) and the disjunctive (either not-x or y), they learn that rewards and punishments weaken the force of a rule by introducing choices. If rewards are designed go give pleasure to the child and punishments are designed to give the child pain, then their use teaches children that they ought to value their own pleasure and to attempt to reduce their own pain.

Conclusion

Rewards and punishments are used to manipulate others. They often result in short-term gains, but their use teaches children to look for personal benefits. Like rewards and punishments, neglect and rejection teach egocentrism. Children brought up among adults who do not attend to their well-being are given no grounds for learning to consider the welfare of others.

Using punishments seems particularly short-sighted. Punishments may increase the attraction of forbidden acts. They also risk desensitizing children both to their own pains and to the pains of others (Cline, Croft, and Courier 1973; Pearl 1987; Thomas et al. 1977). Although severe penalties may force compliance in specific instances, the behavior being punished is actually more likely to occur at a time or place when opportunities for detection are reduced (Bandura and Walters 1959).

No increase in punishment or in reward can guarantee that children will make the choices adults wish them to make. Several studies show, however, that children are more likely to want to do what an adult wishes if the adult generally does as the child desires. In one study, randomly selected mothers of preschoolers were trained to respond to their children’s requests and to avoid directing them during a specified period of time each day for one week. Their children complied with more of the mother’s standardized requests in the laboratory than the comparison group of children whose mothers used contingency training (Papal and Maccoby 1985). The results are mirrored in a natural setting with the discovery that children reared at pre-school age in a consensual environment were among the most likely to value autonomy, intellectual activity, and independence as well as to have high educational aspirations ten years later (Harrington, Block, and Block 1987).

In another study, mothers and children were observed at home for three-months when the children were between 9 and 12 months in age. Mothers were rated for their sensitivity to their babies, a rating based on their perceived ability to see things from the baby’s perspective, positive feelings expressed toward the baby, and adaptations favoring the baby’s arrangements of his or her own behavior. Discipline was rated for verbal commands as well as for frequency of any physical interventions. The baby’s compliance was a simple mea-

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4One could, of course, reward a child by permitting some action beneficial to others or by permitting the child a new challenge.

5The phenomenon is well enough known to have produced several theories, ranging from balance theory (Heider 1946) and Theory of Cognitive Dissonance (Festinger 1957) to Psychological Reactance (Brehm 1966; Brehm and Brehm 1981). None to my knowledge has tied the phenomenon with language.
sure of the proportion of verbal commands the baby obeyed without further action by the mother. Compliance turned out to be practically unrelated to discipline, although it was strongly related to the mother’s responsiveness. The authors note: “The findings suggest that a disposition toward obedience emerges in a responsive, accommodating social environment without extensive training, discipline, or other massive attempts to shape the infant’s course of development” (Stayton, Hogan, and Ainsworth 1971:1065).

Punishments—non-physical as well as physical—teach children to focus on their own gains and pleasures in deciding how to act. If parents and teachers were to substitute nonphysical punishments for physical ones, they might avoid teaching children to hit, punch, and kick; yet, they would nevertheless perpetuate the idea that giving pain is a legitimate way to exercise power. If the substitute for physical punishment were to be non-physical punishments, the consequences could be no less undermining of compassion and social interests.

Children do not require punishments if their teachers will guide them consistently, and they do not require rewards if intrinsic values of what they ought to do are made apparent to them. I am not suggesting that a child will be constantly obedient or agree completely with the values of those who do not punish. No techniques will guarantee a clone. Rather, I do suggest that children can be taught to follow reasonable rules and to be considerate—and that the probabilities for their learning these things are directly related to the use of reason in teaching them and to the consideration they see in their surroundings.

trans turns a spotlight on physical punishment, suggesting that by using violence to educate, adults legitimize the use of violence. I paint a broader canvas, suggesting that by using rewards and punishments to educate, adults establish self-interest as the legitimate grounds for choice.

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