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Sociology of the Family  
Internet Activity 3

Children are often compared to house plants in their needs, but this analogy is less than watertight. Both require attention, good nutrition and lots of sunlight to grow properly; however, unlike plants, children can get into trouble and you can't ignore them when you don't feel like dealing with them. Rules must exist for children to be safe and be able to become productive members of society when they become adults. Rules by themselves will not prevent children from being in danger; therefore punishments must exist to make the rules effective. Many parents select spankings and other forms of physical punishment to discipline their children. What effect does this have on children? Is it really the best way? The issue of whether spanking is a legitimate punishment or child abuse is highly debated. As with all other aspects of private family life, general society as a whole has an impact on how children are punished.

Spanking is probably one of the widest used and oldest child punishments. Spanking on its surface appears to be an effective punishment with no long term effects. Several scientific studies would argue with such a statement. Murray Straus's myths are the results of his research into the topic of corporal punishment and its effects on children. The myths are things that make spanking seem like it is harmless, Straus breaks down the myths and reveals the truth about corporal punishment. The myths agree with most other documentation about spanking. Spanking is ineffective and usually is the result of aggression, not a real effort to correct a behavior. One issue raised about spanking is the non-effectiveness of other punishments on toddlers. Typically the type of behavior that parents are attempting to "correct" at that age is related to natural development of the child. Such behaviors include children putting things in their mouths, and wanting to pick things up. This natural curiosity is something that has always angered parents, but is known to be completely normal by most psychologists, including but not limited to Freud's stages of development. For such activities a spanking can limit a child's natural curiosity and desire to learn and explore the world around them. In most cases with early childhood misconduct it is merely imitation of the actions of a parent. Is it really fair to inflict pain on a child for something that an adult does? When parents see this type of behavior it would be more beneficial for both the parent and

child if the parent would make a conscious effort to display proper behavior when around the child. Until children develop full autonomy at about age 3 they are powered only by natural influences, such as curiosity, and imitating what they see and hear. The biggest problem with corporal punishment is that it is a form of impulsive parenting. Spanking takes little thought and little effort and in most cases is fairly immediate. This makes it the ideal choice for parental convenience, but because of this it can also be fairly impulsive and become linked to emotions. If the actions of a child anger an impulsive parent to a high degree it could result in severe abuse of the child. The book states there are five groups who feel that spanking is acceptable. I find the reasons of each of these groups to be shallow. The believers of non-permissiveness through spanking want to use spanking as a parenting technique primarily because they think without being physically punished children will become immoral. The group that thinks that spanking prepares children to enter the real world have obviously never been to a public school. Children have plenty of time to become injured and tormented with parents having to initiate it. The biblical spankers cite the bible as giving them license to spank children. There are many problems with this, first the book itself is over two thousand years old, humans have come a long way in that time towards better understanding child care. Second, the bible is a translation of an original text; the translations often mirror the opinions of those who commissioned the translation. The third is the location of the highly popular phrase used by the biblical crowd, "spare the rod and spoil the child". The text book states that the phrase is from a 17<sup>th</sup> century poem, not the bible. The group that sees spanking as morally neutral states that spanking is quick, effective and rational. It is true that it is quick, but so is pushing someone over the edge of a building. Things done properly typically take time, child care was never meant to be quick or easy. The effectiveness has been disproven by many studies, including Straus's research and studies conducted by Zero to Three. The claim that rational behavior for a parent includes hitting their child seems a little barbaric. The irrationality in the claim can be seen in the claim by the last group who claims that it is a "harmless psychic release". Because the behavior is done as a "release" it is done with the parent taking out aggressions on a child. This group also claims that it removes the child from guilt. The best reaction to this is in the analysis of how children see their parents. Children see their parents as a god-like figure, if the deity tells the child he/she is forgiven the child will likely feel no guilt. Children don't need pain to be guilt-free. For the most part the disadvantages of spanking must be seen through the

results of numerous studies. All studies and research point to the conclusion that spankings are violent and cause children to become disconnected from parents emotionally, develop violent habits of their own and don't develop as well. The most disturbing of study results is the link between childhood spankings and its effects on the sexual desires of the individual as an adult. A few of the studies state that as adults some spanked children feel the need to be spanked to be sexually satisfied. This is said to be linked to an Oedipus/Electra complex arising from a premature activation of sexual curiosity at an early age due to stimulation of the buttocks.

Additional findings of parenting research shows that corporal punishment is more likely among male parents than female parents. A more detailed analysis of the research result shows that younger men are less likely to use corporal punishment than older men. This could possibly indicate a downward trend, and corporal punishment becoming less popular. According to most of the available statistics on the Internet, African American parents are more likely to use corporal punishment on their children than other races. The information also shows that middle-class parents are less likely to use corporal punishment than lower class families.

Society as a whole has an impact on the amount corporal punishment is used. I agree that violence in society leads to more corporal punishment of children. There could be many reasons for this correlation; one of the possible correlations is with religion. As violent activity that is noted by media increases, the more corporal punishment supporting religious groups press their opinion in an attempt to "correct the problem with the youth". As the media increases their focus on teens and young adults participating in negative behavior, such as violence, parents want their children to be as controlled as possible to avoid that type of activity, but to do that they feel that they must use pain to encourage the desired behavior and develop structure. Another link could be in the general pattern of violence in society. As violent tendencies increase in society as a whole, the more aggression a parent is likely to have and as a result the aggression is unleashed on a misbehaving child.