

Spanking As a Prejudice Against Children

Written by James Talbot.

I'd like to discuss the practice of spanking children on a basis that many women and minorities have experienced for themselves, at least on some level. It shouldn't be seen as unreasonable to address the act of spanking as a practice representing attitudinal behavior that is highly indicative of discriminatory prejudice against children.

It's been said that kids benefit from a good spanking. Some people justify this practice by claiming that today's kids' are getting out of control, and need to be punished more severely. Some folks might be surprised to learn that this generational view has been expressed throughout our history with regard to a number of specific populations of people within our society.

When I hear these prejudicial generalizations, I'm reminded of the misogynistic fellow I once overheard complaining to his buddy about how today's women were getting so high and mighty that if you made them angry or didn't give them their way, you just might wake-up in the morning minus an important body part. We all recognize such statements against women as prejudiced, but I find it somewhat curious that the same types of statements made against children are not generally perceived as prejudiced at all. As a matter of fact, such statements made against children generally seem perfectly acceptable on a social level.

Indeed, it would seem that as a society, we don't recognize negative stereotypes applied to children as being prejudiced, bigoted, or discriminatory. Unlike any other distinguishable segments of our population, regardless of race, religion, gender, or ethnic background, we see that children alone are the only societal group within our population that remains fair-game for stereotypical ridicule, double-standards of treatment, and discriminatory regard. Perhaps most notable is the fact that children are the only segment of our society still remaining unprotected by the umbrella of laws governing crimes of Assault. These are the laws that protect every adult member of our society from the practice of routine corporal punishments, right down to our maximum-security prisoners.

On a societal level, the crux of the spanking issue centers on a prejudicial view that continues to allow children to remain as the last members of the human race who are still not considered as the type of human beings that deserve the same level of legal protections from acts of violence as the rest of humanity. So, for the sake of this argument, it's not the practice of spanking, per se, that serves as the focal point of argument. Rather, I'll be addressing a motivating factor behind the practice of spanking that is seen in the form of a prejudicial attitude toward children which allows an adult to feel justified in

raising a hand to a child for punishment to begin with. In this particular case of stereotypical group prejudice, the existence of the prejudice is evidenced by the great preponderance of those who express a willingness to strike children while at the same time expressing an unwillingness to strike any other misbehaving members of society, not even for the same reasons used to justify hitting children.

In what has become a classic work of literature in the study of human behavior, a social scientist, Theodor Adorno, et al. (1950), determined that the personality type most given to negative stereotypes, prejudices, bigotry, and discriminatory behavior, was found within the ranks of a particular personality type that he described as the 'Authoritarian Personality Syndrome'. There is probably nothing that bears-out his findings more clearly than that which is evidenced by the commonly seen authoritarian nature of parental attitudes toward children. It is the authoritarian approach toward child rearing which stands alone as the causal factor in children being held to a prejudicial lower standard of treatment. It's a standard that is most represented by a fixed belief that children need (and implicitly deserve) to be kept under control through the establishment of fear and intimidation on the part of parents (and other authority figures).

This form of parent-child relationship is invariably associated with punitive acts of physical aggression being initiated by parents against their children as an acceptable practice. As we know, these acts involving varying degrees of violence being inflicted upon children are euphemistically referred to as spankings. Not surprisingly, establishing parental dominance through the use of overpowering physical force for the purpose of causing physical pain and humiliation has traditionally served as the preferred method of punishment for children. This parenting practice has been long recognized by parents as the quickest, most effective, and convenient means by which to control the behavior of children... with fear and intimidation serving as secondary motivating factors.

It's my view that a more strenuous effort should be made to take the wheels out from under the well-oiled steamroller of authoritarian parenting. Spanking is the hub in the wheel of authoritarian attitudes toward child rearing. If the hub can be discarded as unacceptable, the authoritarian wheel will irreparably collapse in favor of yet another step toward a greater humanity.

Many parents who spank seem to be under the impression that the only noteworthy risk carried by this violent form of punishment involves the possibility of causing a small degree of physical harm, such as bruises or welts. It is extremely rare to find a spanking parent who is willing to address, or recognize, the existence of harmful emotional consequences related to spanking. Yet, the truth of the matter is that it's the emotional consequences of the spanking environment that pose the greatest long-term risk to the well being of children. As a motivating force and precursor to whatever outcomes might result from spankings, there can be little doubt that the greatest threat posed to the healthy emotional

growth and development of children is found in the ageist, authoritarian attitude toward children. It's this prejudicial attitude that allows for the degree of disrespect necessary to justify a willingness to hit children in the first place. And, it's an attitude as old as time. It reflects the same disrespect that was once seen being displayed toward other lesser or undeserving members of our society. These were other offending groups of people who were usually unwelcome on the basis of their race, religion, ethnic background, gender, or sexual preference.

Historically, these groups of people have been those members of society who, along with children, also found themselves labeled as just one more group of second class citizens to be viewed with such prejudicial disrespect by the white Christian majority that they made suitable candidates to become the victims of violent crimes of hate.

It shouldn't come as a shock to learn that these crimes of hate against minority groups, happen to represent acts of physical aggression born of the same prejudicial attitudes that serve as the basis for hitting children. At various past points in time, children shared their level of social-status with others viewed in lowly regard and questionable worth. Aside from children, these other second-class citizens of our society included Native Americans, African Americans, wives/women, homosexuals, alcoholics, unwed mothers, witches, sorcerers, atheists/heathens, bastard children, prostitutes, bums/hobos/homeless, ex-convicts, drug fiends, any immigrant group, and foreigners. I don't believe that there was a single immigration group to come into the US that escaped being subjected to an initial period of being treated as inferior second-class citizens. Prejudice is one of our more ugly, harmful, and dangerous human shortcomings. We've now grown beyond all but one socially accepted group prejudice in terms of physical punishments. Wouldn't it be nice to scrape-off the last ugly remnants of prejudice from the bottoms of our shoes and put a final end to acceptable social injustice?

One exceptionally germane example of this group prejudice I've been referring to is the one well known by the female segment of our society. It's been popularly described as male chauvinism, or more recently, Misogyny. Most women are familiar with the prejudiced attitude this kind of knuckle-dragging, misogynistic man holds toward women. True enough, he can often justify hitting a woman. These individuals display an element of contempt that seems to accompany a generalized view of man's innate superiority over the so-called weaker sex. It's a discriminatory attitude that allows this type of man to convey a degree of disrespect that sometimes justifies the use of physical force as a means of imposing his will upon his woman (perhaps even a good occasional spanking to remind her of who it is that's boss of the household).

If any spanking parents happen to find the above scenario barbaric, brutish, and wholly despicable, please hold that thought as I point-out the fact that the prejudicial attitude of the misogynist is the same exact prejudicial attitude that allows parents to treat their

children in the same manner.

To help illustrate my point, let me ask the women readers what they would find as the most upsetting thing about being in a relationship that included being non-injuriously spanked as a punitive measure. To simplify matters, let's suppose that the dearly beloved man, in whose trusted hands you had placed the whole of your care, safety, and well-being, began to discipline you with spankings. And, this occurs while living under conditions that render it impossible for you to escape from the relationship at any time in the foreseeable future. You are totally dependent on this man for your survival and are completely powerless to effect any change in the existing circumstances. If you can imagine how you would feel and react to these kinds of living conditions, you have taken the first step in being able to empathize with the feelings that spanked children find themselves facing in the home. Of course, it goes without saying that you are much better emotionally equipped than a young child to successfully cope with such conditions.

In the hope that there are some spanking moms who would be interested in perhaps gaining a better understanding of why children do what they do, and feel what they feel, I'd like to offer the following questions for your consideration. In the above outlined scenario, do you think that you would consider the acts of being spanked against your will as the most emotionally disturbing element in your relationship with your dearly beloved husband? Or, rather than the act itself, would it be what the act represents in terms of conveying the message that you are regarded as an inferior being that is deserving of being controlled through violent measures? Would it not mean to say that you are seen as less adequate, less competent, less intelligent, deserving of being stripped of your dignity, and unworthy of the respect this man is willing to give others, but not you? Can you think of anything that he could do that would be more distressful, or more threatening to your continued sense of well-being than finding yourself being coerced by a needed loved one each time he thought you failed him as a person, with each blow serving as a reflection of your inability to live-up to his expectations?

In addition, just as this prejudice works against children, his willingness to control you through physical force and pain reflects a disrespectful attitude toward women that would also leave you highly subject to related forms of expressed prejudice, such as finding yourself being made the target of demeaning humor in front of his friends or in public.

For those of you who may have imagined yourselves living under the abusive conditions I've outlined, I'd like to ask you if the thought perhaps crossed your mind that this prejudiced, authoritarian attitude being directed toward you might be more emotionally damaging and cause a greater degree of harm to the relationship you've had with this man than the actual occurrences of being spanked? After being intimidated, forcefully overpowered, and compromised, do you think that the number of blows landed upon you as punishment would have any significant bearing upon the extent of personal

diminishment you'd be experiencing? If so, might this feeling of personal diminishment also cause you to experience a decrease in the level of your self-esteem and personal worth? Well, regardless of how any answers might differ, it is nevertheless true that no one fully thrives in such a prejudicial environment, neither man, woman, nor child.

Regardless of age, all victims of prejudice suffer in mind, body, and spirit... physical harm or not.

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