

## Childhood Physical Punishment and Problem Solving in Marriage

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Drawing from social learning theories and symbolic interactionist understandings of social life, the authors suggest that physical punishment teaches aggressive and controlling strategies for solving the problems of living together and hinders the development of important problem-solving skills, specifically the ability to role take with others. These strategies and skills become part of an individual's toolkit for problem resolution within his or her marriage. The analysis is based on 188 married couples in Washington State who participated in a longitudinal study of the first 2 years of marriage. The analysis reveals the following: Individuals who were physically punished during childhood are more likely to engage in physical and verbal aggression with their spouses, individuals who were physically punished during childhood are more controlling with their spouses, and individuals who were physically punished during childhood are less able to take their spouse's perspective.

**Keywords:** *physical punishment; problem solving; aggression; role taking*

“This is going to hurt me more than it hurts you” is an old saying attributed to a parent preparing to spank a child. Like many folk sayings, however, this disclaimer, focused only on the immediate physical pain of the child and the parent's presumed sympathy about it, has proven to be short-

**Authors' Note:** The research reported in this article is from a longitudinal study of first-married couples, titled Socialization into Marital Roles, funded by National Institute of Mental Health Grant MH46828, under the direction of Irving Tallman, Peter J. Burke, and Viktor Gecas. The authors would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their comments on an earlier draft of this article. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Alicia D. Cast, Department of Sociology, Iowa State University, 107 East Hall, Ames, IA 50011; e-mail: [acast@iastate.edu](mailto:acast@iastate.edu).

sighted and misleading. A growing body of research has shown that the hurt of physical punishment extends far beyond the immediate pain of the spanking. Childhood physical punishment has been associated with a variety of negative outcomes including a greater likelihood of criminal and antisocial behavior (including abuse of spouse and one's own children) and mental health problems (e.g., depression, low self-esteem).

Despite the attention directed at studying the long-term effects of childhood physical punishment on children, our understanding of these effects continues to be underdeveloped (Straus, 2001). Using insights from social learning theory and symbolic interactionism, we contribute to the growing body of knowledge of the long-term effects of childhood physical punishment. We suggest that physical punishment teaches children aggressive and controlling strategies for resolving conflict that they will later apply within intimate relationships as adults. Furthermore, we suggest that childhood physical punishment is not only problematic because of the problem-solving strategies that children are taught (verbal and physical aggression and controlling behaviors) but also because of what it fails to teach them. Children who are physically punished may be less able to develop the ability to role take with others, an essential skill in conflict resolution (Bohman, 2000; Noller & Ruzzene, 1991; Thomas & Fletcher, 1997).

### **Problem Solving in Marriages**

In an effort to understand the processes behind marital conflict and disruption, scholars have increasingly emphasized married couples' problem-solving behaviors.<sup>1</sup> Disagreements between husbands and wives are inevitable; individuals may respond to conflict in their marriages in a variety of ways, however. In general, problem-solving strategies or behaviors are classified as being destructive or constructive depending on the effect of the behaviors on the relationship and whether they facilitate resolution of the problem (Bissonette, Rusbult, & Kilpatrick, 1997; Gottman, 1994; Noller & Feeney, 1998; Tallman, 2003; see also Burlinson, Delia, & Applegate, 1995; Cutrona, 1996).

Constructive problem-solving behaviors facilitate the resolution of problems and include behaviors such as defining the problem and offering a solution in a nonjudgmental fashion, offering compliments, and acknowledging others' perspectives. Constructive problem-solving behaviors also tend to focus on noncritical persuasive techniques and avoid verbal and physical threats. Such strategies help individuals define their perspective for others without criticizing or laying blame. Constructive responses to conflict foster intimacy between husbands and wives and create a supportive environment

where spouses can respond (Burleson & Goldsmith, 1998; Gottman, 1994; Noller & Feeney, 1998).

In contrast, destructive behaviors are overly negative and critical and include behaviors such as criticizing, blaming, complaining, and insulting the spouse. Destructive behaviors escalate negative affect and disrupt couples' problem-solving efforts because they leave spouses feeling alienated and unsupported, making constructive resolution unlikely (Burleson & Goldsmith, 1998; Gottman, 1994). More extreme destructive behaviors, such as violence, are oriented toward coercing the spouse and have been referred to as "forcing strategies" (Stewart, 1998). Using force is a problematic strategy for the resolution of problems because it can "never make anyone do anything"; it can only "restrict action, and then only within the spheres that people are unable to apply greater physical force than is mobilized against them" (Stewart, 1998, p. 243; cf. McPhail, 1994). In brief, destructive behaviors focus on criticizing and blaming others rather than offering potential solutions to the problem at hand.

### **What Physical Punishment Teaches Children**

Research has shown a high degree of intergenerational stability of marital problems and the problem-solving behaviors related to them. In general, parents who are ineffective in solving problems in their marriages tend to have children who as adults also have difficulty in their own marriages (e.g., Caspi & Elder, 1988; Simons, Whitbeck, & Wu, 1994). This research suggests that many of the problem-solving behaviors that men and women use in their marriages are learned behaviors. More specifically, children learn from their parents different behavioral strategies to employ in their interactions with others (Tallman, 2003; Tallman, Gray, Kullberg, & Henderson, 1999).

This explanation is consistent with that advanced by many scholars interested in the long-term effects of childhood physical punishment. Indeed, a prominent argument explaining the link between childhood physical punishment and long-term negative outcomes is a social learning argument. In general, this perspective suggests that corporal punishment communicates to children that "aggression is normative, acceptable, and effective" (Gershoff, 2002, p. 555) and leads to greater acceptance of interpersonal violence. According to Straus (2001),

Children learn from corporal punishment the script to follow for almost all violence. The basic principle of that script is what underlies most instances of parents hitting children—that when someone does something outrageous and won't listen to reason, it is morally correct to physically attack the offender.

That principle, which is taught by corporal punishment, explains most instances of violence . . . . Lost along the way is the principle that all differences must be dealt with without violence (except where physical self-defense is involved). (p. 101)

If physical punishment teaches children that verbal and physical aggression are appropriate ways of responding to conflict, then we should expect to find that physical punishment is associated with greater aggression when children are adults. In Gershoff's (2002) meta-analysis, four adult constructs that are correlated with childhood corporal punishment are identified: aggression (McCranie & Simpson, 1986; Muller, 1996), criminal and antisocial behavior (Baer & Corrado, 1974; McCord, 1988), mental health problems (Lester, 1991; Straus & Kantor, 1994), and abuse of own child or spouse (Straus, 1990b, 2001). Other studies indicate that childhood physical punishment is correlated with alienation and reduced earnings (Straus, 2001).<sup>2</sup>

Consistent with previous research, we suggest that individuals whose parents used corporal punishment can be expected to have a less rich "cultural toolkit" (Swidler, 1986) of strategies for resolving conflict in other relationships. This diminished toolkit results in individuals employing more coercive and controlling behaviors rather than verbal persuasion and communication when confronted with problems in their marriages. More specifically, we suggest that individuals who were physically punished as children will be more verbally and physically aggressive and more controlling in their relationships. Therefore, we hypothesize

*Hypothesis 1 (H1):* The more individuals were physically punished during their childhood, the more they will engage in physical aggression with their spouse.

*Hypothesis 2 (H2):* The more individuals were physically punished during their childhood, the more they will engage in verbal aggression with their spouse.

*Hypothesis 3 (H3):* The more individuals were physically punished during their childhood, the more controlling they will be with their spouse.

### **What Children Do Not Learn**

Straus's (1979, 1990a, 1990b, 2001; Straus & Kantor, 1994; Vissing, Straus, Gelles, & Harrop, 1991) focus on the learning of aggressive and controlling tactics when confronting problems is important, but we suggest that it's also important to consider the skills that children do not learn when parents use physical punishment. From a symbolic interactionist perspective, living with other people is inherently difficult and requires learning shared meanings and symbols for coordinating action and resolving conflict (Blu-

mer, 1969; McPhail & Tucker, 1990; Mead, 1934; Stewart, 1998). Key to coordinated action and conflict resolution is the ability to “take the attitude of the other” or “role-take” (Mead, 1934). Role taking allows individuals to become aware of and anticipate others’ responses so that they can adjust their behavior accordingly. In general, individuals who are better able to understand others’ perspectives are more likely to engage in constructive behaviors and less likely to behave in destructive ways because they are better able to understand the effect that their behavior will have on others (Bissonette et al., 1997; Cast, 2004). In this way, role taking operates as an important mechanism of social control (Heimer, 1996; Shott, 1979).

The ability to understand the perspective of others emerges from interaction with others (Cooley, 1902; Mead, 1934). Research addressing the development of role taking suggests that parent-child interactions characterized by explanatory or inductive responses to the child’s misbehavior are more likely to increase a child’s role-taking ability than are interactions characterized by expressive or coercive responses such as physical punishment (Baumrind, 1989; Hoffman, 1975; Kerckhoff, 1969). Explanatory or inductive responses encourage children to develop a complex and abstract understanding of the implications of their behavior. Inductive approaches to child rearing offer high levels of emotional support and encourage children to identify and acknowledge others’ perspectives and motivations. Furthermore, they focus on the short-term and long-term consequences of the behavior (Burlinson et al., 1995; see Rollins & Thomas, 1979, for review). This approach facilitates the development of role taking because it allows children to develop an understanding of how they appear to others and allows children to explore their own thoughts and feelings (Burlinson et al., 1995; Hoffman, 1982, 2000).

In contrast, expressive or authoritarian parenting styles (that typically involve physical punishment as a disciplinary technique) involve more negative emotional responses and fewer positive responses to the child’s behavior. As a result, children simply learn that particular behaviors are appropriate or inappropriate rather than being encouraged to develop a more complex understanding of how their behavior affects others (Burlinson et al., 1995; see Rollins & Thomas, 1979). In brief then, research suggests that interactions between children and parents that are more authoritarian in nature (involving physical punishment) discourage the development of role-taking skills in children (Barnett, 1987; Barnett, King, Howard, & Dino, 1980; Hoffman, 1982, 2000).

Research has yet to examine whether the effects of authoritarian parenting on individuals’ role-taking abilities persist into adulthood. If children learn important strategies for resolving conflict, as we have just suggested, it also

seems likely that the effects of authoritarian parenting during childhood may potentially have long-term effects on individuals' role-taking abilities as well. Therefore, we hypothesize

*Hypothesis 4 (H4):* The more individuals were physically punished during their childhood, the less they will feel that they can understand their spouse's perspective.

## Method

### Sample

The data for this research are from a longitudinal study of marital dynamics during the first 2 years of marriage. Couples registering for a marriage license in two midsized communities in Washington State in 1991 and 1992 who met project criteria (first marriage, no children, and age 18 and older) were contacted and asked to participate in the study.<sup>3</sup> Of the 574 couples contacted, 207 participated in all three data collection periods. Couples were interviewed shortly after their marriage ( $t_1$ ), 1 year later ( $t_2$ ), and 2 years later ( $t_3$ ).<sup>4</sup> Each data collection period involved a 90-minute face-to-face interview in which wives and husbands were interviewed separately, a self-administered questionnaire that respondents filled out during the interview session, four consecutive 1-week daily diaries kept by each respondent, and a 15-minute videotaping of couples' conversations as they worked to resolve an area of disagreement.

Couples in the study are not different in meaningful ways from others marrying for the first time in the United States. For example, their mean age is similar to the national mean age of people marrying for the first time (about 25), and their mean educational levels resemble those of others marrying for the first time (some college; National Center for Health Statistics, 1987). Nationally, those marrying for the first time are 85% White and 13% minority (National Center for Health Statistics, 1987). This sample is 89% White, 3% African American (underrepresenting African Americans nationally), and 9% other minorities (overrepresenting Asians and Hispanics nationally), reflecting the racial distribution of Washington State (World Almanac and Book of Facts, 1992).

Attrition from the 1st year to the 2nd year was 15%, with an additional 4.2% attrition from the 2nd year to the 3rd. Couples withdrew for personal reasons (e.g., relocation, time constraints) and administrative reasons (e.g., difficulty in scheduling). After 2 years, 206 couples remained involved in the project. Couples who dropped out of the study after the 1st or 2nd year are

younger ( $p < .01$ ), less educated ( $p < .01$ ), and of lower socioeconomic status ( $p < .05$ ).

We limit our analysis to a subset of the couples participating in the study for the following reasons. First, we limit our analysis to couples without children because of the well-documented effect of children on marriage (Belsky, Spanier, & Rovine, 1983; Cowan et al., 1985; Ruble, Fleming, Hackel, & Stangor, 1988; Wilkinson, 1995). For example, research finds that new parents report lower levels of marital quality (Feldman & Nash, 1984), increases in conflict (Cowan et al., 1985), and declines in feelings of closeness and love (Belsky et al., 1983). Second, to maintain as large of a sample as possible for the analysis, we investigate the effects of childhood physical punishment on marital dynamics using the first two panels of data only. Only the first two panels are used because questions about physical punishment during childhood are asked in the first panel of the study, whereas questions about aggression (physical and verbal) are asked in the second panel. Thus, the presented analysis is based on 188 couples for which complete data are available at  $t_1$  and  $t_2$ .

## Measures

*Physical punishment.* During the self-administered section of the first panel of the study, respondents are asked to indicate the degree of physical punishment they experienced during their childhood using two items from the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS; Straus, 1979). Respondents are asked the following question: "While you were growing up (before age 18), how often would you say your mother (or the woman who raised you) used physical punishment?" Responses range from 0 (*never*) to 6 (*more than 20 times*). Respondents are then asked the same question for their father (or the man who raised them).<sup>5</sup> Because not all respondents were raised in a two-parent household, the average of respondents' responses to these two items was used to represent the average amount of physical punishment that they experienced as a child.<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately, we have no other measures of childhood abuse, so we cannot be sure that we have differentiated between minor forms of physical punishment and more extreme physical aggression.

*Aggression.* In the self-administered section of the second panel of the study, respondents were asked to respond to additional items from the CTS (Straus, 1979). These items asked respondents to respond to questions designed to assess the degree to which they had engaged in a variety of behaviors during disagreements. To measure what we think of as counterproductive communication strategies, we used six items from Straus's verbal

aggression subscale: threatened to hit or throw something at him or her, threw or smashed or hit or kicked something, insulted or swore at him or her, sulked or refused to talk about an issue, stomped out of the room or house, and did or said something to spite him or her. Seven items were used to measure physical aggression: threw something at him or her; pushed, grabbed, or shoved him or her; slapped him or her; kicked, bit, or hit him or her with a fist; hit, or tried to hit, him or her with something; beat him or her up; and choked him or her. The division of the CTS items in this manner is consistent with previous research (e.g., Caulfield & Riggs, 1992; Riggs & O'Leary, 1996; Straus, 1990a). Items for both the verbal aggression measure and the physical aggression measure were analyzed using exploratory factors analysis. The omega reliability for the verbal aggression measure is .84 and the omega reliability (Heise & Bohrnstedt, 1970) for the physical aggression measure is .96.<sup>7</sup> The items and the factor loadings for these two subscales (verbal aggression and physical aggression) can be found in Table 1.

*Control.* Control is measured using items from Stets's (1993) Control Scale. Respondents are asked to respond to questions such as, "I make my spouse do what I want," and, "I supervise my spouse." Responses range from 0 to 4 with 0 indicating *never* and 4 indicating *very often*. The items were analyzed using exploratory factor analysis. One low loading item was dropped, and the remaining 9 items were summed to create an overall measure of control over one's spouse. Items and their factor loadings for the control measure can be seen in Table 1. The omega reliability for this scale is .89. A high score indicates high levels of control.

*Role taking.* Role taking is measured using Stets's (1993) Perspective Taking Scale. This scale is composed of five items that ask respondents to respond to such questions as, "I understand my spouse's feelings quite well." Responses range from 0 (*never*) to 4 (*very often*). The items were analyzed using exploratory factor analysis; the items and their loadings can be found in Table 1. The omega reliability for this scale is .79. The five items are summed and a high score indicates high levels of perspective taking.<sup>8</sup>

*Covariate.* Socioeconomic status is a composite measure of a respondent's income, education, and occupational status. To measure income, respondents are asked how much they expected their total family income to be in the current year. Responses range from 1 (*\$5,000 and less*) to 8 (*\$75,000 and more*). Education is measured by asking respondents to indicate the highest level of education that they have achieved. Responses range from 1 (*no formal education*) to 13 (*graduate degree*). To measure a respon-

**Table 1**  
**Factor Loadings for Dependent Measures**

Item	Loading
Verbal aggression	
Insulted or swore at him or her	.72
Sulked or refused to talk about an issue	.59
Stomped out of the room or house or yard	.72
Did or said something to spite him or her	.70
Threatened to hit or throw something at him or her	.50
Threw or smashed or hit or kicked something	.51
Omega reliability	.91
Physical aggression	
Threw something at him or her	.71
Pushed, grabbed, or shoved him or her	.66
Slapped him or her	.72
Kicked, bit, or hit him or her with a fist	.87
Hit, or tried to hit, him or her with something	.85
Beat him or her up	.86
Choked him or her	.82
Omega reliability	.88
Control	
I make my spouse do what I want.	.69
I keep my spouse in line.	.74
I impose my will onto my spouse.	.71
I keep tabs on my spouse.	.55
I regulate who my spouse sees.	.51
I supervise my spouse.	.59
I keep my spouse from doing things I do not approve of.	.58
If I don't like what my spouse is doing, I make him or her stop.	.45
I set the rules in my relationship with my spouse.	.53
Omega reliability	.84
Role taking	
I have difficulty seeing my spouse's viewpoint in an argument.	-.43
When something affects my spouse, I am understanding.	.57
I see myself in the same way that my spouse sees me.	.61
I understand my spouse's feelings quite well.	.70
My spouse does things I do not understand.	-.57
Omega reliability	.74

Note:  $N = 366$ .

dent's occupational status, respondents are asked to describe the work they do at their current job. If they are not currently working, they are to describe the work they did at their last job. Responses are coded according to the Socioeconomic Index (Stevens & Cho, 1985). Before being averaged into a composite measure of socioeconomic status, the measures of income, educa-

tion, and occupational status are standardized. To control for the overall status of the couple, we created a measure that is the average of the husband's socioeconomic status and the wife's socioeconomic status. It is this overall measure that is included in the analysis.

### Analysis

The effects of childhood physical punishment on individuals' physical aggression, verbal aggression, control of spouse, and role taking are estimated for both husbands and wives using structural equation modeling. This allows us to control for the interdependence of the equations for husbands and wives that is very common when using couple data. Eight equations, four for wives and four for husbands, are estimated. We also include in the analysis a measure of the couple's socioeconomic status to control for the consistent relationship between social class and aggression (Rollins & Thomas, 1979). The nature of our sample controls for race and age because respondents are overwhelmingly White and young, leaving little variation in the race and age variables. Among the couples included in our analysis, only about 5% are non-White, and among those, diverse racial backgrounds (Asian, American Indian, African American, and Hispanic) are represented. Furthermore, given that this was the first marriage for all respondents, the sample is also predominantly younger. The mean age of the sample is 25.5, and approximately 80% of our sample is in the 20- to 30-year-old range.<sup>9</sup>

### Results

Table 2 presents descriptive statistics. Consistent with what is found in other research using the CTS, the results in Table 2 suggest that the husbands in this sample report higher levels of physical punishment as children ( $p < .05$ ). Despite husbands' higher levels of childhood physical punishment, wives report being more verbally and physically aggressive in their marriages ( $p < .05$ ). In comparison to husbands, wives also report higher levels of role-taking ability and report that they are more controlling with their spouses ( $p < .05$ ).

Our primary interest, however, lies in the relationship between childhood physical punishment and problem-solving behaviors and skills as an adult. Results addressing the relationship between childhood physical punishment and problem-solving behaviors and skills as an adult are presented in Table 3. Before discussing specific results of this analysis, however, two constraints in the model presented should be noted. First, preliminary analyses indicate that the effects of physical punishment on husbands' and wives' outcome

**Table 2**  
**Means and Standard Deviations for Outcome Measures**

	Physical Punishment		Verbal Aggression		Physical Aggression		Control		Role Taking	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Entire sample <sup>a</sup>	2.60	1.56	1.47	1.03	0.75	2.48	8.28	4.69	13.17	2.72
Wives <sup>b</sup>	2.35*	1.44	1.62*	1.10	1.08*	3.30	8.90*	4.99	13.69*	2.66
Husbands <sup>b</sup>	2.84	1.64	1.33	0.93	0.43	1.10	7.64	4.30	12.65	2.70

a.  $N = 366$ .

b.  $N = 183$ .

\* $p < .05$  (two-tailed  $t$  test comparing husbands and wives).

measures are not significantly different for husbands and wives ( $\chi^2 = 3.31$ ,  $df = 4$ ,  $p > .05$ ); therefore, we constrain these coefficients to be equal to one another in the final model. Second, preliminary analyses also suggest that the effects of physical punishment on verbal and physical aggression and controlling behavior are not significantly different from one another ( $\chi^2 = 2.72$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p > .05$ ); they are constrained to be equal to one another in the final model presented in Table 3.<sup>10</sup>

Recall that we suggested that being physically punished as a child increases the likelihood that individuals will engage in behaviors that are counterproductive to successful problem solving (such as physical and verbal aggression and controlling behaviors) when encountering problematic situations within their marriages and will be less likely to develop the ability to understand the perspective of others. The results presented in Table 3 are consistent with these suggestions.

In Table 3, we see that the more wives and husbands report being physically punished as children, the more aggressive they are in their own marriages (H1 and H2). This is true for both physical aggression ( $b = .06$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and verbal aggression ( $b = .06$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Furthermore, the results in Table 3 also suggest that the more wives and husbands report being physically punished as children, the more controlling they are with their spouse ( $b = .06$ ,  $p < .05$ ); this is consistent with H3. Last, the results in Table 3 suggest that the more wives and husbands were physically punished as children, the less likely they are to feel that they can understand the spouse's perspective ( $b = -.10$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Therefore, H4 is also supported. In sum, the more individuals report being physically punished during childhood, the more likely they are to engage in destructive problem-solving behaviors and the less likely they are to develop the interpersonal skills (e.g., role taking) that are critical to problem solving within marriage.

**Table 3**  
**Standardized Effects of Physical Punishment on Outcome Measures**

	Verbal Aggression	Physical Aggression	Control	Perspective Taking
Physical punishment	.06* <sup>a</sup>	.06*	.06*	-.10*
Socioeconomic status	-.23*/ns <sup>b</sup>	ns/ns	ns/ns	.12*/.28*

$\chi^2 = 16.56, df = 14, p = .28$

Note:  $N = 188$ .

a. The effects of being punished as a child are not significantly different for husbands and wives ( $\chi^2 = 3.31, df = 4, p > .05$ ) and are constrained in this model. Results above are pooled results. The coefficients of the effects of physical punishment on verbal aggression, physical aggression, and control are not significantly different from each other ( $\chi^2 = 2.72, df = 2, p > .05$ ) and are also constrained to be equal in this model.

b. Effect for wives/Effect for husbands.

\* $p < .05$ .

## Discussion

Our investigation, along with other research on physical punishment, suggests that the hurt of physical punishment extends well beyond the immediate physical pain. Utilizing insights from social learning theory and symbolic interactionism, this article contributes to our understanding of the hurt of physical punishment by examining how physical punishment is related to the problem-solving strategies and skills that individuals develop in their families of origin. Individuals then use these strategies and skills within their own families later in life. We suggest that physical punishment affects the future marriages of its recipients both because it teaches destructive strategies for solving the problems of living together and because it hinders its recipients from learning essential problem-solving skills.

More specifically, we find that the more individuals are physically punished during their childhood, the more likely they are to engage in verbal and physical aggression with their spouse, the more likely they are to be controlling with their spouse, and the less likely they are to feel that they can understand their spouse's perspective. Our findings add to a growing body of evidence that suggests there are short- and long-term effects not only for the victims of physical punishment but also for those with whom they interact as adults. Furthermore, by connecting physical punishment to the development of problem-solving strategies and skills more generally, we place research on childhood physical punishment within a larger literature on problem solving. In doing so, our results have implications for how the effects of childhood

physical punishment may extend into a variety of relationships, not just the marital relationship. Our findings point out some of the ways that childhood physical punishment results in a lessened ability to constructively resolve problems and develop cooperation through nonviolent tactics. Just as a spanking parent models violence as a way to deal with conflict, he or she also fails to model peaceful ways of living together.

Furthermore, Straus (2001) claims that one of the barriers to reducing physical punishment is that people who are spanked believe that they do not suffer from any harmful effects. Because the major reported effects of spanking tend to be more extreme mental health and behavioral outcomes (e.g., depression, anxiety, criminal behavior, and spouse abuse), people who do not experience these may believe that spanking left them unharmed or even contributed positively to their lives. However, just as spanking itself has been normalized, many of the behaviors we suggest are connected to it may become normalized. Insulting or refusing to talk to a spouse, engaging in controlling behaviors, and not being able to see things from a spouse's perspective may be viewed as parts of a normal marriage rather than as problematic behavior that may ultimately harm a marriage.

As such, our findings also speak to understanding the intergenerational transmission of violence. Insights from studies of the intergenerational transmission of violence in families extend our understanding of violence more broadly. Violence from one sphere is likely to "spill over" (Straus, 2001) into other spheres. More specifically, "when a society makes violence legitimate in one sphere of life, some people will apply that authorization to situations for which society does not authorize violence" (Straus, 2001, p. 106). If this is the case, then in a similar fashion, alternative principles and practices for dealing with conflict and violence, such as restorative justice, victim-offender reconciliation, and truth commissions, may spill over into other situations. Reducing violent practices, such as physical punishment, may help to facilitate the substitution of nonviolent practices for more aggressive strategies. Our results suggest that the continued use of physical punishment may hinder efforts to create nonviolent conflict resolution strategies, ultimately hindering attempts to reduce violence and aggression more generally in society.

There are limitations to our study that are important to note. First, the relationship between physical punishment and its long-term effects is a complicated one that the CTS does not entirely capture. This particular scale does not allow us to assess how certain factors might amplify (e.g., screaming) or buffer (e.g., reasoned explanations) the effects of physical punishment (Straus, 2001; Vissing et al., 1991). Furthermore, our measure of physical punishment is retrospective and therefore potentially biased.

Second, the CTS “ignores the gendered power imbalances that exist within marriage and excludes crucial details about motives, intentions, and consequences” (Johnson, 1998, p. 27). In short, the survey data tell us nothing about the context within which conflict takes place or about the meaning that positive or negative problem-solving strategies have for their users or recipients (Berns, 2001). Further research exploring other possible sources of variation in these processes is also important. For example, our sample is predominantly younger and White; as a consequence, the generalizability of our results is limited. Clearly, additional research that explores the context and meaning of physical punishment will further enrich our understanding of its use and effects.

Third, because our measure of role taking is best described as a measure of an individual’s perceived role-taking ability and as a self-report measure, it is potentially biased. Individuals may feel that they can understand their spouse’s perspective but may not necessarily be good role takers. On the one hand, the higher status of husbands may mean that they do not necessarily have to be concerned with the perspective of their spouse and therefore will be less likely to understand their wives’ perspective (Thomas, Franks, & Calonico, 1972). Alternatively, wives may overestimate their role-taking skills because of the stereotype that women are more understanding (Graham & Ickes, 1997). Because of these limitations, our results should be interpreted cautiously.

Fourth, our data do not allow us to investigate genetic influences on aggressive behavior. Because recent research has suggested the importance of genetic effects on antisocial behavior by children (Arseneault et al., 2003), the role of genetics in the intergenerational transmission of violence is worthy of investigation. However, this possible avenue for transmitting violence cannot be examined in our study.

Clearly, more research that addresses how it is that families resolve conflict peacefully is needed. What do parents who do not spank actually do to resolve conflict and discipline children? What strategies do nonviolent married couples use to resolve disagreements and make decisions? How do children learn nonviolent strategies from their parents? The answers to these questions are important both to develop better models of interpersonal violence and nonviolence and to promote and disseminate principles and strategies for peaceful living.

## Notes

1. Tallman, Leik, Gray, and Stafford (1993) distinguish between coping and problem-solving behaviors. Coping behaviors are designed to avoid or escape the conflict and the stress

associated with it. Problem solving involves behaviors that are designed to remove the source of the problem. We focus on the latter.

2. A larger body of research focuses on the effects of physical punishment on children. Gershoff's (2002) meta-analysis finds associations among childhood physical punishment and a variety of outcomes such as moral internalization, aggression, delinquent and antisocial behavior, quality of parent-child relationship, mental health, and physical abuse victimization.

3. A full description of the data and data collection process can be found elsewhere (Tallman, Burke, & Gecas, 1998).

4. The length of time between couples' wedding date and interview date ranges from 7 days to 333 days; the average length of time between marriage date and interview date is 74.5 days.

5. Because this question is asked during the self-administered portion of the interview, respondents interpret this question for themselves; no interviewer prompts are used.

6. One respondent reported not living with a mother and 14 respondents reported not living with a father.

7. The omega reliability measure is what is known as an upper bound estimate of reliability. Because it does not assume tau equivalence among the items (as is assumed with alpha reliability measures), it is a more direct estimate of the reliability.

8. An ideal measure of role-taking ability would measure an individual's actual role-taking ability. The measure here is a measure of an individual's perceived role-taking ability; we use it as a proxy for actual role-taking ability.

9. One might consider collapsing the race variable into a dummy variable (White vs. non-White), but it would be inappropriate to assume similar effects for these racial groups.

10. These analyses are available on request.

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