This study was part of a larger Head Start research project. The parents (251 women and 185 men) of Head Start children were asked whether or not they would punish their children for certain behavior; for example, lying, stealing, or hitting a sister. Eighteen situations were hypothesized in the questions. Parents were also asked how severe such punishment would be. The parents of this group of children were primarily Negro and primarily of the lower socioeconomic level. The data indicated that men of lower socioeconomic levels punished antisocial and annoying behavior more severely than middle level men. There was no such difference, however, in the men's punishment of behavior considered morally wrong by middle-class standards. The women were found to punish less severely, but there were no clear differences in the types of punishment. (WD)

F- OEO
OEO- 4118 Report #3

Research Papers of the

Head Start Evaluation and Research Center

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF HOME ECONOMICS

Report Number

3

in cooperation with

MERRILL-PALMER INSTITUTE

A Note on Punishment Patterns in
Parents of Preschool Children

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A NOTE ON PUNISHMENT PATTERNS IN PARENTS
OF PRESCHOOL CHILDREN

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August 1, 1968

The study discussed here was part of an interview study conducted

at The Merrill-Palmer Institute during the years 1967 through 1968 as part

of a larger Head Start research effort. The sample, instruments, and

procedure used in the interview study are described in detail in the

Head Start Evaluation and Research Center's 1966-1967 final report,

volume two. A brief review of the sample and procedure should suffice

for this paper.

The Merrill-Palmer Head Start project included two studies of pre-

school children. These children's parents provided the sample of adults

for a comprehensive interview study which actually was composed of

several sub-studies. The sample of parents was almost entirely Negro,

and was classified on the Hollingshead two-factor index of social

position as largely lower class, with a relatively small proportion of

middle-class parents being included. One of the intentions of the

interview study was to obtain data on the parents' childrearing patterns

and other behaviors and attitudes which might relate to children's

behaviors, in order to interrelate these data with data obtained in the

two studies of preschool children.

Data on parents' punishment behavior were gathered with this pro-

cedure in mind. The questions have, however, proven to yield interest-

ing results and complexities in their own right, in addition to being useful for prediction to certain children's behaviors. The characteristics and idiosyncrasies of parents' punishment patterns were the major focus of the investigation reported below.

Procedures

Two hundred fifty one women and 185 men interviewees were asked about eighteen situations in which their child might be punished. The question asked was:

> "In which of the following situations do you feel that a child should be punished and in which should he not be punished?" (If answer is "should be punished," then ask) "How severe should the punishment be?"

The interviewees selected their response to the question on severity from a card on which five alternatives were printed:

1. Very mild
2. Moderately mild
3. Average
4. Moderately severe
5. Very severe

The eighteen situations for which this question was asked were:

a. Not finishing food at meals
b. Hitting brother or sister
c. Playing with electric light outlets
d. Talking instead of going to sleep
e. Tearing or losing clothes
f. Demanding attention
g. Saying dirty words
h. Scribbling on the walls or in books
i. Throwing a temper tantrum or fit
j. Telling personal family matters
k. Romping in the car when traveling
l. Hitting his parents
m. Being sassy
n. Lying
o. Refusing to share his toys
p. Stealing
q. Taking things apart around the house
r. Not doing homework

In most of the analyses carried out on these responses, the data were treated as interval measurement, from zero designating "no punishment" to five for "very severe punishment." Several analyses were carried out for the two interviewee groups (men and women) as a whole and for the two groups subdivided by socioeconomic class.

Total punishment behavior

An index of the general severity of punishment which the interviewee would use in these typical situations with children was developed by simply summing over the eighteen items and finding a _mean punishment_ score for each interviewee. These means and standard deviations are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Mean overall punishment severity
by sex and socioeconomic class

		Socioeconomic Class				
		1	2	3	4	5
Women						
	mean	2.1429	2.2529	2.0896	2.1047	2.0545
	std.dev.	.7637	.5448	.6645	.5328	.5637
	N	7	18	22	88	116
Men						
	mean	2.0397	2.0451	1.8870	2.1115	2.2790
	std.dev.	.8617	.5881	.6969	.6367	.7394
	N	7	16	19	71	72

One-way analyses of variance were performed for the two groups using socioeconomic class as the independent variable (grouping classes 1 and 2 together because of small N's). For women the obtained F value of .8948 with 3 and 247 degrees of freedom was not significant. For men the obtained F of 2.0263 with 3 and 181 degrees of freedom was not significant;

P was $\leq.11$. The only interpretation to be cautiously made is that men of lower socioeconomic classes might tend to be somewhat more severe in their punishments.

Punishment factor analysis and subscores

The overall punishment severity index was felt to be too gross for use as a precise predictor of children's behavior. Since the eighteen situations cover a wide range of behaviors, it was hypothesized that they might fall into subgroups, and subscores could more appropriately be used for predictions.

Factor analyses were conducted separately for men and women interviewees using the Wayne State University computer's Tsar series Components routine, with unities in the diagonals of the correlation matrix and the varimax rotation option. The three-factor solution was almost identical for women and men respondants, and was used as the basis for defining punishment behavior subscores. The items and loadings for the three-factor solution are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Factor analyses of
punishment behavior

<u>Women</u>   <u>Men</u>

Factor I

.7419	Hitting his parents	.7975	Lying
.7318	Being sassy	.7822	Being sassy
.7282	Lying	.7557	Stealing
.6397	Stealing	.7384	Hitting his parents
.6326	Saying dirty words	.6838	Saying dirty words
.5819	Scribbling on walls or books	.5341	Not doing homework
.4933	Not doing homework	.5335	Playing with electric outlets
.4063	Playing with electric outlets	.4995	Scribbling on walls or books

Factor II

.5533	Refusing to share toys	.6557	Refusing to share toys
.5317	Romping in car while traveling	.6466	Talking instead of going to sleep
.5275	Throwing a temper tantrum	.6389	Romping in the car . . .
.5210	Telling personal family matters	.6157	Tearing or losing clothes
		.5835	Taking things apart around the house
		.5517	Telling personal family matters
		.5475	Throwing a temper tamtrum...
		.3820	Hitting brother or sister

Factor III

.6724	Demanding attention	-.6009	Hitting brother or sister
.6496	Not finishing food	.5787	Not finishing food at meals
.5433	Tearing or losing clothes	.3236	Demanding attention
.4972	Talking instead of going to sleep		

Because the solutions for men and for women replicated so closely,
the subscores derived from these factor analyses were applicable to both
sexes. The subscores defined for further studies of punishment were:

Subscore 1: Mean of behaviors defined as "morally" or intrinsically
            wrong by the usual middle-class standards.

> Hitting parents
> Being sassy
> Lying
> Stealing
> Say dirty words
> Scribbling on walls or in books
> Not doing homework
> Playing with electric outlets

Subscore 2: Mean of behaviors which are antisocial

> Refusing to share toys
> Romping in the car
> Throwing a temper tantrum or fit
> Telling personal family matters

Subscore 3: Mean of behaviors which are largely annoyances to the parent.

> Demanding attention
> Talking instead of going to sleep
> Tearing or losing clothes

The subscores thus obtained for women and men interviewees were
analyzed for differences among socioeconomic classes. The means for
various classes are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Mean punishment severity subscores
by sex and socioeconomic class

			Socioeconomic Class			
			1 & 2	3	4	5
I.	**Morally-intrinsically wrong**					
	Women	Mean	2.0707	2.0909	1.7788	1.8861
		Std. Dev.	.6467	.7208	.6968	.7687
		N	25	22	88	116
	Men	Mean	2.3152	1.9727	1.9575	2.0756
		Std. Dev.	.9192	.4520	.8518	1.0124
		N	23	19	71	72
II.	**Antisocial**					
	Women	Mean	2.3600	2.1477	2.1951	2.3399
		Std. Dev.	.9950	1.0138	.9166	.9995
		N	25	22	88	115
	Men	Mean	1.8261	1.6974	2.3345	2.4572
		Std. Dev.	1.1929	1.1352	1.1503	1.2293
		N	23	19	71	72
III.	**Annoyances**					
	Women	Mean	1.8800	1.5568	2.0473	1.8635
		Std. Dev.	1.3465	1.5448	1.1646	1.1973
		N	25	22	88	116
	Men	Mean	1.4891	1.5789	1.9249	2.2396
		Std. Dev.	1.3473	1.2418	1.1001	1.2716
		N	23	19	71	72

Analyses of variance were performed to test the differences in means across socioeconomic classes for the three subscores. No significant differences were observed for factor 1, the morally-intrinsically wrong behaviors. On subscore 2, antisocial behavior, the means for men differed significantly ($F=3.21$; d.f.=3, 181; $P= .025$). On subscore 3, annoyances, the means for men also differed significantly ($F=3.06$; d.f. = 3, 181; $P \leq .05$).

Close inspection of these results makes clear that men of lower
socioeconomic levels punish anti-social and annoying behaviors more
severely, while there is no difference in their punishment of "morally"
or intrinsically wrong behaviors. Women of the four socioeconomic levels
did not differ in their severity of punishment of these three types of
children's behavior.

Punishment Subscore Intercorrelations

Although the factor analysis described above yields orthogonal factors,
and the subscores should be independent, it was felt that in the various
socioeconomic groups some interrelationships among the subscores might
exist, even though overall the original factors were independent. The
correlation coefficient obtained for the four socioeconomic levels between
three pairs of punishment severity subscores are presented in Table 4.

Table 4.   Intercorrelations among punishment severity
subscores by sex and socioeconomic class.

	Socioeconomic Class			
	1 & 2	3	4	5
Women				
Moral-intrinsic wrong/antisocial	.03	.15	.13	.17
Moral-intrinsic wrong/annoyance	.04	-.02	.10	-.21*
Antisocial/annoyance	.28	.44*	.31**	.19*
Men				
Moral-intrinsic wrong/antisocial	-.22	.42*	.07	.31**
Moral-intrinsic wrong/annoyance	-.19	.46*	-.01	-.15
Antisocial/annoyance	.50**	.66**	.41**	.39**

* $P = .05$
** $P \leq .01$

By far the clearest overall trend exhibited in these coefficients is the relationship between punishment of antisocial behaviors and annoyances. In seven of the eight groups a significant relationship between these variables was observed. Apparently these two concepts as measured by the subscores are somewhat related, rather than being entirely independent. The fact of a theoretical distance between these two concepts and the "morally-intrinsically wrong" concept is confirmed by these coefficients.

Scalogram Analysis

It was hypothesized also that since some of the eighteen behaviors appear to be more serious than others, parents might view the behaviors in some pattern of increasing need for punishment. Multiple scalogram analysis was performed on women's and men's responses to the punishment situation questions in an attempt to test this hypothesis.

Multiple scalogram analysis requires that responses to an item be dichotomized. Rather than dividing the responses arbitrarily into punish/no punish, the distributions of punishment severity responses were each examined and the range of responses (0-5 possible) was divided as close to the median as possible. Practically this meant that for some items no punishment was grouped alone (items a and f), for some items no punishment was grouped with very mild punishment (items c, g, i, j, l, m, n, p), and for some items no punishment, very mild, and moderately mild punishment were grouped together, as opposing the remainder of the responses (items b, d, e, h, k, o, q, r).

The scalogram analysis for <u>women</u> (across all socioeconomic classes)

yielded two scales:

Scale 1   (reproducibility .935)
   m.   Being sassy   162 punish   88 no punish or very mild
   l.   Hitting his parents   149 punish   101 no punish or very mild
   p.   Stealing   123 punish   127 no punish or very mild

Scale 2   (reproducibility .903)
   o.   Refusing to share his 114 punish   136 no punish, very mild, or
         toys   moderately mild
   k.   Romping in the car...   87 punish   163 No punish, very mild, or
                                             moderately mild

It should be noted that these scales quite closely resemble the content

of factors 1 and 2 from the factor analysis discussed above.

The scalogram analysis for <u>men's</u> responses yielded one scale identical

to the women's scale 1, and a second scale which resembles the content of

factor 3.

Scale 1   (reproducibility .933)
   m.   Being sassy   134 punish   51 no punish or very mild
   l.   Hitting his parents   94 punish   91 no punish or very mild
   p.   Stealing   65 punish   120 no punish or very mild

Scale 2   (reproducibility .932)
   f.   Demanding attention   123 punish   62 no punish
   a.   Not finishing food   68 punish   117 no punish

It appears that the second scale might have been generated in part

artificially because of the dichotomizing technique;   items a and f were

the only two items divided strictly punish/no punish.

Scalogram conclusions

The first scale, which replicated almost perfectly in the two sexes,

appears to be the most fruitful for interpretation; the two two-item

scales do not offer much practical interpretative value. Quite clearly

the three items which scaled to form Scale 1 represent to the interviewees

an important group of children's behaviors. A parent who punishes

"being sassy" is one who also punishes both hitting parent and stealing,

all behaviors which threaten the parent's jurisdiction over his child's

appropriate behavior. It may also be noted that these results are

consistent with that which might be expected of a group dominated by

lower-class interviewees.

General conclusions

The importance of reinforcement patterns in childrearing is a well

accepted fact in child development theory. Surely the pattern and severity

of punishment would be a significant part of the child's early experience.

These analyses have demonstrated the complexity of parents' punishment

behaviors and the unusual patterns which characterize the various socio-

economic classes and the two sexes.

We may conclude, first, that punishment varies substantially with

sex and socioeconomic class. Men in particular in the lower socioeconomic

classes tend to punish more severely those behaviors which we defined as

"antisocial" and "annoying." It was equally important to note, however,

that clear differences were not observable among women of the four

socioeconomic levels.

A second and similarly interesting outcome was the apparent interrela-

tionship of annoying and antisocial behaviors in the punishments they

elicited. These two behaviors appear to be a realm apart from the

behaviors defined for this study as "morally-intrinsically" wrong by

middle-class standards. Since the sample for this study was weighted heavily with the lower socioeconomic classes, one conclusion may be that the "wrongs" are seen by this sample as entirely different from the "annoyances" and "antisocial" acts.