

Sowing the seeds of sodomasochism

The United States stands virtually alone among developed nations in allowing schoolchildren to be assaulted and battered by teachers. Polite terms for the practice are "corporal punishment" and "paddling." Specifically, it is the battering of a child on the buttocks with a flat wooden board. Fear, pain and humiliation, intended or not, are by-products of the act. Corporally punished children are often bruised, sometimes injured, and psychological harm almost inevitably results from such mistreatment.

Most Americans are unaware that this happens legally in the schools of 20 states. The number of recorded incidents is more than a ¼ million per year.

Serious discussion of the subject is taboo. The hitters refer to it in joking terms mainly when they are in each other's company. Victims keep silent through shame.

Corporal punishment, or paddling, or spanking or whatever else one wants to call it is also sexual assault. Were an adult struck with the same instrument on the same area of the anatomy, the perpetrator would face serious criminal charges involving prison time if convicted. But when it's done to a child, it's often characterized as "just a friendly little tap on the butt to get her attention" or "a pop on the bottom to let him know you're serious."

The process I've just described is only part of the story. It's time we examined the other part - the part that is typically left out of polite conversation. Spanking causes intense stimulation of the buttocks - a major erogenous zone. As a consequence, spanked children are at risk of having their sexual development permanently deranged. That's good for the pornography and prostitution industries, but it's not good for children.

When Washington lawmakers are asked about school corporal punishment, they say it's a subject to



be addressed at the state level. When state legislators are asked about it, they graciously defer to the local districts. "Decisions of this nature should reflect community sentiment," they advise. When school districts are asked, they are apt to respond, "We are only doing what the state allows. It's perfectly legal. What's your problem? This isn't California, you know, where kids are spoiled rotten by an overdose of mother love." In this well-practiced ritual of duck-'n'-dodge, each party shirks its responsibility to do what's right, and comes out smelling sweet.

The familiar maxim associated with data analysis applies perfectly, I believe, to the education of children:

"GARBAGE IN, GARBAGE OUT."

Until educators are cured of the hitting habit, society will continue

to reap the whirlwind. Paddling schools will remain models for legalized child abuse setting a dangerous standard for the community. And every year we will watch with dismay as a new crop of graduates to adulthood puts into practice some of the worst lessons from childhood.

Now is the time to apply the brakes to the hitting habit. Now is the time to bring schoolchildren safely into range of the normal protections of law that apply to all other citizens.

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