



CAROL R. EMBER
MELVIN EMBER

Explaining Corporal Punishment of Children: A Cross-Cultural Study

ABSTRACT Corporal punishment of children is a frequent child-training technique in many societies in the ethnographic record. In other societies it is infrequent or rare. Using a worldwide sample of largely preindustrial societies in this article, we test previous and new theories that might explain the variation. Our multiple regression analyses indicate that frequent corporal punishment of children is predicted by higher levels of social stratification and political integration, and long-term use of an alien currency. These findings are consistent with our theory that societies are likely to practice corporal punishment to prepare children for living in a society with native or imposed (e.g., colonial) power inequality. In addition, corporal punishment appears more likely in societies in which nonrelative caretakers help raise children. And in nonpacified societies, undemocratic political decision making and a culture of violence also predict corporal punishment of children. [Keywords: corporal punishment of children, cross-cultural, power inequality, colonialism, violence]

MANY PEOPLE in the United States and elsewhere believe that corporal punishment of children is appropriate and even necessary. The proverb “spare the rod and spoil the child” exemplifies this point of view. Even though corporal punishment is now generally condemned by psychologists and educators, and many U.S. states prohibit it by law in schools, corporal punishment is still practiced often in the United States. Murray Strauss (2001:187) estimates that, in 1995, one of four parents in the United States hit their children with objects, not just with their hands. Corporal punishment of children is common outside of the United States as well. It occurs as a frequent or typical technique of discipline in societies in all major regions of the world.

Much of the social science research on corporal punishment focuses on the possible consequences of it. For example, research in the United States supports the idea that individuals (males and females) who were punished corporally as adolescents are more likely to approve of marital violence and are more likely to beat their spouses or partners (Strauss and Yodanis 1996). Cross-culturally, David Levinson (1989:37) finds a higher incidence of wife beating in societies with corporal punishment of children. These findings suggest that corporal punishment begets other kinds of violence.

In this article, we focus on the possible causes of corporal punishment of children and why it may vary in fre-

quency from culture to culture. Using ethnographic reports, we ordinarily measure the frequency of the practice in a worldwide sample of largely preindustrial societies. Our survey suggests that corporal punishment of children was frequent or typical in about 40 percent of the sample societies. So the practice is by no means rare cross-culturally (see the data at <http://www.yale.edu/hraf/EmberAA2005>). We describe the results of our attempts to explain the variation in frequency of corporal punishment.

CORPORAL PUNISHMENT OF CHILDREN

Before we turn to our methods, the theories tested, and the results, let us briefly describe some ethnographic examples to illustrate the range of variation in the frequency of corporal punishment. By *corporal punishment of children*, we mean hitting, striking, wounding, or bruising a dependent child for the purpose of punishing, disciplining, or showing disapproval.

At the high-frequency end are societies that use corporal punishment as a first resort. One example is the Rwala Bedouin of south central Syria and northeastern Jordan, described as of the 1910s. The ethnographer, Alois Musil, tells us that the mother is the main caretaker until the child is seven, and the children live until that age in the woman's partitioned quarters of the tent. “If they deserve it they [children] are spanked with a stick, not only by their mother or father, but by the slaves both male and female” (Musil

1928:256). Corporal punishment is not only practiced; it is idealized (Musil 1928:256). Musil tells us that the Rwala believe that the rod originated in Paradise and will lead people back to it. When boys are between 14 and 16, a father will punish disobedience not only with a stick but also with a saber or dagger. This is believed to harden boys for their future life (Musil 1928:256).

Among the Mapuche (Araucanians) of Chile, corporal punishment of children is employed sometimes, but not usually as a first resort. Described for the late 1940s and early 1950s, the Mapuche distinguish between a child not yet able to walk, who should not be slapped or spanked, and older children who have reached the age of comprehension. "In general a child that has reached the age of complete comprehension, today as formerly, is coerced, when necessary, to conform to behavior standards. Both parents do so by corrections in stern tones, by scolding in angry tones, by deprivations, by slapping the child's hands, and by spankings or whippings" (Hilger 1957:78). Regarding how often corporal punishment is used, Mishcha Titiev (1951:89) says that slapping or whipping is used by the Mapuche only when children are exceptionally troublesome.

It is not uncommon for corporal punishment to be used when other methods fail, as the Mapuche seem to do, but there are many societies that hardly ever escalate to corporal punishment. The Copper Inuit as of the 1910s are near the low end of the frequency continuum. Richard Condon (1987:60) describes the Copper Inuit child as having a great deal of freedom to do what he or she pleases. A child who misbehaves might be teased or briefly chastised, but adults will rarely use verbal threats or physical punishment. In fact, if a child ignores initial reprimands, parents will just ignore the child even if the child hits or swears at the parents. Condon notes that such child-training techniques are much like the ones Diamond Jenness observed during his fieldwork among the Copper Inuit in 1913–16.

METHODS

Previous studies have suggested several factors as possibly favoring corporal punishment, including social complexity, a culture of violence, and a lack of help with child care. We test for these possibilities here. We also explore the possible influence of authoritarian versus democratic decision making in the political system. Our research strategy is to test theories against data from a worldwide sample of societies. The advantage of this strategy is that by maximizing variation in cultural scale and geographical scope, including societies from simple to complex and from all major world regions, we increase the likelihood that our findings will be generalizable.

We rated frequency of corporal punishment of children, our dependent variable, from ethnographic materials included in the Human Relations Area Files (HRAF, or eHRAF) Collection of Ethnography. Our starting point was G. Peter Murdock and Douglas White's (1969) sam-

ple of 186 largely preindustrial societies. We rated all the societies in that sample that were also included in the HRAF Collection of Ethnography (approximately 80 percent of the Murdock–White sample societies are found in the HRAF Collection). With a few exceptions, we adhered to the time and place focus specified by Murdock–White sample for each sample society. The exceptions are as follows: the Azande, for whom we used information from C. R. Lagae (1926); the Turks, from Joe Pierce (1964); the Lapps, from Pertti Pelto (1962); the Marquesans, from Ralph Linton (1939); the Koreans, from Vincent Brandt (1971), William Biernatzki (1967), and Roger Janelli and Dawnhee Janelli (1982).

We adhere to the time and place focus specified by Murdock and White for the following reasons. First, the Murdock–White sample tends to focus on the earliest well-described time period available for a society. This is particularly important to minimize acculturation effects. Second, unless you are trying to assess time-lagged effects, it is important to measure all relevant variables for each case as of the same time. If you do not, even a strong correlation may be reduced in magnitude by random errors (Divale 1975; Ember and Ember 2001:64). Third, for those who are concerned about Galton's Problem, this sample includes only one society for each identified culture area, which presumably minimizes the possibility that correlations are explainable by diffusion or common ancestry. Finally, because some of the variables we wished to use came from ratings we previously made for the Murdock–White sample, it was consistent to code corporal punishment for the time and place they specified.

The first author and at least one other coder independently rated corporal punishment of children on a three-point ordinal scale (see Appendix A for our scale and more details of our coding procedure.) Because coders were allowed to assign intermediate scores and the scores of two (or sometimes three) coders were averaged, the resulting scale has more than 16 points. Although reliability was acceptably high,¹ we omitted a few cases from the analyses about which the two coders disagreed initially by one or more points. Note that we do not consider the severity of punishment in these ratings, only the frequency with which corporal punishment appears to be employed as a disciplinary technique.

Our primary statistical tool of analysis is multiple regression, which allows us to evaluate which of our predictor variables significantly and independently predict corporal punishment of children. However, we often employ many measures of a particular class of variable (e.g., there are ten measures of social complexity), so we first try to establish the significant (or if not significant, the best) predictors of corporal punishment in each class of variables. When the number of sample cases and the number of possible measures is large, as in the case of social complexity, we subdivide the sample into two random subsamples. Only relatively strong predictors will be significant in both subsamples. Another reason for winnowing down the number

of variables used in the multiple regression analysis is that multiple regression analysis assumes the predictive variables are not that highly related to each other. The scores on the various independent variables come from our own and others' previous research.

POSSIBLE PREDICTORS OF CORPORAL PUNISHMENT OF CHILDREN

Social Complexity

In previous research, the strongest predictors of corporal punishment of children seem to relate to social complexity. For example, Levinson (1989:62) finds that greater dependence on agriculture predicts physical punishment of children ($\rho = .42$). Larry Petersen et al. (1982) find physical punishment of children to be predicted by economic as well as political complexity.² Other possibly related findings, by Ronald Rohner (1975:117), suggest that high political integration and social stratification, and settled communities, predict parental rejection of children.

Theoretically, why should social complexity, or some aspects of it, predict corporal punishment of children? Petersen et al. (1982) consider economic and political complexity to be measures of the degree to which adults are likely to be supervised in their work. They theorize that in societies in which adults are highly supervised, parents should value conformity in their children and should choose to punish them physically, because such punishment "serves as a clear indication to children that rule violations are not tolerated" (Petersen et al. 1982:133). It is important to note that Petersen et al. (1982) do not consider complexity per se to be a cause of corporal punishment; in their view, economic and political complexity are proxy measures of the need for work supervision. Given work supervision, parents will value conformity. In their view, the valuation of conformity directly underlies corporal punishment of children, and their research provides some support for this view. At the end of this section, we compare the impact of social complexity variables with the importance of obedience training.

Social complexity is a complex theoretical construct involving many different variables. What exactly about social complexity predicts corporal punishment? To explore this issue, we examine the relationships between corporal punishment and the ten five-point scales of cultural-social complexity published by Murdock and Caterina Provost (1980). The scales of complexity are as follows:

1. writing and records (ranging from a low score [no writing, records, or mnemonic devices] to a high score [an indigenous writing system and written records]);
2. fixity of residence (ranging from a low of fully nomadic settlement to a high of permanent, sedentary settlement);
3. use of agriculture (ranging from a low of no agriculture to a high of intensive agriculture contributing more than any other subsistence activity);

4. urbanization (ranging from a low of communities averaging fewer than 100 persons to a high of communities averaging more than 1,000 persons);
5. technological specialization (ranging from a low of no metalworking, loom weaving, and pottery making to a high of many craft specialists, including at least smiths, weavers, and potters);
6. land transport (ranging from a low of exclusively human carriers to a high of extensive use of indigenous automotive vehicles such as trains or trucks);
7. use of money (from a low of no recognized medium of exchange to a high of an indigenous currency involving coins or paper);
8. density of population (ranging from a low of fewer than one person per square mile to a high of more than 100 persons per square mile);
9. level of political integration (ranging from a low of no political integration even on a local level to a high of three or more administrative levels above the local community); and
10. social stratification (ranging from a low of an egalitarian society lacking classes, castes, slavery, or important wealth distinctions, to a high of three or more distinct classes or castes).

We tested the simple relationship between each of the complexity scales and our ratings of the corporal punishment of children in two random subsamples that were created for us by the SPSS statistical package. Five of the ten measures of complexity—agriculture, money, density, political integration, and social stratification—significantly predict the frequency of corporal punishment of children in both subsamples.³ To evaluate whether these five measures of complexity were independently predicting corporal punishment of children, we employed multiple regression analysis. We first had to remove highly collinear variables (multiple regression analysis assumes the independent variables are not highly related to each other). Because social stratification and political integration are highly related (the Spearman rank-order correlation [ρ] coefficients are greater than .6), we summed the two variables. Regression assumes that the predictor and dependent variables are linearly related, and so we inspected the plots for the relationships between corporal punishment of children and each of the remaining significant complexity variables. Density did not appear to be linearly related to corporal punishment. Because it was highly related both to agriculture and to political integration, we dropped it from further consideration.

In examining the plots of the relationship between the money scale and corporal punishment, we found that one value in the five-point money scale was out of line—namely, "the society lacks any form of indigenous money but has long used the currency of an alien people, e.g., that of its colonial rulers" (Murdock and Provost 1980:149). Because all the other scale scores pertain to indigenous money, we created two different money scales—one measuring

TABLE 1. Multiple regression predicting corporal punishment of children from cultural complexity

Independent Variable	(1) β	(2) p value
Indigenous Money (trichotomized)	.220	.05, one-tailed
Alien Currency (dichotomized)	.279	.004, one-tailed
Social Stratification/Political Integration	.299	.01, one-tailed
N	89	
R	.496	.000

indigenous money and the other “alien currency used for a long time” (“alien currency” for short).⁴

Do we need the two money predictors, agriculture, and the combined social stratification–political integration variables? Do they predict corporal punishment independently?⁵ Using corporal punishment of children as the dependent variable, Table 1 shows the standardized beta coefficients for the significant complexity variables—presence of indigenous money, presence of an alien currency for a long time, and the combined social stratification–political integration scale. (Agriculture had no significant independent effect and was dropped from the model.) The beta coefficients reflect the predictiveness of each of the variables, independent of the others. Of the three significant predictors, social stratification–political integration is the strongest. But the presence of either kind of money—indigenous or alien—also predicts corporal punishment of children, independent of social stratification–political integration.

What do money, political integration, and social stratification have in common? Is it that money, economic, and political complexity are proxy measures for supervision in society and that the important intervening variable predicting corporal punishment is valuing conformity, as Petersen et al. (1982) suggest? We test this suggestion directly by adding a measure of the strength of obedience training in childhood to the multiple regression models involving the variables in Table 1. We first chose the best predictor of corporal punishment of children from four available measures of obedience training (for boys in their early years, for girls early, for boys later, and for girls later—the data are from Barry et al. [1980]). The best predictor is obedience training for boys in late childhood ($\rho = .343$; $N = 82$, $p < .002$, two-tailed). If conformity were the important intermediate variable—that is, if it explained the connection between these various aspects of social complexity and corporal punishment of children—we would expect that obedience training would become significant and the other variables nonsignificant. But the latter do not disappear. Table 2 shows the results of the multiple regression analysis adding obedience training to the model shown in Table 1. Although the significant beta in Table 2 for obedience training indicates that it may be an important predictor of corporal punishment, the three other predictors do not disappear and remain marginally or more significant.⁶ So, we suggest that the presence of any kind of money and social stratification–

TABLE 2. Multiple regression predicting corporal punishment of children from cultural complexity and obedience training

Independent Variable	(1) β	(2) p value
Indigenous Money (trichotomized)	.221	.06, one-tailed
Alien Currency (dichotomized)	.203	.03, one-tailed
Social Stratification–Political Integration	.190	.08, one-tailed
Obedience (late childhood–boy)	.240	.01, one-tailed
N	82	82
R	.523	.000

political integration may reflect different ways that power differentials influence degree of corporal punishment. Parents, by using corporal punishment, may be preparing children to accept that some people are more powerful than others. We elaborate more on this theory later, in the section “Interpreting the Results.”

It may be important to consider the fact that not all political systems with high political integration are autocratic or at least not to the same degree. Similarly, not all low-level political systems are egalitarian. It is true that in preindustrial societies, more autocratic systems generally occur with higher economic and political development (Ember et al. 1997:115–116), but this is not always the case. Perhaps, then, our results will be improved if we consider the type of political system, not just the hierarchy of the system. If the “power inequality” explanation of corporal punishment of children is applicable, we should expect that autocratic political systems (whether or not they have more than local political integration) will employ corporal punishment more often than participatory systems.

In the cross-cultural study we did with political scientist Bruce Russett (Ember et al. 1992; Ember et al. 1993), we tested the hypothesis that more participatory polities (“democracies”) are unlikely to go to war with each other. We used variables devised by political scientist Marc Ross (1983) to measure the degree of local political participation. Ross coded about half of the Murdock–White (1969) sample; we coded the remaining societies.⁷ We now examine if more participatory (more “democratic”) political systems have lower frequencies of corporal punishment. Previously, we used five measures of degree of adult participation in community decision making (variables 6 [checks on leaders’ power], 7 [removal of leaders], 8 [consultation], 9 [decision-making bodies], and 11 [extent of participation] in Ross [1983]), and one measure (variable 30 [local fissioning] in Ross [1983]) that we think reflects the absence of a respect for civil rights (not agreeing to disagree).

Do these variables predict corporal punishment of children? It turns out that all five of the participation variables are correlated in the anticipated direction. That is, more participation predicts less corporal punishment; and all five are significant (the ρ s vary from .194 to .357 and all are significant by a one-tailed test). Ross’s variable 30, the one reflecting the absence of agreement to disagree, is not a significant predictor. In short, it appears that degree

of political participation is relevant to corporal punishment of children. To choose the best local political participation predictor for inclusion in the final multiple regression models, we first looked at the plots of the relationship between each of the political participation variables and the corporal punishment of children to check for linear relationships (we grouped adjacent categories to maximize linear relationships). We then looked to see which of the five variables predicted significantly in the two random subsamples. Only one variable did—widespread local political participation (dichotomized at less than 2.5 vs. higher in Ember et al. 1993).

Because extent of political participation also predicted independently in one of the multiple regression analyses that also measured money and social stratification (not shown), we retain extent of political participation in our final multiple regression analyses.

A Culture of Violence

Another domain of possible causes is a culture of violence. Cross-cultural researchers have frequently found that one form of aggression is associated with another. In other words, many societies appear to have a culturewide pattern of violence. If one form of violence occurs, others are also likely to occur. For example, more war is correlated with more homicide, assault, combative sports, malevolent magic, and severe punishment for crime (Ember and Ember 1994—see references therein to previous research). And Levinson (1989:44) found that physical punishment of children is related to wife beating, sibling aggression, punishment of criminals, and pain in female initiation ceremonies. So the evidence available from previous studies suggests that corporal punishment of children is part of a cultural pattern of violence.

We decided to rate corporal punishment of children ourselves (as described here) because we wanted to be sure that we were measuring corporal punishment exactly in the way we wanted to. Using our own ratings, the picture is equivocal. Truncating the scales of homicide, assault, and war frequency (excluding less reliable ratings—less than 6—from Ember and Ember 1992b) to make the relationships more linear, our measure of the frequency of corporal punishment of children is not significantly related to the three measures of violence (only homicide dichotomized as less than 1.75 vs. higher is marginally significant). The respective Spearman rhos are .179 ($N = 57$; $p = .09$, one-tailed), .147 ($N = 55$, *ns*), and .130 ($N = 71$, *ns*). In previous research on warfare (Ember and Ember 1992a), we found it important to exclude pacified societies because their warfare frequency was artificially reduced by a colonial power. So we reexamined the relationship between corporal punishment of children and war frequency in nonpacified societies. We found that war frequency is significantly related to corporal punishment in nonpacified societies ($\rho = .255$, $n = 49$. $p < .038$, one-tailed). Accordingly, we decided to use homicide as our best measure of violence in the overall sample; we use

war frequency as a measure of violence in the nonpacified societies.⁸

Help in Child Rearing

Although there are some hints in the literature on the United States that social isolation of parents increases the likelihood of corporal punishment of children (see Levinson 1989:54), the cross-cultural findings are neither clear nor consistent. Levinson (1989:54) cites previous cross-cultural researchers (see Munroe and Munroe 1980; Rohner 1975, 1986) as suggesting that child punishment will occur more often in independent and single-parent households because fewer people are available in those households to relieve the stress of caretaking. We consider that hypothesis here, but it should be noted that the studies referred to by Levinson were not directly measuring corporal punishment of children. For example, Rohner (1975:112–113) was looking at parental acceptance and rejection, which is not the same thing as corporal punishment. In fact, according to the Rohner coding scheme (1975:195), both rejecting and accepting parents may discipline their child with physical punishment.⁹ And R. H. Munroe and R. L. Munroe (1980:293–294) use codes from Herbert Barry et al. (1959) to assess socialization “pressure” in six different domains (responsibility, obedience, nurturance, achievement, self-reliance, and independence), but “pressure” for Munroe and Munroe (1980) involves reward as well as punishment. In addition, punishment need not be corporal. What Munroe and Munroe (1980) actually found in their study is that multifamily households were more likely to be permissive in the six socialization domains than nuclear and mother–child households. But in another domain (aggression), Munroe and Munroe (1975:104) found extended family societies to be less rather than more permissive—punishing aggression in children more severely than in societies with smaller households—which seems contrary to the hypothesis that corporal punishment is associated with fewer caretakers.

Levinson (1989:55) explicitly examined the relationship between physical punishment of children and household type and found no significant relationship. We looked at a number of measures that we thought would tap the degree to which parents have help in child rearing, including the following: sex of parents in residence (if both parents are in residence, child-care help should be greater); involvement of nonparental caretakers (the more the involvement, the more help in child care); and the type of principal nonparent caretaker. We also looked at composition of the family and type of marriage. The “help with child care” theory would predict that extended family households should have less corporal punishment. Polygynous households, which are often mother–child households, should have more corporal punishment.¹⁰

The only one of these variables that predicts corporal punishment of children in the expected direction is polygyny. Societies with a high degree of polygyny (general polygyny) presumably have the highest percentage of

mother-child households and should have higher frequencies of corporal punishment of children. But the correlation is fairly low—the rho is .197 ($N = 89$, $p < .032$, one-tailed). The other caretaking variables suggest a different picture: Higher involvement by nonparental figures appears to predict more, not less, corporal punishment of children. After examining the plots and truncating scale scores to linearize the relationships, we find that in societies in which parents are the exclusive caretakers of children in early childhood (vs. nonexclusive caretakers), frequency of corporal punishment is less likely. The rho for exclusive parental caretakers for boys in early childhood is .334 ($N = 87$, $p < .001$, one-tailed) and for girls in early childhood is .289 ($N = 87$, $p < .003$, one-tailed). In addition, we find that nonrelative or nonsibling child caretakers predict considerably more corporal punishment of children. The rho for boys in early childhood is .349 ($N = 71$, $p < .001$, one-tailed) and the rho for girls is .401 ($N = 70$, $p < .000$, one-tailed).

We cannot put both exclusive parental caretakers and the type of nonparental caretaker in the same multiple regression because exclusive parental caretaking precludes the possibility of a nonparental caretaker. Therefore, we decided to combine the two variables into a new measure to tap the degree to which a close relative does the caretaking. The first point on the scale is “exclusively parents,” the second position is “other relatives as caretakers,” and the third position is “non-relatives and non-sibling children.” This new variable is more strongly related to corporal punishment of children than either of its two components: The rho is .444 ($N = 86$, $p < .000$, two-tailed). Because the new variable predicts in the opposite direction as compared with polygyny (i.e., more help appears to increase corporal punishment), we retain it and polygyny in our multiple regression analyses.

A puzzle is why polygyny predicts more corporal punishment when the other variables suggest that exclusive parental care decreases corporal punishment. It is possible that polygyny is tapping something else. We know from previous research that polygyny is predicted by high male mortality in warfare (Ember 1974) and we know that when fathers sleep further from infants we can predict more homicide and assault (Ember and Ember 2002). So, perhaps polygyny is actually tapping a culture of violence. Indeed, high polygyny in this study's overall sample is significantly associated with higher homicide dichotomized ($\rho = .316$, $N = 97$, $p < .002$, two-tailed), assault dichotomized ($\rho = .458$, $N = 94$, $p < .000$, two-tailed), and war frequency trichotomized ($\rho = .260$, $N = 132$, $p < .003$, two-tailed). If polygyny is a proxy measure for violence, not lack of help in childcare, it should not predict in the multiple regression analysis. We examine this possibility in the next section.

PUTTING THE PREDICTORS TOGETHER

The possible predictors in our multiple regression analyses include the following: indigenous money, alien currency,

TABLE 3. Multiple regression model for predicting corporal punishment of children (all sample cases)

Independent Variable	(1) β	(2) p value
Alien Currency	.193	.04, one-tailed
Social Stratification–Political Integration	.397	.001, one-tailed
Homicide (dichotomized)	.113	.16, one-tailed
Non-Relative Caretakers (trichotomized)	.417	.000, one-tailed
R	.655	.000
N	55	

and social stratification–political integration as indicators of social complexity; homicide frequency (in all societies) and war frequency (in nonpacified societies) as indicators of a culture of violence; and polygyny and other-than-parental caretakers as indicators of help in childcare. Using multiple regression analysis, we evaluate which of these possible factors have independent effects on corporal punishment of children. Earlier, we also considered the impact of the degree to which the political system was autocratic and whether obedience training might be the mediating variable for social complexity. Those earlier analyses suggested that our multiple regression analysis should also employ measures of local political participation and obedience training (in late childhood for boys).

A preliminary multiple regression analysis (not shown) indicates that four of the factors—indigenous money, extent of political participation, high polygyny, and obedience training—have extremely low independent effects (β s less than .10) on the corporal punishment of children. These four variables were dropped from the analysis to maximize the sample size. Table 3 shows the multiple regression with the remaining variables. The overall R is quite strong (.655) and indicates that we are predicting 42 percent of the variation in corporal punishment frequency.¹¹ We conclude that certain selected aspects of social complexity appear to predict corporal punishment of children—in particular, the sum of social stratification and political integration and the presence of a long-time alien currency. Recall that obedience training was dropped from the model because of a very low beta weight, which suggests, in contrast to Petersen et al. (1982), that an emphasis on compliance does not explain why the combination of social stratification and high levels of political integration predicts corporal punishment of children. So, something else about social stratification or political integration underlies their predictiveness. We will come back to this issue in the section on interpreting the results.

In Table 3 there is little or no support for two theories about corporal punishment of children—that help in child care minimizes corporal punishment and that a culture of violence increases corporal punishment. If anything, one type of child-care help—from nonrelatives—is strongly significant in the opposite direction. In societies in which non-relatives help parents in caretaking, corporal punishment is significantly higher, not lower. Corporal punishment

TABLE 4. Multiple regression model for predicting corporal punishment of children (in nonpacified cases)

Independent Variable	(1) β	(2) p value
Indigenous Money (trichotomized)	.350	.004, one-tailed
Alien Currency	.383	.002, one-tailed
Widespread Local Political Participation (dichotomized) ^a	-.288 ^a	.015, one-tailed
More-than-Rare Warfare (dichotomized)	.240	.025, one-tailed
Non-Relative Caretakers (trichotomized)	.349	.005, one-tailed
R	.770	.000
N	37	

^aThe sign of this beta weight is reversed to be more meaningful. Higher values on this variable actually indicate *less* widespread political participation.

is lowest when parents are the exclusive caretakers. And homicide as a measure of a culture of violence is not significant.

Before we give up on the possible effect of a culture of violence, we need to examine nonpacified societies—societies whose warfare patterns were not reduced by pacification. Recall that warfare was a significant bivariate predictor of more corporal punishment in nonpacified societies. However, we caution that the next multiple regression analysis is based on a smaller sample.

After eliminating the predictors with the lowest beta weights, Table 4 (restricted to nonpacified societies)¹² shows only the significant predictors of higher corporal punishment of children. Notice some important changes from Table 3, which includes pacified as well as nonpacified societies. Not only is more-than-rare warfare now a significant predictor of corporal punishment (consistent with the “culture of violence” theory) but also other variables that were nonsignificant in the whole sample become significant in the nonpacified sample. These now-significant predictors are “widespread political participation” (predicting less corporal punishment) and “indigenous money” (predicting more corporal punishment). And one of the strongest predictors previously—the summary score of social stratification and political integration—is now nonsignificant. Why should this be? Because the size of the sample is not that large, our thoughts are necessarily speculative, but perhaps we need to consider that pacification is usually associated with more than the forced cessation of warfare—other changes caused by the intrusion of colonial authority are also likely. A more “democratic” local political system becomes less meaningful if a colonial authority imposes a stronger political system beyond the community. When we look only at nonpacified societies, we may be looking at factors that are more important in less-aculturated societies. Although we might expect that an alien currency may swamp the effect of an indigenous currency, we are hard pressed to explain why both types of currency seem to predict more corporal punishment in nonpacified societies.

INTERPRETING THE RESULTS

A surprising and unexpected finding is that the presence of additional caretakers does not appear to decrease corporal punishment: On the contrary, additional caretakers are associated with more corporal punishment. Societies employing nonrelative caretakers have the highest corporal punishment, relatives as caretakers somewhat less, and societies in which parents are the exclusive caretakers the least. Note that we do not have specific data on how much parents versus others employ corporal punishment. But the results are consistent with the idea that the closer biologically a caretaker is to a child, the less likely the caretaker will corporally punish that child.

Although the results in Tables 3 and 4 are slightly different, it is clear that the presence of money of some kind is one of the best predictors of higher corporal punishment of children. Recall that when all the predictors were included in the multiple regression, obedience training was not significant and the beta weight for it was less than .10. Therefore, we suggest, contrary to Petersen et al. (1982), that valuing conformity is not the critical intervening variable. If conformity were at issue, why do not other predictors of complexity, like agriculture, independently predict corporal punishment of children too? Barry et al. (1959) suggest that agricultural-pastoral societies train for compliance in children because it is highly disadvantageous for them to experiment—specifically, to allow noncompliance with custom, because the risk of food loss would be too high. (If you plant too early, you might lose your crop to a late frost; if you harvest too late, you might lose your crop to an early frost.) But we found that agriculture is not significantly related to corporal punishment when the effects of other variables are removed. Could not parents just reward children for following the tried-and-true methods, rather than punish them for not following custom? It seems to us that conformity does not require punishment (which may or may not be corporal); therefore, conformity cannot help us account for corporal punishment of children.

What, then, might propel parents, consciously or unconsciously, to use corporal punishment? We suggested earlier that money and social stratification-political integration are probably indicators of different aspects of power inequality. If parents want children to fit into a society with inequalities in power, might parents choose corporal punishment to convey dramatically that some people are much more powerful than others? After all, to a child, parents are clearly powerful. Not only are they taller and physically stronger, they also control and dispense important resources. So perhaps parents think, consciously or unconsciously, that corporal punishment is a dramatic way to convey the discrepancy in power between themselves and their children, and that the perception of this discrepancy by the child will generalize to an acceptance of power inequalities later on when the child grows up. If the child fears those who are more powerful and acts meek and subservient, he or she may be less likely to get into trouble and

more likely to be able to get and keep some kind of a job. Donna Goldstein (1998) poignantly describes the plight of a woman in a shantytown near Rio de Janeiro who supports more than ten children in a one-room shack. Her discipline is harsh, but she is trying, as Goldstein points out, to ensure that the kids "have the skills, as well as the attitudes of obedience, humility, and subservience, necessary for a poor black person to survive in urban Brazil" (1998:411).

Social stratification and alien currency both indicate a situation in which some groups of people have more power—the upper classes in a socially stratified society or colonial authorities and other foreign rulers. (The link between "alien currency" and colonial or external rule is supported by the fact that only two out of 42 cases with alien currency are politically autonomous; the data on political autonomy can be found in Tuden and Marshall 1980.)¹³ And although a politically hierarchical society may be democratic, as we noted earlier, this is generally not the case. Therefore, higher levels of political integration will be generally associated with some people having more power than others.

Money has an independent effect. Why? Perhaps it is because depending on a job and the money earned from it, in contrast to having land on which you can raise at least some of your food, puts poor workers at very high risk. If they are not meek and subservient to their sometime employers, they can be fired and lose their livelihoods completely. So parents of children who will face this situation may be very likely to punish their children corporally on the assumption that such punishment will prepare them for their future life.

How should we interpret the significant effect of war frequency in nonpacified societies? We argued in an earlier article (Ember and Ember 1994) that war may legitimize violence, so parents may feel justified in punishing their children corporally if the society has frequent war. Or perhaps corporal punishment is a type of fortitude training that is favored in a warlike environment. By using corporal punishment, parents may be teaching children to master pain, which they could experience later in wartime. Of the Creek, John Swanton tells us that earlier observers Swan and Adair reported being told that

this punishment [scratching legs and thighs with a pin or needle] has several good effects; that it not only deters the child from mischief, but it loosens the skin, and gives a pliancy to the limbs; and the profusion of blood that follows the operation, serves to convince the child that the loss of it is not attended with danger, or loss of life: that when he becomes a man and a warrior, he need not shrink from an enemy. [1928:363]

Whether as a form of fortitude training for war or because violence is more legitimized in wartime, the presence of war should lead parents to practice corporal punishment more frequently.

CONCLUSION

If corporal punishment of children is a conscious or unconscious way for parents to train their children for a world full

of power inequality, we should be able to explain changes in corporal punishment over time as well as variation within a society. Although such tests are beyond the scope of the present study, we may speculate about some possibilities. First, in societies that are socially stratified, such as the United States, we would expect that parents toward the lower end of the social hierarchy would be more inclined to practice corporal punishment than those toward the higher end. (For evidence of class differentials, see, e.g., Lareau 2003:230.) After all, people on the bottom of the social hierarchy are more likely to feel the pressure of unequal power relations. The corporal punishment of elite children in English boarding schools might appear to be an exception, but remember that societies with nonrelative caretakers in our data are more likely to employ corporal punishment.

Consistent with our finding that the presence of a long-standing alien currency predicts corporal punishment, we would expect that previously egalitarian peoples subjugated by colonial authority might increase their use of corporal punishment because they have to deal with a new power. Unfortunately, this development is unlikely to be directly observed; anthropologists often appear only after a colonial authority is well established. An example is provided by observers of the Papago. Ruth Underhill tells us that "it is hard to be positive that whipping is a foreign institution yet it seems likely since the Papago are chary of physical contact especially in public" (1939:119). And Alice Joseph et al. reveal that Papago "families with training in white ways sometimes spank their babies; it is more frequent in the more acculturated eastern districts" (1949:125). Although we have found no direct evidence that colonial authorities directly encouraged corporal punishment of children, there is evidence that colonial authorities used corporal punishment on native adults (Bodley 1999:114; cf. Banks 1996). Assuming that natural selection influences how children are raised, it is likely that they are raised in ways that prepare them for "environmental pressures" (Munroe and Munroe 1996:195). We might expect, then, that the pressures of a colonial capitalist economy (as indicated by an alien currency) would select for subservience to the new superordinate power and its constraints (cf. Wolf 1982:314–315). We might also expect that children would be socialized accordingly.

Colonialism had other profound effects on native populations, ranging from punitive raids to establish administrative control, inducing wage labor through direct coercive means or indirect methods (such as a head tax), imposing new political authority, and the alienation of valuable resources. Generally, these changes increased hours of work and created more poverty and poorer health, undoubtedly putting greater stresses on the family (Bodley 1999). Without further research, it is difficult to know whether the effect of alien currency on children's corporal punishment is caused by the colonial authority per se, the introduction of a capitalist system, poverty, or the indirect stresses and frustrations that impact family life.

In sum, our results suggest that corporal punishment of children is likely in societies that are marked by power inequality caused by the presence of social stratification or high levels of political integration, or an alien power (as indicated by a longtime use of alien currency). Corporal punishment of children is not likely to be a result of a society's emphasis on obedience inasmuch as obedience training is not an independent predictor in our multiple regression analyses. Judging by the fact that societies with exclusively parental caretakers are lowest in the employment of corporal punishment and societies with nonrelative caretakers are the highest, it seems that biological distance is more likely to increase the probability of corporal punishment by a caretaker. The presence of more-than-rare warfare, which may reflect a culture of violence, also seems to make corporal punishment of children more likely.

CAROL R. EMBER Human Relations Area Files at Yale University, 755 Prospect Street, New Haven, CT 06511

MELVIN EMBER Human Relations Area Files at Yale University, 755 Prospect Street, New Haven, CT 06511

NOTES

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1. Our reliability ratings were done in two phases. In the first phase, we used ratings of corporal punishment that we had done for a previous study on the relationship between father absence and aggression (Ember and Ember 2002). For that earlier study, we had rated the frequency of corporal punishment for those societies that are included in both the Murdock-White (1969) sample and the HRAF Collection of Ethnography and that were also reliably rated on frequency of homicide and assault (Ember and Ember 1992b, 1994). For the first phase, most of the reliability ratings were made by Professor Andrey Korotayev from Moscow State University; Professor Alexander Kazankov, also of Moscow State University, did some of the ratings. They were not aware of the hypotheses to be tested. The rho between the senior author's ratings of the frequency of corporal punishment and the second coder was .855 ($N = 46$, $p < .000$, two-tailed). To gain additional societies in the second phase of coding, we ignored the reliability of homicide and assault ratings and coded all the remaining societies in the overlap between the Murdock-White (1969) sample and the HRAF Collection of Ethnography. The first author coded these additional societies and the second author provided a reliability check. The reliability in the second phase was .703 ($N = 57$, $p < .000$, two-tailed). Although reliability was acceptable in the second phase, it was not as high as we hoped. To minimize measurement error, we decided to eliminate four ratings in which the coders initially disagreed by more than one point on the corporal punishment scale and we also averaged the scores of the coders. The rho between the first author and the second author improved substantially to .872 with the four large disagreements eliminated.

2. Petersen et al. (1982) cross-culturally tested the theory that a societal preference for conformity versus self-reliance in childhood is the mediating variable between supervision of adults and physical punishment. Although the Petersen et al. (1982) theory does not address societal complexity per se, they operationally use a number of measures of societal complexity as proxy measures of supervi-

sion by adults. These included economic and political complexity in addition to four other variables not clearly related to complexity. They found that both economic complexity and political complexity are moderately correlated ($r = .300$ and $r = .426$, respectively) with physical punishment of children.

3. The two random subsamples have n s of 41 and 48, respectively. The one-tailed Spearman rhos for relationships between frequency of corporal punishment and the measures of cultural complexity are as follows: for agriculture, .318 ($p < .022$) and .311 ($p < .016$); for money, .367 ($p < .009$) and .511 ($p < .000$); for density, .291 ($p < .033$) and .371 ($p < .005$); for political integration, .373 ($p < .003$) and .517 ($p < .000$); and for social stratification, .316 ($p < .022$) and .381 ($p < .004$).

4. For the indigenous money scale, we recoded all of the cases scored as having only an alien currency for a long time into the lowest scale position—lacking any indigenous currency. Because the first two categories on the indigenous money scale (no indigenous money and useable articles as medium of exchange) did not differentially predict corporal punishment of children, we added useable articles as medium of exchange into the lowest scale score. An intermediate category was elementary forms of money and the highest category was coins or paper money. Thus, we produced two separate money scales: indigenous money (trichotomized) and alien currency (present vs. absent).

5. The remaining variables are not strongly correlated with each other. The two money scales are moderately but not that strongly correlated: rho = $-.339$, $P < .000$, $N = 185$, one-tailed. The presence of alien currency has almost no relationship with social stratification or political integration. Indigenous currency is not strongly related to either political integration or social stratification—the rhos are in the .4 range.

6. The finding of Petersen et al. (1982) is consistent with ours in that political complexity had a fairly large direct effect on physical punishment of children, and compliance training also had an effect.

7. Ross (1983) rated only half the cases in the Murdock-White (1969) sample. As explained in Ember et al. (1993:100), we rated the remainder of the societies; all the codes can be found in Ember et al. 1993.

8. Pacification ratings come from Ember and Ember 1992b (nonpacified societies have scale scores of 1–2 in column 7; see p. 175 for definitions). War frequency ratings were dichotomized into more-than-rare warfare (> 1.5) versus rare (1.0–1.5) to maximize its linear relationship to corporal punishment of children.

9. To examine the degree of relationship between the Rohner codes of acceptance and rejection and our measure of frequency of corporal punishment, we looked at the Spearman rhos between corporal punishment and overall parental hostility and overall parental warmth that Rohner and Rohner (1981) published for the Murdock-White (1969) sample. (The codes appear as v504 and v492 in *World Cultures* [2001]). The relationship with overall parental hostility is .514 ($N = 63$, $p < .000$, one-tailed). The relationship with overall parental warmth is $-.308$ ($N = 53$, $p < .01$, one-tailed). As defined by Rohner and Rohner (1981:250), parental hostility may involve physical aggression, but it may also involve verbal aggression. Not surprisingly, parental hostility is highly correlated with corporal punishment, but it is far from isomorphic with corporal punishment—it accounts for only about 25 percent of the variance in corporal punishment. Because “warm” parents may also corporally punish, it is not surprising that parental warmth is not highly correlated negatively with corporal punishment.

10. These variables were retrieved from *World Cultures* (2001). They were all subsequently checked against corrected codes published in *World Cultures* (2004). The variables are v361 (nonparental involvement in caretaking for boys early), v362 (nonparental involvement in caretaking for girls early), v365 (principal nonparental caretaker for boys early), v366 (principal nonparental caretaker for girls early), v353 (sex of parents in residence for boys early), and v354 (sex of parents in residence for girls early). For type of family, we looked at the composition of the domestic group (derived from variable 14 of the *Ethnographic Atlas* [Murdock 1967]) and type of family (from Murdock and Wilson [1980]). Composition of the

domestic group is v211 in *World Cultures* 2001, and type of family is v68.

11. The original *R* with all the variables included was slightly higher ($R = .700$; $p = .013$). To make sure that the results did not change substantially when we removed all four of these variables, we reran the model putting back each of the four variables one at a time. Of the four resulting multiple regressions, none of the omitted variables is even marginally significant.

12. We excluded those societies rated 3 or higher on the scale of pacification in Ember and Ember (1992b).

13. The data were retrieved from *World Cultures* (2001), variable 81. Fully autonomous societies were coded 6 in variable 81; "A" in the original.

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Appendix A

I. Corporal Punishment of Children

Note: Use category 861 (Techniques of Inculcation) in the Human Relations Area Files Collection of Ethnography as the primary category for information. If there is little or no

information, look at the other categories on child rearing (under the two-digit 86 major head).

Definition:

Corporal punishment is the act of hitting, striking, wounding or bruising a dependent child for the purpose of punishing, disciplining, or showing disapproval.

Frequency of Corporal Punishment (CP)

1. Rarely or never. Rare could be in one of two senses—most families hardly ever use corporal punishment or corporal punishment is characteristic only of a rare family.

- Do not infer the absence of corporal punishment from the absence of information on the subject of discipline or how children are treated. The ethnographer must describe alternative methods of discipline or how caretakers treat children sufficiently so that it is clear that corporal punishment is rarely used.
- Do not consider the supposed lightness of the hit or strike.
- If the ethnographer only describes infancy and does not describe corporal punishment during that period, do not assume that it is lacking in subsequent stages unless there is explicit information on other stages.

2. Frequent, but not typical. Corporal punishment is used for some categories of misbehavior that occur fairly often, but it is not the usual method of discipline.

3. Typical. Use this category if corporal punishment seems to be the usual mode of discipline for almost any kind of misbehavior.

4. Confusing or contradictory. (Do not use this category if you can make an intermediate score, e.g. 2.5 if you think it is either 2 or 3.)

5. No information.