

# Child-spanking as Sexual Abuse

Leila Holm

Child abuse researcher at Åbo Akademi University in Vasa, Finland

2005

## CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION .....	3
1.1 The purpose of this essay .....	3
1. DEFINITIONS.....	4
1.2 Thoughts about physical violence.....	4
1.3 Sexualized violence .....	6
2. SPANKING AS SEXUAL ABUSE .....	6
1.4 The child's sexuality .....	7
1.5 The ritualized punishment.....	8
3. PREVIOUS RESEARCH.....	10
4.1 Thoughts about spanking prior to Freud.....	10
4.2 Sigmund Freud.....	12
4.3 Research after Freud .....	12
4.4 Attitudes towards spanking – opinions for and against .....	13
4. THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE ABUSE .....	14
1.6 Spanking and poor self-esteem .....	15
1.7 Flagellomania and other sadomasochistic behaviour .....	16
1.8 A feeling of having been raped.....	16
5. CONCLUSIONS.....	17
NOTES.....	19
REFERENCES .....	21

## 1. INTRODUCTION

During my years of study at Åbo Akademi University in Vasa, Finland, I have come to specialize in the field of child abuse research. In Finland we have had an anti-spanking law since 1984, and studies show that this law has to some extent changed the Finnish attitudes towards child-spanking and other physical punishment of children; nonetheless, it would be Utopian to suppose that because of this anti-spanking law child abuse in Finland is no more. The number of children killed in Finland is steadily decreasing, but these are just a fraction of abuse cases, and the hidden figures will unfortunately remain hidden. No one can say for sure how many children are beaten in Finland annually by capricious and unpredictable parents or as a part of a more sophisticated "upbringing". The amount of reported cases of child sexual abuse is on a steady increase in Finland and has been so during the past decades. This increase may also be due to the fact that people seem to report child sexual abuse more often than previously, thus indicating that child sexual abuse is being recognized as a crime in the eyes of the common people.

Beating has since pre-biblical times been an accepted form of child discipline, sanctioned by authorities. This makes it difficult for people to talk about the topic of child beating. It is an issue surrounded by taboos, and there is a risk of talking bad about one's own parents. Nobody truly wants to believe that their own parents would deliberately want to hurt them. It is within this context that I have chosen to talk about the sexual risks of spanking children. It is, as I mentioned, a topic surrounded by taboos, but it is also sometimes a conscious choice made by the adults not to see these risks. We are used to viewing children as asexual, despite the fact that Freud as early as the 19th century pointed out that the child is by no means sexually "slumbering." Freud was not the first to issue warnings concerning the sexual risks of

spanking children, or *lower discipline* as it used to be called, although perspectives were a bit different then than they are today.

### *1.1 The Purpose of this Essay*

The purpose of this essay is to try to shed some light on the part of child abuse research that scholars usually choose to close their eyes to, for one reason or another. The subject is by no means easy to chart, and there is always a risk of creating scapegoats out of parents who spank their children. This essay is not meant as a lecture. My intention is to make a hidden problem more visible – in Finland and all the other Nordic countries, spanking is illegal, but it still exists. These spankings may have consequences for children's sexual identity development, and it is important to point out the dangerous mixture of force, power, violence and love that is at work.

Creating clear limits for this essay has proven to be a difficult task. The previous research in this topic is vast, although very few of these works have actually reached Finland. It is easy to get lost in the jungle of research branches. The consequences of child abuse is a topic widely written about, and the main limitations I have been forced to make here. One cannot write about all these consequences in a single essay. Therefore, I have concentrated my research on the consequences that have to do with the child's sexual and psychosocial development, such parts of life that have to do with sexuality, trust and partnership, relations and vulnerability. I will mention sadomasochism but will not cover it further. Nor will I discuss forms of child abuse other than spanking, i.e., slapping or otherwise striking the child's buttocks.

Chapter 2 will deal with some of the definitions that are important to this essay. I am going to discuss my choice of terms and the difficulty of translating these from the English language and the different linguistic meanings of these terms.

Chapter 3 is an analysis of sexualized spanking as a concept and how this can be seen as abuse. I will also discuss the sexuality of the child.

Chapter 4 is a resumé of the most important research findings on this subject, along with a presentation of the two main viewpoints with respect spanking children, i.e., that of people who are in favour of corporal punishment versus that of people opposed to this form of discipline.

In chapter 5, I will be dealing with some of the most fundamental psychosexual and psychosocial consequences of sexualized spanking and how these affect the child's development. Chapter 6 ends the essay with a concluding discussion.

## 2. DEFINITIONS

### *1.2 Thoughts About Physical Violence*

In order to clarify the purpose of this essay, it is important to know what the concepts used in the texts really mean. In the Swedish language there is no verb that would equal the English verb *to spank* or the French verb *fesser*, both meaning to slap or smack the (clothed or, more traditionally, naked) bottom. In Swedish we use the word *aga*, but the meaning of the word is not the same. In Finnish and Swedish law *aga* is mentioned as forbidden. It is a word commonly used for describing any form of physical or corporal punishment of children. Thus, the law forbids any form of corporal punishment, including smacks, slaps, pinching, or hair-pulling. Even though the Swedish word *aga* is a word loaded with meaning and associations, it is a vague word to use in this context. The term "physical violence" is also a vague concept, as it may include a lot of different varieties of violence. Save the Children Sweden (Rädda Barnen Sverige) uses this definition of physical violence/punishment:

Corporal or physical punishment is any form of punishment where physical force is used to inflict some form of pain or discomfort by striking the child with the hand or a cane, with a belt, strap or other object, to kick, toss, scratch, pinch, bite or pull hair, to force the child to stand still in uncomfortable positions, to lock it in or tie it up, to burn it, scald it or force the child to eat foreign substances or to wash the child's mouth with soap.

Still, this definition fails to capture the whole meaning of corporal punishment. Murray A. Straus, an American child abuse researcher and child welfare activist, uses the following definition of what corporal punishment is:

Corporal punishment is the use of physical force with the intention of causing a child to experience pain, but not injury, for the purpose of correction or control of the child's behaviour.

This definition is also supported by Mercurio (1975).

We have here not only a difference in language use, but even a difference in the perception of what abuse and physical violence really is. In the countries where physical punishment of children is forbidden by law, the common notion is that all

forms of corporal punishment is abuse and therefore illegal. One cannot use methods that would fall under the English word "spanking," since spanking is also abuse, and therefore illegal. In other countries, such as Great Britain, France and the United States, spanking is still allowed, and school spanking is common in about half of the American states. All of this information can be read at Project NoSpank's website. In these countries, it is permissible to spank children--but not to abuse them. Therefore, the phrase *but not injury* is added to Straus' definition. One wants to separate these two concepts by claiming that spanking cannot cause permanent injuries, and if such injuries would appear, they have not deliberately been inflicted on the child. The 20 "spank-free" years we have had in the Nordic countries have changed our way of looking at these things, and already now it is hard to understand the past ways of thinking, but such thinking is the starting-point when dealing with issues of child abuse in countries which have not yet abolished spanking. In these countries, it is possible to hear this question: "*Is spanking physical violence?*"

Since Swedish language doesn't have a term equal to the English *spanking*, I have chosen to use the Swedish word *stjärt-aga*. The word *stjärt* means bottom. With this I mean corporal punishment inflicted on the child's buttocks with the purpose of punishing or correcting the child's behaviour.

### *1.3 Sexualized Violence*

While the physical violence towards children seems to be on the decrease in Finland, reports of an increasing sexual violence towards children are being published. Abuse in the form of sexual violence could be anything from glances and comments to caresses and rape. Defining the sexual violence described in this essay is more difficult. Some authors, as for example Jeff Charles (2001), aver that the very act of smacking children on their bottoms with the intention of causing the child pain is *per se* a sexual assault, since the assaulted parts of the child's body are erogenous zones (more about this later).

That bottom-smacking can have sexual implications and overtones is for most people not news. The fact that a simple Internet search for the term "spanking: yields a mixed result of pornographic and factual web pages says a lot. Some of the sources

that I have used in this essay had to be ordered from publishing companies that also publish so-called flagellant literature. The fact that spanking traditions have evolved over extended periods of time confers distinct features on contemporary sexualized punishment scenarios. Thus, sexualized violence here means *corporal punishment with sexual overtones*.

### 3. SPANKING AS SEXUAL ABUSE

Those who have read the classic literature within the fields of Pedagogy and Childhood History know that the child's life has often been filled with violence in the form of corporal punishment, both at home and at school. While some countries, such as France, abolished corporal punishment in schools early on, some countries developed sophisticated punishment rituals that came to play a major role in the development of the child's psychosexual identity. Examples of such countries are Germany, the United States and Great Britain. These rituals became eroticised (and were often recounted in writing) by the children themselves and by adults remembering their childhood experiences. These rituals were prominent especially in Great Britain during the 19th century. Upon studying such literature, one can clearly see how the spankings raised mixed emotions of terror and fascination in the child who was watching, heard of, read about or personally was subjected to this type of violence.

#### *1.4 The Child's Sexuality*

Shere Hite begins her *Report on the Family* with a question: "Why do we deny the sexuality of the child?" Naturally, there is no easy answer to this question. One can imagine our own views of sexuality as something ugly and dirty being one reason why we do not want to accept the idea that our children would nourish such sentiments and desires – the thought of children as innocent and pure creatures is appealing to us. The fact that Developmental Psychology has made a clean break with Freud and his psychoanalysis is also considered to be an important reason why we tend to view our children as asexual. Freud was not, however, the first to describe the urges of the child in sexual terms (more about this in Chapter 5).

Michel Foucault describes how people were forced to change their way of thinking when the French authorities at the end of the 1970s started to consider legislation against sexual abuse of children.

What is emerging is a new penal system [...] whose function is not so much to punish offenses against these general laws concerning decency, as to protect populations and parts of populations regarded as particularly vulnerable [...] there are people for whom others' sexuality may become a permanent danger. In this category, of course, are children.

Further in the same text, Foucault points to the fact that the sexuality of the child is of another kind than the adult's, with its own phases and grades of maturity, and that the sexuality of the adult may by no means enter the world of the child's. This was a new notion in the 1970s, and from this we can conclude that the corporal punishments in school and in homes for centuries did not take the child's sexual integrity into consideration.

Hite devotes a whole chapter to punishments and sexuality. She claims that spanking deforms the child's sexuality and eroticism. Oddly enough, she does not consider boys to the same extent as she considers girls, although Money (1986) and Straus (1994) clearly point out that boys are in a greater risk of developing a masochistic personality than are girls. Girls develop faster than boys. A girl can reach orgasm already at ages four or five, while boys start to orgasm (without ejaculation) at the age of seven at most. Striking a child on the buttocks in this sensitive age means that the parent actually seizes power over the child's body and by force gives a message that mixes power, violence and sexuality. John Money tells of a letter that he received after a lecture he gave in India:

During my schoolhood in a Christian missionary Anglo-Indian Institute in Calcutta we were (all boys) often caned on our upturned, upraised buttocks by the headmaster (with his attractive wife sometimes looking on and passing humiliating, sarcastic comments). Needless to say, this brutalized our love-maps and in certain cases brought about orgasms and a sickening addiction to the rod and a good whipping.

This example clearly shows how the child's buttocks function as an erogenous zone. Children also talk about how they fantasize about spanking and use these fantasies as stimulants during masturbation. Freud was the first to (almost) create a conscious connection between children's beating-fantasies and real, self-lived experiences during childhood.



The child's sexuality doesn't pop up out of nowhere in the beginning of puberty but rather is there from the beginning and develops slowly from birth.

### *1.5 The Ritualized Punishment*

What does this violence look like? Spanking (or beating, if you like) looks a little bit different in the three previously mentioned countries where corporal punishment of children is especially popular. In the USA, both girls and boys are commonly struck on their buttocks with a paddle, an implement that looks like a wooden cutting-board or a cricket bat. The verb used for this type of punishment is *paddling*. In Great Britain, children are being beaten with the cane, but also sometimes with a leather strap called a *tawse*. The cane is often applied to the buttocks, but also sometimes on the palm of the hand. (The same goes for the strap.) One must remember that school violence is currently abolished in Great Britain as well, but this does not mean that it does not exist. In addition, spanking is still very common in homes, and it is not uncommon for parents to use the cane, especially on their sons.

Another, equally important difference between the USA and Great Britain, is the fact that girls are not being punished by male teachers in Great Britain. In U.S. schools, on the other hand, girls as a rule are being forced to receive corporal punishment from males. This increases the risk of actual injury, as the man who beats her often is much bigger and stronger. Now, what drives these men?

As early as the 16th century, the Marquis de Sade wrote about teachers opening schools so that they could satisfy their sexual urges by beating children as they pleased. Gibson and other researchers state that these adults often are driven by sexual desires, consciously or unconsciously. One must also remember that the violence can be sexualized in the mind of the child quite independently of what drives the adult who spansks. Violence against a child's buttocks is therefore dubious from different points of view.

Punishments of this kind can often be arbitrary. The "crime" committed by the child can sometimes be purely fictional, invented by the adult, or a crime only if committed by a girl. It is also hard, especially in the US, for a girl to choose another punishment

than the spanking. Boys are often given alternatives, such as cleaning or detention, while the girls are being made to choose between a week's suspension from school and a spanking, all to make sure that the girl actually chooses the spanking. Below a quote from Charles:

[...] Females, unlike males, were not offered the alternative punishment of raking leaves since raking leaves was "unladylike". Having 17-year-old women spread their legs and bend over his desk while he stood behind each girl and brutally beat each girl's sex area with six hard hits of a two-foot long board was, however, sufficiently "ladylike" for Mr. Varney's sensibilities.

Charles describes here how the young girls have to spread their legs and bend over the principal's desk. The sexual implications are so clear that it feels unnecessary to mention them: a girl in this position is imitating sexual willingness and invitation to intercourse. That the punishing men in this case are seeking sexual satisfaction is being reinforced by the projection of the personal desire by the phrase "I am doing this for your own good". To punish a child in front of an audience (before the class or before other adults), to force the child to undress completely or the lower body, to put a child over the knee so that the genitals are pushing against the body of the adult, are all elements that are there to add further humiliation and shame to the corporal punishment:

She [the teacher] once left our classroom for a few minutes, so I went to the front and started imitating her – and she came back and caught me, put me over her knee, pulled my knickers down, and smacked me in front of the whole class. It was very humiliating.

They make you spread your legs and bend over and put your hands flat on the desk. Then they rub the paddle lightly on your rear end just to kind of tease you, and then they hit you as hard as they can.

Shame is also a big part of the punishments that are being given to children by parents, at home. Charles tells of girls in their teen years who are being forced to undress completely before their fathers. In some cases the children are forced to wear diapers, to stand naked in a corner, or as Gibson describes it, are being humiliated and disgraced by the command: "Kiss the rod!" In this way, child-rearing manuals that encourage parents to hit their children often serve as pornography for people who become sexually excited by discipline (masochists and sadists). Often, these

punishment manuals bear forewords written by priests or other men of the church, who are being perceived as authorities by the parents. Such urges used to be called perversions, but are now being called *paraphilias*.

#### 4. PREVIOUS RESEARCH

In this field of research, the literature can be divided into a pre-Freudian and a post-Freudian genre. The research of Sigmund Freud and his psychoanalytical theories have come to represent a milestone, as he was the first to recognize the fact that a child can harbor sexual feelings. In this chapter, I shall briefly comment on the common thinking before Freud, and moreover how other researchers and scholars have developed the thoughts of Freud. Focus is of course still on spanking as sexual abuse.

##### *1.6 Thoughts About Spanking Prior to Freud*

Ian Gibson's book *The English Vice* gives an excellent summary of the earliest research regarding spanking as sexual abuse. It is interesting to see how early on this notion actually surfaced. At the same time, one must remember that such warnings back then were hardly noticed or acted upon.

The first who tried to describe flagellation as a sexually stimulating act appears to be the German doctor Johann Heinrich Meibom, who lived between the years 1590 and 1655. Meibom published his findings under the name *De Flagorum Usu in Re Veneria & Lumborum Renumque Officio*, which was later translated into English under the title *On the Use of Rods in Veneral Matters and in the Office of the Loins and Reins*. The topic of this treatise was so surrounded by taboos that the books were kept behind closed doors until the end of the 20th century and a special permit was required to see them. Therefore, the book did not become as known as Meibom himself would have wished. The gospel of Meibom was that lashes from the birch rod or the whip could stimulate a man to erection. Flagellation was thus in Meibom's eyes a universal remedy for impotence. Already here one can clearly see a connection being made between male impotence and sadomasochism, if only in another context. During this period, it was considered that heavy stimulus of the skin of the buttocks

activated some sort of nerve reflex, so that the male could produce an erection. This was before the era of Psychology. A "reflex" like this one would suggest that all impotent men who were flagellated would be cured, and that all who got whipped would produce an erection. Today we know that this is not the case. Meibom was, however, the first to issue a warning regarding spanking of children. He was also the first to realize that a taste for sadomasochism in the early years would stay with the person for the rest of his life:

By the force of a vicious habit gaining ground upon him, he practis'd a vice he disapprov'd. But it grew more obstinate and rooted in his nature, from his using it from a child, when a reciprocal friction among his school-fellows used to be provoked by the titulation of stripes. A strange instance what a power the force of education has in grafting inveterate ill habits on our morals.

The earliest described case of sexual sadism in connection with flagellation can be found in a letter written by the doctor J. M. Nesterus. The letter was written in 1672 and Gibson quotes for us the most important part:

I have known intimately a very learned man, whose name I shall omit for honour's sake, who, whenever in school or elsewhere he sees a boy punished, unbreeched and beaten, and hears his cries, at once ejaculates semen copiously without any tension or erection of the penis but with such mental confusion that he could almost swoon, and the same thing happens to him frequently in sleep when he dreams of this subject.

In the turn of the 17th and 18th century, people started to more often question the so-called *lower discipline*, pointing out that it was a particularly cruel and degrading form of punishment and that it ruined the souls of young children. Instead people spoke for so-called *upper discipline*, which meant lashes upon the shoulders and back just as described in the Bible. Now the public started to seriously reflect upon the sexual implications of the spanking and beating of schoolboys, which during those times consisted of brutal blows of birch rods on the boy's naked buttocks, often resulting in bloody wounds. The large number of prostitutes providing these sorts of services made people even more convinced. In some countries, such as France, the authorities listened, but the English schoolteachers in particular wouldn't listen, and the beating of children in schools would continue into the 1990s .

The *Confessions* of Jean-Jacques Rousseau were published in the year 1782, and his first personal confession was this: as a schoolboy, he was beaten by a young woman and came to associate sex with spanking from then on. Rousseau was the first to

”come out” as a sadomasochist, even if that particular term was not invented by that time. He was even wise enough not to pass his "vice" on to the next generation – he always condemned corporal punishment of children in strong words, and spanking had no room in *Èmile*, his book about education of children.

Richard von Krafft-Ebing, contemporary of Sigmund Freud, would also become one of Freud’s role models. Krafft-Ebing himself only followed the by-then classical track originally created by Meibom, that of the body reacting by reflex to flagellation. Freud took these notions and developed them further by recognizing the human psyche and, above all, *the unconscious*.

### *1.7 Sigmund Freud*

As I already mentioned in chapter 3, the theories of Freud regarding child sexuality have been proved very important to the research within this particular topic. Freud’s discovery of the unconscious and the supression mechanism created new horizons for thought and the notion that it is possible to supress memories of unpleasant or unbearable episodes, such as abuse in childhood. His theories on children’s beating-fantasies that he published in 1905 give room for such an interpretation, although Freud himself preferred to put the blame on the child by calling it the *seductive child*. He was not ready to admit that these beating-fantasies really could be actual memories or memories transformed, created in the early childhood by one or both of the parents. The thought ”I am being beaten by my father” is not literary to Freud, but a masked, Oedipal wish expressed by the child.

### *1.8 Research After Freud*

Many of the researchers and scholars who have studied the connections between corporal punishment and abberations in the psychosexual development of children, mainly focus on the fact that spanked children run a risk of becoming sadomasochists. Since main focus lies on this aspect, it is easy to be fooled into believing that this is the one and only consequence of beating, but it is of course not so. The human psychosexual reality consists of so much more than the actual sex life. In this chapter

I shall briefly present some of the most important research results of modern time. As I already mentioned, these research results have been unambiguous: spanking of children's bottoms can be dangerous to the development of the child. But few have chosen to listen. Oskar Pfister was a doctor and a psychoanalyst in the 1920s and says this in his book *Love in Children and its Abberations*:

I have had constantly to do with neurotics in whom sadistic feelings were first aroused by corporal punishment; after the sadistic impulse thus awakened has been repressed and forms the starting points of very malignant aberrations about which it would be very disingenuous to aver that they would have developed without the free use of the rod ... The number of those who are harmed through beating, especially upon the buttocks, is undoubtedly very great .... Even one who passionately contemns sexuality will hardly be inclined to deny that corporal punishment induced well-marked sexual stimulations – although the gluteal region is not within the domain of the genital organs.

Otto Fenichel later revised Pfister's opinion that the buttocks are not an erogenous zone. He talks about spanking of children's bottoms leading to anal fixation that will make the bottom "trade places" with the genitals as being the number-one erogenous zone.

Murray A. Straus was already by the beginning of the 1970s trying to make the American population aware of the dangers of the widespread abuse of children. Even today some 94 per cent of American toddlers are being spanked on regular basis. Straus also pointed out early on the sexual aspects of child-spanking. He moreover questions frequently the fact that child abuse researchers often choose to close their eyes to the sexual aspects of bottom-spanking, even those who unprejudicedly do research on incest and other sexual assaults on children.

John Money, a professor in Medical Psychology and Pediatrics, introduced his theory of *Lovemaps* in the 1980s. The term is meant to describe the routes which the individual's mind must take to achieve sexual pleasure and satisfaction. The average child has a heterosexual map that includes no bigger complications, but if the child's lovemap is being vandalized, the child will connect erotic pleasure to acts that for most people do not have anything to do with sex. Especially if the child is being punished by the adult for having played games of sexual curiosity, the child will connect pain with sex.

### *1.9 Attitudes Towards Spanking – Opinions For and Against*

There is not enough room in this essay for a detailed presentation of the now prevailing attitudes towards corporal punishment. These attitudes can roughly be divided into two different camps: the conservative, religious fundamentalist one and the humanistic one. Child abuse and religious (Christian, Jewish, Islamic and Hindu) extremism are often closely connected as these individuals choose to interpret their religious texts in a very literal manner. These children grow up in an environment where they risk getting beaten for just about anything, especially for so-called character flaws or moral errors such as lying. Attitudes and opinions like the one of reverend Roloff from Texas, are common: "Better a pink bottom than a black soul." In these circumstances, Christian child-rearing manuals (by critics often called "baby-whipping manuals") play a major part. Authorities in the field are, for example, James Dobson and the married couple Michael and Debi Pearl. The Pearls recommend training children from birth quite in the same manner as one trains rats or circus animals [sic!], so as to make the child *absolutely obedient*. They use twigs and switches from trees to reinforce this training.

Straus dedicates a whole chapter in his book *The Primordial Violence: Corporal Punishment By Parents* to confronting and refuting the most common defences of spanking, and Biblical interpretation is an important factor in these defences. He claims that the consequences of a strict father-image is an equally strict God-image. When the child grows up, this God-image justifies continual abuse of his or her own children. In the mind of the child, he or she is naughty and only worth loving after the punishment has been taken.

The fundamentalist (Judeo-Christian) approach is built on a couple of Bible quotes from the Old Testament (see for example Proverbs 3:12; 13:24; 19:18 and 23:13-14). These are without exception quotes from Solomon, who is viewed as a particularly wise man. He recommends striking sons on their backs with canes (rods) to create red stripes. Often you can hear the words "spare the rod, spoil the child" being quoted in the strong belief that these words are from the Bible, but they are not. This phrase is not Biblical, but from a satirical poem called *Hudibras* written by Samuel Butler in

1664. One lady wishes to flagellate her lover, Sir Hudibras, as says like this:

But since our sex's modesty	If matrimony and hanging too
Will not allow I should be by,	By dest'ny, why not whipping too?
Bring me, on oath, a fair account,	What medicine else can cure the fits
And honour too, when you have done it;	Of lovers, when they lose their wits?
And I'll admit you to the place	Love is a boy, by poets styled,
You claim as due in good grace	Then spare the rod and spoil the child.

According to the poem, spanking is an erotic way of expressing love for one's partner – you spank because you love. Love and pain are thus connected, according to Butler, and a description of pure masochism. Should one expose a child to such a confusing message? Opponents of *lower discipline* have always pointed out that this form of punishment is degrading and overwhelms the child with shame and humiliation. "Nothing kills quicker than ridicule."

## 5. THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE ABUSE

Although I have already mentioned in previous chapters some of the consequences that spanking has, this impact ought to be examined further, especially as it not always is easy to show how things are connected – children are not objects of research that one can subject to experiments. One is forced to reckon with with the proverbial question of "Which came first, the chicken or the egg?". Straus describes this dilemma. He speaks of the risk of the child showing sadomasochistic behaviour. How can this be measured or "proved" in a way that does not violate scientific ethics? The only way would be to divide the children and their parents into two groups; the parents of one group would get the instructions to use corporal punishment as a way of disciplining their children, the other group would be instructed not to strike their children. After reaching adulthood, these subjects would be interviewed to see if they felt they were sexually aroused by sadism or masochism. And even then it would not be possible to prove that spanking was the sole factor.

### 1.10 *Spanking and Poor Self-Esteem*

Shere Hite is one of those who have chosen to view the child in a larger perspective. By interviewing both children and adults, she has devoted a whole chapter in her



*Report on the Family* to the dynamics in families who use physical violence. Hite discovered early on that it was very hard for the interviewees to talk about how they were beaten as children and about the emotions these memories awoke in them. They often speak of themselves in degrading terms and thus show signs of *poor self-esteem* and *shame*..

Why didn't you experience anger? – Probably because one cannot afford to get angry under such circumstances. After the punishment the child is expected to apologize, it is the child who is in the wrong. The child may not show anger towards the parent, the child may not morally condemn the parents. The child must only *love and obey*.

The child is forbidden to act and react in a proper way in these situations. The child cannot defend itself and often the child hears that the punishment will be harsher if the child tries to strike back or refuses to lay still. The connection between pain, fear and love starts early on – the pain and the fear comes from the adult's actions, and the love is there despite the abuse: the child loves the parent, and the parent often says that it is because she or he loves the child that the child is being spanked. Charles speaks of bottom-spanking as damaging to the child's self-image and its future safety:

When we hit the sex areas of children we violate their natural God-given sense of sexual modesty and dignity. Thus, with their resistance to adults handling their sex areas and hurting them in the process worn down by repeated "spanking", children are naturally more vulnerable to other sexually sadistic adults who would prey on them.

The child gets mixed messages at this point. The child learns early on that one is not supposed to show "the private parts" to other people, and the adults tells the child not to talk to strangers or to get into a stranger's car, the better to protect them from pedophiles and other predators. At the same time, the parents/teachers themselves break this code of decency by pulling down the child's trousers and spanking him or her.

### *1.11 Flagellomania and Other Sadomasochistic Behaviour*

Ian Gibson's *The English Vice* clearly shows how a whole culture can be formed around a phenomenon he chooses to call "flagellomania." With this term he refers to the abnormal fixation on everything that has to do with corporal punishment, and above all, the bottom as an erogenous zone and bottom-spanking. Human sexuality can thus form around this fixation, and flagellation often becomes the one and only

thing that awakens sexual desire and leads to satisfaction. Such behaviour is commonly called *sadomasochism*. It is important to remember, however, that there is a difference between so-called *moral sadomasochism* and *erogenous sadomasochism*. Sadomasochism is nowadays no longer listed in DSM-IV, which means that this syndrome is no longer considered as a mental disease. However, research indicates that some parts of the sadomasochistic behaviour cannot be considered healthy, especially if indulgence in such behaviour is not by one's own free will. Money (1987) points out that sadomasochism is one of the many known paraphilias, which means sexual attraction towards objects (such as leather) or situations (such as punishment rituals). Typical of paraphilias is that the lust partner is not the same as the love partner:

It is more accurate to say that paraphilias are love disorders rather than sex disorders.

It can therefore be said that a sadomasochistic personality may lead to huge problems in the person's loving relationships.

Moral sadomasochism, according to Fenichel, consists of an extreme submissive behaviour, among both women and men. Freud also talked about such behaviour, where individuals allowed themselves to be totally consumed by their partner in such a way that they ceased to exist for their own sake and completely dissolved their own personality. Fenichel gives us an example of such behaviour:

The patient imagined she was the penis of her exalted father, and thus his favourite and most important part [...] the fantasy of being a part of the partner's body is the basis of "extreme submissiveness".

### *1.12 A Feeling of Having Been Raped*

Hite, Stone, Gibson and Straus each give us accounts of both girls and boys who describe their spankings as akin to being raped. Here we are dealing with children who have experienced the bottom-spanking as a pure assault and continued to classify it as such, without transforming the incident to an enjoyable (and thus less threatening) experience in their imagination. This transformation process, according to Fenichel and Money, is a sign of infantile sexuality. Thus, one may conclude that these children show a more mature reaction, for which there may be many reasons. The most common reason is that the boy or girl comes from a home where corporal

punishment has never been used as a method of discipline and *the child has therefore an intact sense of bodily integrity*. If this child is forced to submit to corporal punishment at school, for example, the reaction is often violent and the feeling of having been raped is obvious. A girl tells her story at Jordan Riak's website Project NoSpank, under the title "Rape: Lesson no. 1". I am going to quote here some passages to illustrate this feeling of rape:

I had been late three times to school and sent to the referral center, where I had to explain myself to a male administrative assistant. The teacher told me that I would be given a choice of three "swats" or three days suspension [...] Picturing myself in that obscene position with a male administrator and a witness leering at me was a very frightening thought. I became nauseated and went to the school rest room, where I vomited [...] Before I knew it the words I dreaded were being said: "I want you to bend over and lie flat on the desk, feet wide apart". So, reluctantly I bent over the desk trying to maintain as much modesty as possible. I can still hear his next command: "feet wider apart". [...] The bruises lasted three weeks, and I had to be careful not to let anyone see them. I was terribly embarrassed and humiliated [...] I only know that this experience was the closest thing to a rape as I can imagine.

One can conclude that American teachers have chosen to close their eyes to the fact that bottom-spanking is experienced as a sexual assault by the child itself, and that pro-spankers likewise close their eyes to their own intentions. It cannot be only a question of punishing a child for errors made – that could be done in a much less sexualized manner. Is it a repetition of their own experiences of abuse from the time when they went to school? Is it religious conviction, the force of habit, or pedophilia? There is no room in this essay for such an analysis, but I intend to take a further look at this topic in other assignments. If we are to believe Gibson, the driving force behind assaults like these is mainly a sexual one.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

Murray A. Straus has described the vulnerability of children like this: "Corporal punishment does to the parent-child relation what wife-beating does to marriage." The child is indoctrinated to accept corporal punishment as a proper form of discipline and considers himself to have "earned it" if he breaks a rule on purpose. Who deserves such a treatment? Can sexual assault of children ever be accepted as proper behaviour? In my opinion, one can never justify any kind of abuse of another

human being, and children are human beings, too.

It is easy to be fooled into believing that this issue is no longer worth prioritizing in Finland, given that all parents in Finland already know that it is illegal to spank a child. Regardless of whether our focus is put on Finland or a more global perspective, however, we have to admit that thousands of children are suffering daily in one way or another. Margaret Stone has made an attempt to theorize this issue and make it more tangible, by dividing the countries of the world into five different categories:

- 1 Countries where corporal punishment is forbidden in school but practiced elsewhere
- 2 Countries where corporal punishment in school is officially forbidden but the ban is often ignored
- 3 Countries where corporal punishment in school is allowed and commonly practiced
- 4 Countries where corporal punishment is allowed both in school and elsewhere and is commonly practised in both school and in society at large
- 5 Countries where corporal punishment used to be banned but is now reintroduced or in the process of being reintroduced

Stone's categories give us a clearer view of the factual problem. Number 5 is especially disturbing: countries such as Thailand have reintroduced corporal punishment on their agenda, and certain states in the U.S. are discussing the same thing. With this kept in mind, and with the knowledge that violence breeds violence, we get a pretty grim picture of the future. Hard work is needed to change attitudes, for as long as general society's attitudes toward corporal punishment and other forms of child abuse are positive or of a *laissez-faire* type, legislation will not have a big impact. The Nordic countries are perfect examples of how changes also in attitude may lead to fewer cases of abuse. Here, people have realized that the weakest members of our society are equally worthy of effective protection against assault, abuse and meaningless violence. At the same time, we must realize that things have their own order. In many countries, social injustice is still a widespread problem, with women, the poor and minorities are systematically discriminated against daily. In such countries, one can find people who believe poverty and racism to be bigger

problems that ought to be solved first, before focusing on the rights of the child. As a child abuse researcher, I must protest against such a statement. I believe that the neglect of our children ought to be remedied first, as these children inevitably grow up with such neglect as their only frame of reference and are thereby prone to pass it on to their own children. Peace on earth starts at home.