

Parental Punishment in Home Education

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Abstract: Parental Punishment (PP) is a form of family education that has been misinterpreted from the traditional Chinese culture of filial piety. It relies heavily on the behaviorist mechanism of reward and punishment. But punishment not only makes children feel anxious and unsure of themselves but in the worst cases it can worsen the parent-child relationship. It is also clear from a cognitivist perspective that such an approach to education does not help children to understand the problem itself and its rationale. That it is difficult for children to discover the reasons for their mistakes on their own. Therefore, I question this approach and propose three alternatives that can achieve the same or even better results: utilize positive rewards, teach metacognitive strategies, and change children's social sphere. Based on these alternatives, I conclude that we should do more to educate and raise the awareness of parents in the face of family education problems. This will improve the situation to a greater extent.

Keywords: Education, Children, Parental Punishment, Behaviorism, Cognitivism

1. Introduction

In traditional Chinese theory, there is a culture known as "filial piety". According to Bedford, it is the virtue and responsibility to obey, respect, and care for one's parents [1]. This culture emphasizes the idea that parents are one step above children. And such a notion has gradually been distorted over time by some parents into the notion that as a parent one has the unconditional right to punish their children, which has led to parental punishment. When parents intentionally cause bodily harm to their children in an effort to correct or regulate their behavior, this is referred to as parental punishment (PP) [2]. With the popularity of this distorted concept, parental punishment is becoming more common in Chinese families. However, the most fundamental reason for the spread of this educational approach is its "apparent" effectiveness.

In this article, I will first be more specific about the theories of behaviorism that underpin parental punishment. Next, I will focus on the theoretical perspective of cognitivism to question the effectiveness of parental punishment for children to recognize misbehavior. Finally, I give some strategies that can be used to educate children in a more healthy and effective way.

2. Theoretical Framework

In Chinese families, some parents will physically punish their children when they misbehave. Since this punishment brings pain and fear that children do not want to receive, this kind of parental punishment would be called positive punishment in behaviorism based on B.F. Skinner [3]. Positive here does not have any positive or negative representation, but rather represents the addition of

something or things. The corresponding negative in the behaviorist's understanding corresponds to the loss of something or something. This situation can be called punishment because the thing added is something that the child fears or avoids. So when children realize that if they do a particular behavior they will receive something they don't like—that is, a blow from their parents—they will gradually do less of it or even stop doing it altogether. This process of change is seen by parents as a sign of learning, as their child's maladaptive behavior gradually decreases. This is basically the theory behind the operation of parental punishment.

But parental punishment, which is hurtful and aggressive, can sometimes be counterproductive. This is because in the process of punishment and learning, children receive not only behavioral guidance, but more often negative emotions and complaints from their parents. Such an emotional stimulus, if it occurs several times at the same time as a behavior or stimulus, the child will naturally connect the simultaneous occurrence with him or the negative emotions he receives [3]. In such a situation, if the child is faced with a behavioral choice, it is likely to elicit their fear and anxiety rather than judging how to make the right behavior.

In behaviorism, Ferster and Skinner had proposed a Reinforcement Schedules. They classified responses in four ways: Fixed Schedule, Variable Schedule, Ratio Schedule, and Interval Schedule. Fixed Schedule means that the frequency and number of responses are fixed, while Variable Schedule means that they are not fixed. Ratio Schedule refers to the fact that the occurrence of a response is determined by the specific number of times the behavior occurs, while Interval Schedule is determined by the time spacing [4]. Based on Schwartz et al.'s study we can find that any kind of stimulus—either reward or punishment—will appear under the regularity of Variable Schedule than under Fixed Schedule situations have a more reinforcing effect [5]. When it comes to specific stimuli like parental punishment, which can have side effects, we also need to determine the frequency in the context of the child's mental and spiritual condition. If the child is punished at a high frequency according to Fixed Schedule, it may cause a more pronounced rebellion in the child. Especially in the case of adolescent children, this type of punishment may provoke a lot of conflicts and quarrels between parents and children, which may eventually lead to a terrible situation.

If we analyze this approach to education from a cognitivist perspective, the holes are all exposed. First of all, in cognitivism, there will be more emphasis on focusing on the way of thinking and the changes in the thinking process rather than on the final outcome—which can be understood as the final behavior exhibited. This means that we need to go further and analyze the specific changes that children undergo after receiving parental punishment. Based on Schwartz et al. we can learn that all reinforcement strategies drive children's behavior in a directional way, rather than their understanding of which specific thing to do. An educational system composed solely by reinforcing behaviors produces more narrowly defined results than expected [5]. This means that a change in a child's behavior can only convey the result that he is afraid of receiving punishment, and does not mean that he has learned the reason why the behavior itself is wrong. Children's behavior changes not because they realize why the behavior is wrong, and in some cases, they do not even realize that the behavior is wrong. Especially for young children, it is difficult for them to monitor their own cognition, so it is more difficult for them to realize the problem itself by themselves [6].

The capacity to actively control one's own cognitive processes as well as behavior, particularly affective conduct, is known as metacognition [7]. It is a very central concept in cognitivism. Because cognitivism focuses on change at the level of thought, and metacognition is the ability of individuals to change the way they think, cognitivists can roughly assume that the ability to metacognition is one's ability to learn. However, in the process of parental punishment, all parental actions are based on the child's behavior—the output after thinking—and giving response, and not giving any attention to the child's thinking process. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, it is almost impossible for children to become aware of what they are doing and how they are thinking if they do

not have a guide to lead them in monitoring their own behavior [6]. Thus, even though parental punishment can lead to substantial changes in behavior, children are not really learning anything. Because they are neither informed about which part of their behavior is wrong, nor are they led to think about why that behavior is wrong. The only information they catch is that if they do the behavior, they will be punished. From a cognitivist's point of view, this approach to education is completely ineffective.

3. Research Question

Overall, children are harmed more than they are helped by the parental punishment approach to schooling. Given the wide range of use of this method of teaching, it has to be reviewed urgently. Finding good educational approaches in which parents can help their kids reflect on the causes of their errors and learn from them is currently of utmost importance. So, I came out with this research question: What does research suggest about strategies that parents can use to achieve the same purpose as positive punishment?

4. Alternatives

4.1. Utilize Positive Rewards

As mentioned in our previous analysis, despite the many and obvious disadvantages of parental punishment, it spreads in the social sphere based on a certain validity. This validity comes from the behaviorist theory of feedback and stimulation in psychology, which we analyzed earlier. In this theory, both types of stimuli and feedback, punishment, and reward, can be very effective in shaping people's behavior [3]. However, based on Thorndike's research we can find that positive reinforcement—allowing children to receive the rewards they want is a more effective form of feedback than positive punishment children are more likely to repeat the behavior for which they received a positive reward [8]. Children will spontaneously change their behavior in pursuit of better external rewards and thus meet the criteria for receiving them [9].

There must be a motive or factor that influences our decision to "do" something when we make it. In a broad sense, this is what motivates. Extrinsic and intrinsic motivation are the two categories used to When we perform an action, we receive external rewards, which is known as extrinsic motivation. When we perform something, we are motivated by our own personal gain, which is known as intrinsic motivation. Based on Sennett, in comparison, extrinsic motivation is indeed very effective in pushing children to do things they do not want to do. But often intrinsic motivation is better at pushing children to achieve or become better at something [10]. Therefore, when parents teach their children about the benefits of reasonable behavior, they should try to make them aware of the benefits that are more in line with their own internal pursuits. For example, a parent can tell his or her child that if he or she behaves appropriately in society, he or she will receive more respect from others. The respect and attention given by others is what most people aspire to, so the effect is more obvious.

The change not only solves the problem of the child's own misbehavior, but even satisfies the child's own psychological quest to correct the behavior through positive guidance. This has the advantage of helping children to discover what they are really seeking and to develop themselves based on the change in behavior. This is the second advantage of positive rewards.

In summary, positive reinforcement is not only effective in motivating children to change their behavior, but it can also increase and promote children's self-development and even strengthen parent-child relationships. But whether it is positive rewards or positive punishment, they both fall under the behaviorist theory-which means we are putting all of our attention to the result. McLeod's research, it is clear that behaviorism lacks analysis and attention to the mental process. Everything about the shaping of behavior is very dependent on the environment in which the subject is placed

and the feedback elicited by the outcome of the particular behavior [11]. However, once the participant leaves the current environment, receives different behavioral feedback, or receives no feedback at all, the previously formed behavioral patterns can be easily changed or dismantled. So what kind of education can be more stable and have more long-term impact than positive rewards?

4.2. Teach Metacognitive Strategies

Whether it's parental punishment or utilizing positive rewards, these are behaviorist theories at work. This means that we are missing the real focus on the mental process—which will have a long-term impact. And as we mentioned in the previous paragraph, the cognitivists' way of thinking can be a good way to fill the current thinking gap. Because the focus of cognitivism is on changes at the level of the learner's mind and thinking, not the end result. So what we are trying to change is what children think and consider during or before they produce a negative action, which is what they think about. In essence, it refers to the ability to actively regulate one's own thought processes and behavior, especially influence conduct [7]. Based on Flavell, we can broadly understand the two core components of metacognition, metacognitive knowledge, and metacognitive experiences. The majority of metacognitive knowledge is views about how various elements or variables affect the progress and results of cognitive efforts. And when solving an issue, a person's consciousness and sentiments are said to have had metacognitive experiences [6].

If parents who teach their children have this information, they can use metacognitive strategies to help their children actually change their thinking in a way that leads to stable, long-term improvement. For example, parents need to first teach their children what is wrong or inappropriate behavior, preferably in a way they can understand. Then teach them to ask themselves before they do anything, Is this behavior appropriate? Will it bring risk and trouble? This way of thinking will be naturally integrated into their lives as it is repeated and reinforced. As a result, its long-term effectiveness is much better than positive rewards. But while this is a more effective way of teaching than behaviorism, if a child is embedded in an unhealthy, misguided microsystem, any behavior can be easily changed and misdirected. We need to find an educational approach that can better influence and improve the whole child.

4.3. Change Children's Social Sphere

The first two approaches to education both fail or are less successful in the face of environmental change, so what if we were to be proactive and change children's behavior in a direct way by changing their environment? First of all, based on the most primitive observation learning in behaviorism——learning by observing people around us and imitating their behavior——we can clearly recognize the influence of people around us in our social environment. Most of the time learners see themselves as actors and try to imitate the behaviors they observe as much as possible [12]. Therefore, any behavior that occurs too frequently or too intensely around the learner has the potential to shape the learner's behavior patterns.

And, most centrally, based on Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, we can directly see the influence of the environment on the child. According to Guy-Evans, children's self-development as they grow up is influenced by multiple layers of different social environments. The microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem were the five systems that Bronfenbrenner used to categorize a person's environment [13]. The family, which is the environment that we are discussing, is the environment that comes most directly into contact with the child, and is classified as a microsystem. In a microsystem, all interactions are almost specific to the individual, so people in an environment have a strong influence on each other. As children grow up, the group with which they interact most in the microsystem is not only the family but also the school. Especially school as

a place of education, children will subconsciously learn more strongly the behavior patterns of teachers and even classmates. If parents can provide or even select a healthy school environment for their children, this will certainly have a positive effect on their children's self development.

5. Conclusion

Parental punishment is a way of teaching children that many Chinese parents have derived from a misunderstanding of "filial piety". This approach may seem simple and effective, but it does not constitute effective learning from the perspective of several pedagogical concepts. Based on the behaviorist's perspective, this approach does reduce inappropriate behavior through the stimulation of positive punishment. However, its frequent use not only leaves long-term psychological damage to the child, but also, in the worst case, provokes the child to rebellion. In the end, instead of reducing inappropriate behavior, it worsens the parent-child relationship and increases the adolescent's isolation [14]. This educational approach is even less desirable for cognitivists. This is because after children are punished, they do not know that their behavior is wrong or why it is wrong. Parents do not guide them in the process of education to reflect their own behavior and way of thinking. Therefore this completely fails to meet the cognitivist requirement for learning—to produce change in the way of thinking [7]. Overall, the parental punishment approach to education does more harm than good for children. Based on the diversity of learning theories, there is a great need to revisit this approach to education. The most important thing now is to find a healthy way of education in which parents can guide their children to think about the reasons for their mistakes and reflect them in their behavior.

So I asked my research question—what does research suggest about strategies that parents can use to achieve the same purpose as positive punishment? And I gave three alternatives to answer this question. The first is based on behaviorism by using positive rewards to motivate children rather than positive punishment. But to address the discontinuity of the behaviorist approach, I propose a second alternative based on cognitivist theory—teaching. But based on observational learning and Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, it is clear that the environment is also an important factor in shaping children's behavioral development. In general, since the problem occurs only in the small unit of the family, it only requires parents to make adjustments in the way they educate their children, and does not require the government or institutions to do anything on a large scale. These alternatives are not complicated or difficult to operate. So how it works is not the point we need to address, the point is that more parents need to be made aware of it. They first need to know and understand the information about children's education in order to have the motivation to change the way they are taught. So I think the only thing that should be advocated on a large scale is to increase educational opportunities for parents. When confronted with this issue, it is important to shift our attention from educating children to educating parents. If educators can realize the significance of this change and implement it, I think it will be a very effective improvement.

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