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“Boys Must Be Beaten”: Corporal Punishment, Gender, and Age in New Delhi Schools

Abstract

In this article I discuss the relationship between corporal punishment and gender in two public schools in New Delhi. Women teachers beat male students, justifying it as the only way to get “respect” from them and as a way of maintaining “obedience” and “control.” They emphasized that male teachers did not need to hit male students, as these teachers were respected simply because they were men. Both students and teachers agreed that “boys needed beating,” but that girls were inherently obedient and should not be hit. Drawing on scholarly literature, news sources, and observation of and interviews with teachers, students, and parents, I show how corporal punishment in schools is not simply punishment for in-school wrongdoing. Rather, corporal punishment demonstrates how ideologies of femininity, masculinity, age, and power are constituted through everyday, normalized violence against youth, and reinforced through the school system.

Keywords

Corporal punishment, age, gender, schools, India

Author Biography

Lavanya Murali Proctor is Assistant Professor of Anthropology at Lawrence University. She is a linguistic and cultural anthropologist specializing in English and its relationship to globalization in India. She also studies gender, sexuality, class, and work.

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Introduction

It was the kind of afternoon that defines a Delhi summer—hot, dry, and soporific. Perched atop a rickety, child-sized desk, I was observing the fourth-grade English class in a school I call Government English School. The children were quietly doing an assignment and taking it up to the teacher, Seema, to be checked. Lulled by the overhead fans, I fell into a half-sleep. I was jerked awake by the unmistakable sound of a slap. I looked up and saw a little boy walking back to his desk, right cheek reddened. As I tried to gather my sleep-addled thoughts, Seema slapped another little boy so hard that he rocked back on his heels. Startled, angry, and unsure what to do, I ran from the classroom. Later, I told the principal about it. She shrugged helplessly. "I tell [the teachers]," she said. "What can I do? I tell them. I know it goes on. I try to stop it. It is not permitted. They don't understand. Then the media, they will latch onto this, and we will be the villains." She was extremely reluctant to discuss it any further, perhaps because of the negative attention corporal punishment has been getting in the Indian media in recent years.

Between the summers of 2008 and 2009, I conducted fieldwork in three schools in New Delhi. Two of the schools in which I did my research, "Government English School" (GES) and "Government Hindi School," (GHS) were public schools (called *government schools* in India), catering to the children of socioeconomically disadvantaged families.¹ My research focused primarily on ideologies of English, class, and social mobility. However, I noticed a number of instances of corporal punishment in these two schools, and when I spoke to teachers, students, and parents, they would often bring it up in conversation. As I began analyzing my data, I noticed certain patterns in discourse and behavior with regard to corporal punishment.

Women teachers beat male students—and only male students—and justified it in the name of achieving "respect." They stated that male students would not respect women teachers who did not beat them. The young men in question seemed to have internalized this discourse to some degree. Mayank, a student, said to me, "You have to keep boys under control. That's just the way boys are. Children are bastards. But it's easy to control them. Beat them a little and you can control them." Further research led me to the conclusion that corporal punishment in Delhi schools is a highly complex phenomenon that is not simply punishment for in-school wrongdoing. Rather, corporal punishment is an aspect of structural or social violence (see Kleinman 2000) and a reflection of social orders and ideologies, particularly those of gender and age.

Corporal punishment demonstrates how ideologies of femininity, masculinity, age, and power are constituted through violence and reinforced through the school system. In *Teach Me How to Be a Man*, a powerful essay on violence and gender

¹ All names of institutions and people have been changed to preserve anonymity.

identity formation in South Africa, Mamphela Ramphele observes, “identity formation in almost all cultures is modeled on ideals of what it means to be a man or a woman” (2000:102). These ideals become deeply entrenched aspects of social structure, and are often reinforced through structural and physical violence. As such, the justifications for corporal punishment and the discourses surrounding it reflect these gender ideologies.

In this essay, I unpack these justifications and discourses and highlight their relationship to gender ideologies. I concentrate here on three sets of ideas: first, that female teachers have to beat male students in order to get their respect; second, that girls are inherently more obedient than boys, and therefore need less punishment in order to be controlled; and finally, I examine the emotional aspect of violence wherein corporal punishment is presented as an expression of mother-like love and caring.

This article addresses some lacunae in research on age, schools, and gender. While there is a lot of research on how violence is used to enforce caste or gender norms in India, there is not enough on how it is used to enforce age and gender norms in schools. There is also not a lot of scholarship on the interaction of femininities and masculinities in schools, nor on the use of corporal punishment in schools, particularly in India. Research on corporal punishment tends to focus on punishment at home. Furthermore, as Peggy Froerer points out, “little scholarly attention has been given by anthropologists and other social scientists to children’s perspectives and specific experiences within India and elsewhere” (2007:1036). I cannot make the claim that my research closes these gaps, but it does go some way toward highlighting some of the reasons as to why it is important to do research in these areas.

In studying the relationship between gender and corporal punishment, we also arrive at some sense of how femininities and masculinities shape each other in the school environment. Apart from the work of scholars such as Joseph Alter (2002), Radhika Chopra (2004), the Osellas (2006), Craig Jeffrey and Patricia and Roger Jeffery (2008), Sanjay Srivastava (1998, 2004), and a handful of others, masculinity is a rather under-researched field in South Asian studies in general and in schools in particular. Jeffrey et al. note, “men are present in the South Asian ethnography, but they are generally not the explicit object of study and the gendered nature of their behavior is rarely problematized” (2008:19). Feminist studies should be more invested in studying masculinity, because “in some feminist theory, the relationship between power, ideology, and masculinity is depicted as one of uniformity” (Gutmann 1996:20). Therefore, if we are to understand how patriarchy is reproduced, particularly through violence, we should pay close attention to the social institutions that are “critically responsible for the production of masculine identities” (Kandiyoti 1994:199), such as schools.

Research background

Public schools in India are usually poorly funded, less likely to teach in English, low in infrastructure, and have a politicized curriculum (Jeffery and Basu 1996). Their students are likely to be poorer than their private school counterparts. Teacher-student relationships also tend to be more fractious in public schools. One well-known academic report on education in India quotes a teacher as saying about public schools, "Much teaching is conducted in an abusive and callous manner. There is a tangible, even if unintended, process of eroding the children's self-esteem, dignity, and respect" (PROBE Team 1999:59). Public schools are thus disadvantaged on many levels, and the quality of education the students receive is often poor, though I did encounter good teachers during my fieldwork in these schools.

The students in GES and GHS were from underprivileged families. Many of the students in GHS were first-generation schoolgoers who self-identified as poor. The students in GES were from slightly better off families, although they were not rich by any means. In GHS, many fathers of students worked as unskilled manual labor. In GES, most of the students' fathers worked as lower-rank employees for the state or federal governments. In both schools, the mothers did not generally work outside the home. The language of instruction in GHS was Hindi. The language of instruction in GES was officially English, but all instruction occurred in Hindi. All conversations with students from the government schools and their parents were primarily in Hindi, and I have translated them into English. The conversations with teachers were primarily in English. Words such as "discipline," "control," and "respect" were spoken in English, even in conversations that were otherwise in Hindi.

My research was based on observing classes and student activities both within and outside the classroom, such as at assembly or during the interval. I also conducted individual and group interviews with students, teachers, and parents. I spent time with teachers in the staff rooms, eating lunch with them and participating in their conversations. I tried to participate in school life in as many ways as I could, though the majority of my time was spent with students. I spoke primarily to high school students, ranging from about fourteen to eighteen years old. While both public schools were coeducational, the young men tended to be louder and more vocal, often silencing the voices of young women, whom I would then have to seek out separately. Due to the nature of the corporal punishment I witnessed, my focus here is on male students.

Defining corporal punishment

Corporal punishment is often accepted as an appropriate means of socializing young people into normative forms of behavior. Robert Morrell defines corporal punishment as "the purposeful and frequent infliction of pain by those in authority in a formal and ritualized way in an institutional setting" (2001a:140). Murray Straus

defines it as “use of physical force...for the purpose of correction or control of the child’s behaviour” (2009:214). I use the term to refer to acts of physical violence by adults in authority upon the bodies of young people. My definition includes all punishments inflicted on the bodies of students, from beatings to running laps or standing for long periods of time. It does not include non-physical acts of violence, such as verbal humiliation or harassment, although these often accompany corporal punishment and can cause suffering, just as physical punishment does.

The teachers in both GES and GHS said that they used corporal punishment to enforce respect, to control student behavior, and in response to disobedience (which was interpreted as disrespect). I saw various acts of corporal punishment in the schools, including hitting with hands or sticks, pinching, pulling of ears, hair, or arms, making students run laps around the school field, and making students do various kinds of exercises.

Despite the justifications offered by the teachers, many of the instances of corporal punishment that I witnessed did not accompany any particular immediate infraction. Rather, teachers seemed to pick on particular students whom they did not like, or whose parents they did not like, and used them as “examples”. For example, some GES teachers would pick on particular students (always male), calling them *nikamma* (useless) and saying, “He will never amount to anything.” This was often accompanied by a light slap on the head, shoving, or grabbing of an arm. It was rarely accompanied by hard slaps or beatings, but it was always public. After witnessing one such act in the classroom, I asked the teacher why she had hit the student, as he did not seem to be doing anything that warranted it. She replied that he was not “good in studies,” and that his parents had repeatedly refused to come to school to meet her to discuss this. “If his parents don’t care,” she continued, “why should I?”

A.R. Vasavi (2003) suggests that such abuse of children by teachers might (among other things) be due to the fact that there is often a significant social gap between teachers and students. Poorer students may be first-generation schoolgoers (as was the case with many GHS and GES students) or from oppressed caste groups, while teachers may be from the upper classes or privileged castes. Thus, teachers may be insensitive, resentful, and abusive toward these children, and believe that they are uneducable (Vasavi 2003). In both GES and GHS, many teachers were extremely disdainful and disrespectful of parents. I believe this was due to the social differences between them, with teachers being from slightly wealthier or better-educated backgrounds. Combined with parental powerlessness, this led to a rampant violence upon children that was virtually unchecked despite laws preventing such behavior.

One of the primary excuses for corporal punishment was that the student was “out of uniform,” which was perceived as a form of disobedience. In GHS, after assembly one morning, I noticed a teacher hitting an older boy repeatedly over the head. He was much taller than she and much bigger, but he simply stood there, head

bowed and expressionless, as she hit him. His friends retreated to the foyer and watched unhappily. A few minutes later, he was sent home for being out of uniform. In the far corner of the field, I saw other students doing *uthak-baithak* (holding their ears and repeatedly squatting, then standing) as punishment for wearing the wrong uniform.

Uniformity (both in the sense of being in uniform and of being the same) is a central value in Indian schools, one that is directly tied to disciplining of the body. Control over students' bodies is a fundamental aspect of institutionalized schooling in India. It is "the focal form through which discipline was taught and learnt" (Bénéï 2005:142). As Froerer notes, in the context of *sadachar* (moral education) in RSS schools, "discipline...is manifested through physical control, bodily comportment, and social etiquette" (2007:1035).² While authoritarian adults exert control over students' bodies, students are also expected to control their own bodies. They are taught to sit still, sit in certain positions, or restrict themselves to specific places. They are required to dress their body in ritualized, prescribed ways (see, for example, Froerer 2007).

Adherence to these rules and rituals is a demonstration of both obedience and respect for the teacher, the school, and the rules. It may also be framed in broader terms, such as respect for the country or for society (Froerer 2007). Véronique Bénéï says that *shista* (discipline) "encompasses the meaning of moral rectitude and is explicitly enacted in everyday school life as well as in the official pedagogy" (2008:78), particularly through disciplining the body. Children learn about respect through everyday rituals in the classroom, such as paying attention to the teacher and not questioning him or her (Jeffery 2005). They also learn about adult power through punishments, which inculcate "discipline," as do assemblies, lines, and uniforms (see Bénéï 2005; Froerer 2007; MacDougal 2005; Srivastava 1998).

The principal of GES was inclined to turn a blind eye to lesser transgressions when it came to uniforms, unlike other teachers in the school. "It's so hot," she said, "and they make these poor boys wear ties. Nothing will happen if they loosen them a bit, or undo their top button." In GHS, though, the principal was less forgiving. I was sitting in her office one day, observing her scolding a student who was not wearing regulation shoes. He told her that those were the only shoes he had, and that he could not afford other shoes. She said that he had been given money (by the government) to buy shoes, and he could go home and come back when he had done so. When he left, she turned to me and quite calmly told me that it was very likely that his father had "drunk the shoe money." I was bemused. "But why, if you knew that, did you yell at him and send him home?" I asked. She shook her head at me implacably. "He was out of uniform," she replied, "and that cannot be permitted."

² The RSS, or Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, is a Hindu nationalist organization.

Violence, gender, and age in India

Violence is a central element of socialization processes. It is not enough to see corporal punishment as an individual act of punishment for transgression of rules. It is more than that. It is a social act that carries with it the force of existing social structures. Suffering, as Veena Das (1995) says, is a social experience wherein social order is imposed on the bodies of individuals, and corporal punishment is no exception.

Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) state that one of the functions of pedagogic work is to keep order, or reproduce social power structures, so that it “tends to impose the legitimacy of the dominant culture on the members of the dominated groups or classes, and to make them internalize, to a variable extent, disciplines and censorships which best serve the material and symbolic interests of the dominant groups or classes” (1977:41). While the maintenance of “control” in schools might be the overt purpose of corporal punishment, such control serves to maintain hegemonic power structures as well. In this section, I discuss these structures to provide some sense of the cultural context of corporal punishment in schools.

Corporal punishment is illegal but not uncommon in India. Journalist Nilanjana Bhowmik notes, “65% of school-going children have faced corporal punishment” (2009). It is also often very violent. In December 2005, Akanksha, who was only seven years old, died from a blow to the head. Her teacher, Amar Singh Dohrey, beat her because she did not bring her Hindi textbook to school (NDTV 2009). In April 2009, Shanno Khan’s teacher allegedly punished her for not knowing her English alphabet by beating her, then making her stand in the sun for hours. Shanno, who was only eleven, slipped into a coma and died a few days later (Bhowmik 2009).

Why is corporal punishment so common and normalized in India? The answer to this question lies partly in the structure of family authority systems in India. Women and children rank low in these authority systems, and, as such, are expected to be obedient to those above them. This demand for obedience is a central aspect of the assertion of age and gender hierarchies in Indian society. Violence is a common means of enforcing such hierarchies in India, and schools are no exception.

Hierarchies are highly contextual, locally determined, ideological devices for the maintenance of arbitrary power. They are used to preserve the interests of dominant groups. Such hierarchies govern social behavior and role expectations. Therefore, if they are to be maintained, everyone must follow the rules. These rules differ from group to group and role to role but “the nature of the hierarchy, of dependence and relative positioning...is generalised through reiterations in dispersed contexts” (Chopra 2004:42). Hierarchies in India operate along various axes, and very powerfully along the axes of gender and age. Corporal punishment in schools is an aspect of the complex interrelationships between these hierarchies.

Most of India is extremely patriarchal, and social rules work to maintain this patriarchy. For example, Steve Derné states that the Indian men he studied believed

that Hindu practices of arranged marriage, joint families, and restricting women's movements outside the house "help maintain male privilege by making women docile, obedient servants in their husbands' families" (1995:16). As Susan Wadley observes, rural north Indian joint families practice surveillance and control, and "behavior within the family marks the hierarchies" (2010:19). Obedience and observing the rules of behavior are seen as signs of respect. Lack of obedience and breaking the rules are thus signs of disrespect and disruption of social order, and are usually punished through violence. Corporal punishment is consequently generally accepted as a way to socialize children into obedience (Segal 1995; Hunter et al. 2000).

Therefore, we must see violence as "the sign of a struggle for the maintenance of certain fantasies of identity and power" (Moore in Rydstrom 2006:332). In India, for example, rules of endogamy are often strictly enforced. Intercaste marriages in rural India are often punished by illegal but socially sanctioned violence, which is also used to enforce gender and kinship norms (Chowdhry 1997; 2007).

In other words, using violence as a means of control or enforcing hierarchies is not uncommon in India. Parents beat children, teachers beat students, husbands (and indeed, their entire families) beat and burn wives, and employers abuse domestic help. Violence is also used to socialize women and children into male-dominated prescribed modes of behavior (Karlekar 2003).

Inequality in Indian families operates along the axes of both gender and age. Access to resources is determined along these axes, with girl children usually at the bottom of the heap (Karlekar 2003). Krishna Kumar comments that in Indian families, "authority discourages any form of challenge or dissent. Independent decision making, questioning and criticism are usually not among the traits encouraged in children by adult members of the family" (1991:91). Indian parents value obedience and conformity (Jambunathan and Counselman 2002; Raina and Raina 1971; Rajagopalan et al. 1992). In joint families, elders expect to be respected and obeyed (Wadley 2010). Their decisions are enforced through physical punishment, and social lessons are taught, and control maintained, through fear. Children in India, particularly in socioeconomically deprived families, can be "victims of substantial abuse of a physical, psychological, and emotional nature" (Karlekar 2003:1136).

Studies conducted among middle class professionals in India show that almost fifty-seven per cent of parents surveyed participated in what they called "normal" methods of punishment—slapping and spanking. About forty-two per cent participated in "abusive" punishment, such as kicking or biting, and three per cent admitted to "extreme" violence, such as using or threatening to use a knife or gun on a child (Hunter et al. 2000; Segal 1995).

In rural Maharashtra, some mothers subjected their children to all sorts of punishment, including "hanging the child by hands or feet, forcing chili pepper into

the child's mouth, threatening to burn, threatening to beat, pulling hair, kicking, with holding food, calisthenics, and forced kneeling for a period of time with some added burden, such as in hot sand or holding a brick in each hand" (Hunter et al. 2000:440).

I encountered diverse views on corporal punishment among parents. While some parents were accepting of corporal punishment and others were not, none of the parents I spoke to distinguished between genders in their discussions of corporal punishment. I spoke to three fathers, Bikram, Arun, and Shyam, whose daughters all studied in GHS, and who thought their children needed to be hit more in school. "*Bachche marne se hi seekhte hain,*" they told me—children learn only through being hit.

Arun: In our time, they had canes of green bamboo and hit us a lot.

Shyam: You have to hit children, scold them.

Bikram: See, you have to dominate them a little. So they are a little afraid. Hit them one day, and for the next ten days they will be afraid if you just raise your hand.

Not all parents approve of physical violence in schools, and this may have to do with the difference in status and power between teachers and students. Ramya Subrahmanian notes that Dalit and Adivasi parents that she interviewed were not happy with violence in schools and that "Most parents would withdraw the child from school, or children would drop out rather than face what they regarded as unnecessarily severe corporal punishment" (2005:74).

While the three fathers with whom I spoke stated that corporal punishment was necessary, other parents thought it was a bad thing. After the incident in Seema's classroom described at the beginning of this article, I retreated to the courtyard of the school. There I met Reena, a young mother waiting to collect her daughter, who was in Seema's class. I asked her what she thought of the school. "I don't like it," she replied flatly. "I don't like the teachers. They don't do their work properly, and they hit the children. They don't do their jobs, but they are quick to raise their hands. Like that Seema." At this point, some children playing nearby told her what had happened in Seema's classroom earlier. Reena shook her head angrily. "I'm going to let her finish this year," she said of her daughter, "and then I'm going to move her to another school. I don't care how good this school's reputation is, or about the English-medium. This is not a good school." I asked Reena why she didn't complain to the principal, if she felt so strongly about it. "What good will it do?" she said. "She won't do anything, and all that will happen is the teacher will trouble the child more." Very few parents complained about corporal punishment for fear that their child would endure further suffering in the classroom.

The teachers I spoke to had very strong opinions on corporal punishment. I was a little startled at how many teachers hit students, and how many of the others expressed a wistful desire to be allowed to hit them. I didn't speak to many teachers who, during the course of our conversations, didn't give me some version of "if I could only give them one *jhap*" (slap). Uma is a teacher in a government junior school and the aunt of a GES alumnus. We became quite friendly and met at least once a week over tea and snacks. We talked a lot about the corporal punishment I saw in the schools and she agreed that it was not good for students. Our last meeting was the week before I returned to the U.S. We talked a little bit more about my work, and she said, "You know, you can't hit little children." I agreed wholeheartedly. "But," she said as I picked up my bag to leave, "sometimes they need one tight slap before they will listen!"

Teachers frequently complained to me, "*bachche sunte nabin bain,*" or, "*bachche mante nabin bain.*" These literally mean "children don't listen (to us)" or "children don't accept (what we are saying)," but the meaning they convey, and are intended to convey, is "children don't obey." The equation of obedience with listening and acceptance gives us a clue into what kind of obedience is demanded as well—it must be unquestioning. To hear is to accept and obey.

Why are teachers so invested in unquestioning obedience, and why does disobedience meet with violence? Kumar (1991) suggests that there might be a historical reason, dating back to colonial India. Under colonial rule, teaching became a low paying, low-status, government job, and involved a lot of clerical work. Syllabi were fixed by an external authority, and teachers were not expected to do much more in the classroom than preserve order (maintain control) and make sure students learned the prescribed content. These patterns still persist. Syllabi are still externally determined, even in private schools. Teachers are still "powerless subordinates" in departments of education (Kumar 1991:87), a situation that contributes to teacher frustration and apathy (PROBE Team 1999), which, in turn, might be a contributing factor in their resentment toward students.

It became clear to me that many of the teachers I spoke to in the government schools were somewhat antagonistic toward their students. While they might have liked individual students, they talked about students as a whole in a very negative way, and a lot of their attention was focused on maintaining their position in the school power hierarchy. It seemed to me that they believed the only way to do this was to oppress their students at least a little bit.

Schools are complicit in this process—they "model, permit and shape violent attitudes and behaviors, they encourage students to accept that certain levels of violence are normal and natural" (Kenway and Fitzclarence 1997:126). Investigating why and how violence occurs in schools provides insight into the ways in which social structures, such as those of age and gender, are enacted and enforced through school socialization practices.

Gender and Corporal Punishment

Radhika Chopra observes that violence is “a whole mode of articulation, a bodily language through which something specific is being said. It is essentially a communicative language of gestures” (2004:52). It is a language that is easily understood, and is used to keep people “in their place.” Such violence is often gendered, and corporal punishment is no exception.

One area of research on violence that needs more exploration is that of female-on-male violence, particularly in the case of corporal punishment of young people. Research on gender violence in schools tends to focus on sexual abuse or harassment (Leach and Humphreys 2006). Discussions of gender and corporal punishment are often framed in terms of violent masculinity or the victimization of women and tend to focus on male-male violence or male-to-female violence. For example, Leach and Humphreys state that the corporal punishment of female students is often rationalized as a process by which girls are socialized into becoming obedient mothers and wives, while “female teachers are said to prefer chastisement to caning” (Leach and Humphreys 2007:111). Scholars such as Humphreys (2008) and Morrell (2001a) have commented that male students are resistant to corporal punishment from female teachers.

In the public schools I visited, however, female teachers were the only ones who hit students, and they only hit male students. These beatings were justified in the name of the need to “control” boys, and by stating that male students would not respect female teachers except through violence. As I demonstrate in this section, both notions are highly gendered. After some asking around, I have concluded that female teachers hitting male students is not, in fact, as uncommon as it would seem from the scholarly literature, at least in India. At the same time, the academic literature on corporal punishment in schools is sparse, and therefore does not account for all the elements of such violence.

I sat with Malini, a GHS teacher, in the teachers’ room one day, discussing her experience in GHS. Talking about the difficulty of working with her students, Malini said, “Boys must be beaten. Not too hard, but female teachers cannot assert their authority unless they can beat boys—otherwise they won’t respect us.” Other female teachers in the room agreed with her that that violence was needed to assure respect of female teachers.

At the core of such statements is a belief that a woman, because she is a woman, cannot get respect from men. Femininity is presented as a condition that essentially lacks respect and authority. This belief is rooted in an ideologized perception of both femininity and masculinity. Male teachers commanded respect because they were men, and female teachers, who lacked respect and authority because they were women, needed to demand respect through violence.

It is important to draw attention to the fact that, in this situation, it is women rather than men who are inscribing masculinity. As Connell and Messerschmidt say,

“focusing only on the activities of men occludes the practices of women in the construction of gender among men,” (2005:848). Or, as Kenway and Fitzclarence observe, “masculinities cannot be fully understood without attending to their relationship to femininities within the broader scope of patriarchy. It is therefore important to identify the sorts of femininities which unwittingly underwrite hegemonic masculinity” (1997:120)³. Despite the superficial appearance of disruption of normative gender behavior (women being violent toward men rather than vice-versa), their rationale for the need for this violence tells us that such is not the case. These teachers, through their violent behavior and their justifications for it, are “colluding in their own subordination” (Kumar 2007:133). Their aggressive femininity is, in fact, a corollary of hegemonic masculinity (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005).

Masculinities and femininities are performed and enacted through bodies and discourses. To borrow from Foucault (1977), the body is a primary focus of power relations. He says, “systems of punishment are to be situated in a certain ‘political economy’ of the body...it is always the body that is at issue...power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs” (1977:25). Female teachers presented the masculinities of young men as needing to be forged, restrained, disciplined, and beaten into shape, implying that masculinity in its natural state is wild, aggressive, disobedient, and unable to follow rules. Masculinity, therefore, is inscribed onto boys’ bodies through violence.

Femininity, in turn, is a condition that lacks respect and authority. According to the female teachers, male teachers were endowed with authority simply by virtue of being older, established men. As one female teacher in GHS told me, “Male teachers don’t need to hit boys.” Although I did not see any instances of male teachers hitting students, this does happen all too frequently in India. The PROBE Team, for example, says, “female teachers are less brutal and their presence could *reduce the endemic violence in government schools*. Whenever we found a child who had dropped out after being beaten at school, the teacher was always male” (1999:55, italics in original). There is an ideologized assumption in both public and policy discourse that women teachers are gentle. As my research shows, this is certainly not the case.

More attention needs to be paid to gendered violence in schools, as the dissonance between what I found and popular discourse about the gentleness of women teachers demonstrates. As Matthew Gutmann says, “Through investigation of the vagaries of gender identities amid the realities of gender oppression, we may come to better understand the persistence of gender variations and instability among enduring patterns of inequality,” (1996:4). Kumar (2007) observes that ideas about

³ Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) distinguish hegemonic or ‘normative’ masculinities from subordinate ones. Hegemonic masculinities embody “the currently most honored way of being a man” (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005:832).

masculinity and femininity in India must be studied because they are crucial to the socialization of children. Corporal punishment in Indian schools is an issue investigated more by journalists than academics, and its gendered aspects are systematically investigated very rarely, if at all. Yet, schools play an important role in the creation and perpetuation of gender norms (Bénéï 2005; Kenway and Fitzclarence 1997; Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli 2003; Morrell 2001a).

Masculinities in schools are an under-researched topic (Morrell 2001a). Schools that follow the pattern of violence I describe here are complicit in the violent shaping of masculinities. This raises an important question that goes beyond human rights issues of violence in childhood and adolescence (although these are also significant)—how are young men socialized into normative masculinities, and what are “the implications of these dynamics for the reproduction of patriarchal power?” (Jeffrey et al. 2008:32).

It is important to ask what consequences it has for gender relations in India to naturalize violence between men and women, and to teach young men that violence is an acceptable method for demanding respect and “controlling” others. Moreover, what consequences does it have for gender relations to teach young people that masculinity is some sort of wild thing that must be controlled, and that such control is only possible through violence? While aggressive and violent masculinities do emerge from schools with harsh punishment systems, corporal punishment is not necessarily always associated with the production of violent masculinities (Morrell 2001a). It is the context of corporal punishment that is important, and investigating these contexts and the kinds of gender performances associated with them is important.

The young men I spoke to generally agreed, “boys needed beating.” However, both students and teachers felt that girls did not need beating because that they were already respectful and obedient. Gaurav, a student in GES, said, “if you hit girls, they feel very bad.” Malini, the teacher, said, “Girls only need to be scolded, not beaten,” and this would “scare them into submission.” All agreed that female students should not be hit because physical violence was *unnecessary* in “controlling” young women. This discourse is at odds with the factuality of violence against women, but at its root lies a gendered imagining of women as being both inherently docile and obedient (and, as in the case of female teachers, gentle).

Craig Jeffrey (2010), talking about the practice of “timepass” in north India, says, “in line with broader patriarchal ideas, professors, government officials, and parents imagined young men as, in essence, wayward and somewhat detached from daily tasks and young women as obedient and conscientious” (2010:471). Drawing on this, I suggest that there exists a gendered imagination of obedience and the need to control. In some situations (such as in these schools), young women are simply not imagined as disobedient or needing to be controlled through violence, while young

men are. Therefore, young women are not necessarily punished, or even surveilled, in the same way as young men.

As with the idea that boys needed beating, this gendered imagining of docility also seems to be internalized by students. I never saw any female students in either school receive any kind of punishment or scolding for being out of uniform and, indeed, I rarely saw them out of uniform. Through my research, I never saw any corporal punishment inflicted on female students. I never even saw them being scolded, unless the entire class was being scolded and they were part of the class. I never saw them in the principals' offices. They tended to observe the rules, were much quieter, and worked hard at their studies. In fact, it was hard for me to speak to the female students, not just because the young men silenced them, but also because they were rarely willing to spare the time from their studies. The only instance of "scolding" I saw was in a Math class in GHS. The teacher (a man) was trying to get the young women in his class to speak up, to solve problems, and to participate in class. They would occasionally try to speak, but stop talking if interrupted by a male student (which was often). Frustrated, the teacher scolded them. "*Sher bano!*" he said, and then pointed to me. "*Inki tarah!*" (Be a lion! Like her!). Pushing the young women toward being more assertive, the scolding was gentle, not violent like the punishments inflicted on young men.

Like all other forms of violence, corporal punishment has complicated emotional aspects, and these can also be shaped by gender ideologies. GHS and GES teachers, while talking to students (and not directly to me), presented punishment as an expression of caring. Students told me that they would like to see more "love" from their teachers, instead of beatings. At the same time, as I discuss later in this article, they interpreted some instances of punishment (but not all) as a sign that teachers cared about them and their education. This emotionality is an important aspect of studying violence and its justifications, and one that needs more research. Steven Nock, for example, discussing spanking in the US, asks, "The meaning of spanking should be considered, do parents and children view spanking as discipline? As punishment? As love?" (2000:68). In both GHS and GES, the emotionality of corporal punishment was also inextricably intertwined with gender, particularly with the ideas that women are motherly, nurturing, and caring.

One day, I was observing the morning assembly in GHS. One of the senior classes was held back and scolded for chronic misbehavior. The principal said to them, "Why do you make us scold you? We are only trying to teach you. We are like your mothers. We only want to help you." The male teachers were completely left out of the discussion. In fact, they weren't anywhere near the students, even physically. Like me, they stood some distance away, observing. Kumar notes that "a gendered history of education reveals that there are multiple discourses: women were formed by men through a discourse of reform and the "private", and *men were formed*

by women through a discourse of motherhood and family” (2007:139, italics in original; see also Froerer 2007).

The equation of mothering and teaching allows for the creation of a discursive structure in which punishment is an expression of love. Therefore, when they hit students, teachers can say that they are acting for the benefit of their students. Implicit in this discourse is the idea that students, as young people, have to be molded and guided by whatever means necessary. I refer to the students here as young men and women, but the teachers referred to them (and they referred to themselves) as *bachche* (children). Perhaps the use of the term *children* by students and teachers is an indicator of students’ status in their relationship to teachers? They present themselves as children and are seen as children, which is critical to the maintenance of age hierarchies and the façade of a mother-child relationship.

This relationship between love and punishment is an area of much-needed research, particularly when it comes to young people. If a man were to hit a woman, and said he was only doing it for her own good, because he loved her, many people would be up in arms. What makes a similar justification for violence against young people more acceptable? The answer lies in the fact that children and youth are not perceived as fully socialized beings. Froerer notes, “the status of child, along with the interpretation and experience of childhood by both children and former children (adults), sees considerable variation, both cross-culturally and cross-generationally” (2009a:21). Yet, young people are not passive participants in the process of learning to be adults—they actively challenge, resist, and change the cultural practices they encounter on their way to adulthood (Froerer 2009b; see also Bucholtz 2002; Demerath 2003; Jeffery 2005). However, if they are not perceived as full social citizens, they are not accorded the same rights as adults, and their lack of voice makes offences against them justifiable at best, and invisible at worst.

Many students said that teachers needed to “love” students, though Shiv was skeptical of the possibility of students obeying a teacher for love. This prompted a heated discussion on the power of love, which degenerated into heavy melodrama on the one side, and dismissive cynicism on the other. Although it may seem like these students were drawing on Hindi movie dialogues (which perhaps they were) or that they were engaging in joking behaviors, they were, in fact, very serious:

Gaurav: If I were a teacher I would teach with lots of love. I would teach them with so much love they would do what I said.

Shiv: You would tell them lovingly and they would do it?

Varun: Why wouldn’t they do it?

Gaurav: They would do it!

Shiv: Hmmm.

Rohit: The world runs only on love!

Arjun: Which can melt stone and turn water into stone!

Rohit: Which can set fire to water!

Shiv: These are all just sayings. Things don't happen that way.

The desire for "love" is one that seems to mark the need for greater flexibility in the classroom and in teacher-student relationships. Jonathan Larson (2010) notes that in Slovakia, many people claimed that "dehumanizing" and "alienating" hierarchical relationships marked socialist-era classrooms. Teachers were accused of focusing on students' reproduction of content authored by others, rather than encouraging innovation. After the Velvet Revolution, these discourses began to focus more on the role of "love" in the classroom. Larson notes, though, that one of the pragmatic effects of "love" and "democracy" in a school is the fear of (or actual) loss of authority of the teachers, and thus raises an important question—are "love" and control incompatible in a classroom?

While students desired love from their teachers, they weren't entirely sold on the idea that punishment was a form of love or caring (though they didn't completely reject it either). I asked some students of GES what they would like to see in a teacher, and they started talking about corporal punishment.

Me: How should teachers behave with students?

Gaurav: They should be friendly.

Rohit: They should hit only when it is necessary.

Shiv: If a student makes a mistake, they should hit.

Rohit: If he makes a mistake.

Me: What are the kinds of mistakes that deserve hitting?

Gaurav: If he doesn't do his work.

Rohit: Betraying their trust. Like, they teach us and hope that we will go over it for the next day.

The students began their conversation by telling me that they would like friendly teachers who only hit with good reason. This points to two things. First, they felt that they were being unjustly punished and second, that some punishment is nevertheless acceptable. Many studies, and not just in India, have shown that some students feel hitting students with reason is justifiable (Humphreys 2008; Morrell 2001b; Rydstrom 2006). These students, though, were clear that hitting is permissible only if a student has done something wrong. Their definition of "wrong" was quite narrow, restricted to not doing schoolwork. However, they also felt that teachers

needed to “control” their students. As one student, Shiv, told me, “Teachers should control their students right from the start, otherwise...the children will shout more and start to misbehave. And then the teacher will have more trouble teaching later. And the kids will get up to all sorts of antics. So there should be control over the kids right from the beginning.”

The students did not interpret control as violence, but as firmness, a kind of professionally appropriate demeanor. They said that they liked teachers who taught well, were fun to talk to, and took an interest in their students, while still being firm with them and maintaining a distance. As the discussion mentioned above died down, one of them summed up the groups’ thoughts succinctly, saying that teachers should be “friendly, but not friends.”

Concluding Thoughts: Humiliation and Resistance

Many teachers thought the best way to control students was by “humiliating” them. As mentioned earlier, this humiliation was both physical and non-physical, but their discourses of punishment and humiliation focused on corporal punishment as a response to disobedience. Inflicting humiliation through violence was seen as an effective tool for maintaining order in the classroom and the hierarchical status of teachers. It allowed teachers to demonstrate their authority physically, and also to single out students and exposing them to peer ridicule. As Froerer observes, “docile bodies remain invisible, whereas bodies that do not conform are made visible through the display of corporal punishment” (2007:1045).

In the staff room in GHS one morning, two female teachers, Maya and Vasudha, were discussing their students over tea, talking about how difficult students had become:

Maya: In co-ed schools, we cannot control boys without corporal punishment. When we were in school, they punished us for every small thing. Now the Education Officer comes to school, and he talks to the kids. Then they complain about the teachers, especially those who have been strict with them. The EO doesn’t hear the teachers’ side of things, so students can cause trouble for teachers. We are not allowed to humiliate the students.

Me: How do you discipline them?

Vasudha: (*Slapping her hands together in a namaste*) We beg them. We are reduced to begging them. They say one in hundred teachers beat children too much, but the other ninety-nine are good, yet they too are punished. Not being able to punish

students means students don't respect us anymore.

Maya: Everyone is worried about humiliating the students. No one is worried about how they humiliate us, and we can't even respond.

Teachers complained that government rules and parental protests did not permit them to humiliate students any more, and left them with no means of "controlling" them. A teacher from the third school in which I did research, English Convent School, said, "parents don't want their children to be "insulted" by being scolded in front of friends. We can't punish them also—teachers have no authority anymore. If we scold them, the parents say their child is depressed. For everything now the child is depressed. You can't say anything only. When I was in school, you would get one tight slap."

Students resisted authority in various ways. My interlocutors were quite disparaging about their teachers during conversations that were off the record. At other times, they told me their teachers were not interested in teaching, only in humiliating the students and telling them they were no good. Rohit, from GES, said, "What do the teachers care? They come to school in their Maruti cars, they get two-three periods free. When they don't feel like teaching, they just sit it out. In every period someone makes tea or coffee for them. Their life is much more comfortable than the students."

One visible form of resistance was in their attitude to uniforms. Despite the punishments they are likely to receive, uniformed students all over the world have found ways to modify, alter, or embellish their uniforms and otherwise resist authority. Meadmore and Symes (1996) observe that students express their ambivalence about uniforms through acts of defiance. The young men in GES usually at least loosened their ties, which met with disapproval and corporal punishment from teachers. Raj, a student from GES, said, "It's like this. Like, he hasn't knotted his tie. It's a little loose. You know, the *confident tie*? The teacher will call us, "Come here child." She slaps us so much. They say, 'he is roaming around like a vagabond.'"

Like other examples of uniform modifications, loosely knotted ties seem to function as a rejection of school authority by relaxing the rigidity of the uniform and asserting personal or peer-determined style (see Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli 2003). In GES and GHS, the male students usually also rolled up their sleeves. Their hair was often elaborately styled. One young man in GES, for example, sported a faux hawk the entire time I was doing my research there. Shoes were often not uniform, and many male students clearly spent time and effort on deconstructing their uniforms at least a little bit.

I also observed male students mocking teachers' weight, teaching styles, or behavioral characteristics, although this was never done in front of authority figures (which I was apparently not). Resistance had to be discreet or deniable. Students—always male—also frequently disrupted class by constant fidgeting, interrupting the teacher, and either talking very loudly or mumbling under their breath when called on. Paul Willis, in *Learning to Labour*, noted that the students he observed behaved with a “caged resentment, which always stops short of outright confrontation” (1977:12). Students' resistances are enacted in small ways. They are weapons of the weak, avoiding “any direct, symbolic confrontation with authority” (Scott 1985:29). Nevertheless, while individual students may actively resist school power structures, teachers have an institutionalized, unshakeable power over their students (especially when those students have no space for redress), and thus over their students' bodies. In the end, students are obligated to do what teachers tell them to do, or face violent reprisal.

In this article, I have suggested some reasons as to why and how corporal punishment takes place in schools, focusing on the relationship between corporal punishment and gender. One of the roots of corporal punishment is the importance placed on obedience in Indian society, which ensures maintenance of existing gender and age hierarchies. Violence punishes transgression (real, perceived, or potential). Teachers present corporal punishment as a way to control students. In actuality, this notion of control often serves as a façade for the maintenance of social power structures. Female teachers justify corporal punishment in ways that reinforce patriarchal gender norms. In doing so, they severely oppress young men and possibly teach them to associate violence with demanding respect. They also reinforce the idea that masculinity can only be “controlled” through violence. In a country where patriarchy is still the dominant social norm, and where violence against women is widespread, these ideas can have extremely damaging consequences.

Although the human rights issue of violence upon children and youth has not been the focus of this article, it must be mentioned. As Taylor and Ussher note (in a discussion of discourses about sadomasochism), when focusing on narratives, symbols, or discourses, it is important not to lose sight of the fact that modes of violence have “very real material consequences for the body and society” (2001:312). Bodies, they observe, “can be bruised and scarred” (2001:312). The notion of control through corporal punishment involves, at a very basic level, breaking the child in some way, mentally if not physically. Kenway and Fitzclarence state that “the idea of breaking the child's will by force or connivance in order that he or she can be controlled is no stranger to education, which is structured around the power relationships between adults and children” (1997: 128). Corporal punishment is thus structured around wider social hierarchies of gender and age. The canvases for these hierarchies are, unfortunately, the bodies of young people, which are sites for the inscription, expression, and enactment of power.

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