The Influence of Gender, Race, Age, Academic Level, and Political Affiliation on Corporal Punishment Attitudes

Eric G. Lambert, Morris Jenkins, and Lois Ventura

There is a paucity of research on attitudes toward the corporal punishment of criminal offenders. This research study explored the attitudes of college students on corporal punishment. The authors found limited support for use of corporal punishment as a sanction for theft. There was greater acceptance for use of corporal punishment as a sanction for acts of violence. The authors conducted multivariate analyses to assess the influence of gender, race, age, educational level, and political affiliation variables on attitudes toward corporal punishment. Gender was the most powerful predictor of attitudes: men were more accepting of corporal punishment than women. After gender, political affiliation had the most influence. Republicans were more supportive of corporal punishment than Democrats. Race, age, and academic level had only limited influence on attitudes toward corporal punishment.

Key Words: Corporal punishment attitudes • punishment attitudes • gender • political affiliation

Corporal is from the Latin corpus, which refers to the body (Leighton, 2004); thus, corporal punishment involves inflicting pain to the body as a punishment for an unacceptable behavior or crime (Madden & Hallahan, 2002; Newman, 1983). Before the advent of prisons, corporal punishment was often used to punish criminal offenders (Madden & Hallahan, 2002; Newman, 1983). Corporal punishment was often administered in public as a form of deterrence. The whipping of offenders is a historic form of corporal punishment and is referenced in nearly all ancient codes, including the Code of Hammurabi, the Old Testament of the Bible, and the Koran (Fuller, 2006; Wieche, 1990). Since the rise of prisons in the 1800s, the use of corporal punishment has become less frequent in the United States. Contemporary sentences of imprisonment rely on the loss of liberty to achieve the penological purpose of punishment rather than inflicting physical pain on the body of the offender (Bloom, 1995; Henries, 1970; Leighton, 2004; Rothman, 1971). The last whipping of an offender convicted of crime in the United States took place in 1952 in Delaware, even though whipping of offenders was not abolished in Delaware until 1972, making Delaware the last state to have legislatively

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endorsed corporal punishment as a criminal sanction (Bloom, 1995; Hall, 1995; University of Delaware Library, 2006). The use of corporal punishment of inmates in prison ended shortly after the Eighth Circuit Federal Appeals Court ruled in Jackson v. Bishop (1968) that this form of inmate discipline, as it was administered in that case, violated the Eighth Amendment prohibition against cruel and unusual punishment (Maddin & Hallahan, 2002; Pollock, 1997). While no state currently imposes corporal punishment as a criminal sanction, the United States Supreme Court has not ruled on the constitutionality of legislatively authorized, judicially ordered corporal punishment as a sentence for convicted offenders (Hall, 1995).

While the sentence of corporal punishment has not been used for more than three decades, there are still calls for its use. Newman (1983) argues for the use of public electric shocks for the punishment of many minor crimes. In 1994, the case of Michael Fay, who was sentenced to be caned by Singapore authorities for vandalizing cars (Bloom, 1995; Hall, 1995; Weiner, Graham, & Reyna, 1997; Wiechman, Weiss, & Bea, 1995), led to a renewed debate in the United States about the reestablishment of corporal punishment as a sanction for convicted offenders (Bloom, 1995; Hall, 1995; Maddan & Hallahan, 2002). While some were appalled by Mr. Fay’s sentence, others called for the reinstatement of corporal punishment for criminal offenders. There has been little research on the attitudes of people toward corporal punishment and the differences of these views by gender, race, age, academic level/division, and political affiliation; therefore, the authors undertook this study.

**Brief Literature Review**

As mentioned previously, there has been little research on the views of corporal punishment of offenders; however, views on corporal punishment of children have been a more popular topic. Corporal punishment is often used to discipline children in the United States. Most young adults report that they were spanked at least once as a child (Graziano & Namaste, 1990). Moreover, most adults support parental spanking of children (Flynn, 1996, 1998; Graziano, Lindquist, Kunce, & Munjal, 1992); however, support for corporal punishment of children has declined since the 1960s (Davis, 1999; Douglas, 2006). Attitudinal research on corporal punishment of children indicates that support for the practice varies among different sub-populations in the United States. While some studies have found that more men than women support the use of corporal punishment with children (Douglas, 2006; Flynn, 1998; Grasmick, Morgan, & Kennedy, 1992; Graziano et al., 1992), other studies did not elicit similar findings (Ellison & Sherkat, 1993; Flynn, 1994). Educational level has been inversely linked to support of corporal punishment (Ellison & Sherkat, 1993). While many studies have found that Black
individuals are usually more supportive of spanking than White individuals (Ellison & Sherkat, 1993; Flynn, 1994, 1998; Straus, 2001), some studies found no differences between Black and White individuals in level of support for corporal punishment of children (Cazenave & Straus, 1990). Finally, Flynn (1998), Grasmick et al. (1992), and Ruane (1993) all found that support for corporal punishment of children increased as the misbehavior of the child increased in severity.

The attitudinal research on corporal punishment of children suggests that attitudes concerning corporal punishment of offenders might also differ across different subgroups. Indeed, the research on attitudes regarding punishment and treatment of criminals, in general, suggests that attitudes vary by gender, race, age, educational level, and political affiliation. Research suggests, for example, that women tend to be more supportive of rehabilitation (Applegate, Cullen, & Fisher, 2002; Cullen, Clark, Cullen, & Mathers, 1985) and are less punitive than men (Applegate et al., 2002; Blumstein & Cohen, 1980; Grasmick & McGill, 1994; Langworthy & Whitehead, 1986). Additionally, women are less supportive of the death penalty (Applegate et al., 2002; Bohm, 1987; Borg, 1997; Ellsworth & Gross, 1994). Some studies report that White individuals tend to be more punitive in their views (Blumstein & Cohen, 1980; Lambert, 2005; McCorkle, 1993). Other studies have found no differences between White and Nonwhite individuals in their views of punishment of offenders (Applegate, Cullen, Link, Richards, & Lanza-Kaduce, 1996; Tsoudis, 2000). The literature also suggests there is a racial gap in support of the death penalty, with White individuals more supportive of capital punishment (Arthur, 1998; Bohm, 1991; Ellsworth & Gross, 1994). In addition, as people age, they often become more punitive in their views concerning crime and punishment issues (McCorkle, 1993; Tyler & Boeckmann, 1997). Education has been found to have a liberalizing effect on views toward crime and punishment (Blumstein & Cohen, 1980; McCorkle, 1993; Tyler & Boeckmann, 1997). Studies also suggest that affiliation with the Republican party and those who identify themselves as conservative are more supportive of the punishment of offenders, including the death penalty, than are those who are affiliated with the Democratic party and those who identify themselves as liberal (Lambert, 2004; Lambert, Clarke, & Lambert, 2004; Mackey & Courtright, 2000; Sandys & McGarrell, 1995; Young, 1991).

This study examined attitudes about whipping criminal offenders and children. Based on the literature regarding views on corporal punishment of children and the literature on punishment and treatment views in general, the authors proposed the following hypotheses. First, men would be more supportive of corporal punishment (i.e., whipping) for both offenders and children than women. Second, race would also be significant with White individuals more supportive of whipping than Nonwhites. Third, support for whipping
would be positively associated with age because corporal punishment, especially of children, was more common and socially acceptable in the past. Fourth, educational level would have an inverse relationship to views on corporal punishment of children and offenders. Specifically, lower level/division students (i.e., freshmen and sophomores) would be more supportive than upper level/division students (i.e., juniors and seniors). Finally, political affiliation would be associated with corporal punishment views. Specifically, individuals affiliated with the Republican party and those who indicated that they are Independents would be more supportive of corporal punishment than those affiliated with the Democratic party.

Methods

The data for this study came from a survey of college students at a public four-year university in the Midwest with an enrollment of about 20,000. A convenience sampling design was used to select the students in the study. More than 20 college courses offered were selected for administration of the survey. On average, each of the selected classes had 25 to 35 students. The classes represented a wide array of majors and included general education classes required by all majors at the university. A survey was provided to students who attended the day of the survey administration. The students were informed that the survey was voluntary. While no student was required to participate, and all were told that they could decline without penalty, more than 95% of the students completed the survey, resulting in 611 usable surveys. Among the respondents, 54% were women, 17% were Black, 4% were Hispanic, 73% were White, and 6% classified themselves as another racial group. For purposes of analysis, gender was coded as women = 0 and men = 1. Race was collapsed into a dichotomous variable where Nonwhite = 0 and White = 1. The median age was 21, with a range of 18 to 69 years old. The mean age was 21.61, with a standard deviation of 6.70. For the purpose of analysis, age was left in continuous years. Approximately 25% of the respondents were freshman, 25% sophomore, 26% junior, and 24% senior. For the purpose of analysis, academic status was recoded into a binary variable of lower level/division (freshman and sophomore, coded as 0) and upper level/division (junior and senior, coded as 1).

The respondents were asked whether they believed that “the United States should use corporal punishment, such as caning or whipping, on convicted criminals” which they answered by using a five-point Likert scale of strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), uncertain (3), agree (4), and strongly agree (5). Eleven questions dealing with corporal punishment, which respondents answered by using an agree/disagree binary response option, were also selected for analysis; Table 1 presents these questions. The respondents were informed that the corporal punishment would not result in a permanent
injury to the recipient. Specifically, it was indicated that the sanction of whipping would not result in the breaking of skin. The respondents were also informed before answering the eleven questions that they should assume that corporal punishment could be used legally.

Results

When asked whether “the United States should use corporal punishment, such as caning or whipping, on convicted criminals,” 18% strongly disagreed, 27% disagreed, 20% were uncertain, 24% agreed, and 12% strongly agreed. Respondents were asked their views on eleven aspects of corporal punishment, and the percentages for the frequency results appear in Table 1.

Almost two-thirds of the respondents believed that whipping an adult for theft was cruel, but slightly less than half thought it was cruel to whip an offender who committed a violent crime. The majority of respondents indicated that they feared whipping more than a month’s incarceration. Only about a third thought that whipping would deter offenders from reoffending. They also believed that a month in jail would reduce recidivism more than eight lashes from a whip. Additionally, respondents were asked whether they would prefer eight lashes with a whip or one month in jail if they were convicted for minor drug possession; most of the respondents preferred one month in jail. An even greater number of students would sentence a first-time offender of minor drug possession to a month in jail rather than eight lashes with a whip. The majority indicated that offenders should not be able to select whipping or incarceration as punishment and whipping of offenders should not be public.

The vast majority (87%) of respondents believed that parents should be allowed to spank their children. Fifty-two percent thought the government should not try to stop parents from whipping their children for bad behavior. The respondents were split on whether they thought parents who whipped their children for bad behavior were cruel. While we defined that whipping would use a whip that would inflict pain but not break the skin or leave scars, we did not indicate whether spanking would involve a hand only or an object.

To determine the influence of gender, race, age, academic level/division, and political affiliation on responses to each of the corporal punishment questions, multivariate analysis was conducted. For the question about whether “the United States should use corporal punishment, such as caning or whipping, on convicted criminals,” ordered ordinal regression was used to analyze the data because the response options for this question were reported on a five-point Likert scale, which is an ordinal level measure. When the dependent variable is an ordinal level measure, the use of ordered ordinal regression is
Table 1. Percentage of Responses to Questions on Corporal Punishment (N = 611)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Cruel</th>
<th>Not Cruel</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I believe that whipping (8 lashes) an adult who has stolen $1000 is:</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe that whipping (8 lashes) an adult who has hit a victim in the face while stealing the victim’s wallet is:</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Lashes From a Whip</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Month in Jail</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If convicted for minor drug possession, which would you prefer as a sentence:</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If you were a judge, how would you sentence a first-time offender for a minor drug violation:</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which form of punishment do you think would be most likely to prevent criminals from committing the same crime again:</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which punishment would you fear more:</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If whipping or caning was allowed as a form of punishment, should they be public:</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Should we allow offenders to decide if they would rather be whipped or incarcerated:</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Should parents be allowed to spank their children:</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe the government should stop parents from whipping children for bad behavior:</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cruel</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Cruel</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe that parents who whip children for bad behavior are Cruel or Not Cruel.</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

recommended (Long, 1997; Menard, 1995). Only gender (b estimate = .99, p ≤ .001) and being Republican (b estimate = .74, p ≤ .001) had statistically significant effects. Men and respondents who indicated they were affiliated with the Republican party were more likely than women and Democrats to believe in the use of corporal punishment of offenders.
Multivariate analysis was conducted with the 11 questions in Table 1 as the dependent variables, and gender, age, race, academic level/division, and political affiliation were the independent variables. Because all 11 questions had a dichotomous response option, binary logistic regression was used (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1996). The results appear in Table 2. (For a description of how the independent variables were measured, please see the note section that accompanies Table 2.) Due to space constraints, the table presents the independent variables in the columns and the dependent variables in the rows. Gender had a statistically significant effect for nine of the 11 questions. Women were more likely to believe that whipping an offender for a theft offense or for a theft with violence offense was cruel, were more likely to prefer serving a month in jail than being whipped, and were more likely to sentence a first-time drug possession offender to serve a month in jail than to be whipped. Women were also more likely to believe that it was cruel for parents to whip their children and were more supportive of a government-imposed prohibition of parental whipping as a form of child discipline. Men were more likely to believe that corporal punishment had a greater deterrent effect than sentencing an offender to a month of incarceration and were more supportive for public displays of caning or whipping of criminals. Men were more likely to think that an offender should have the option of selecting either incarceration or corporal punishment.

Race had only a significant relationship with two of the 11 questions. Nonwhites were more fearful of receiving eight lashes from a whip, while Whites were more fearful of being incarcerated for a month. Nonwhites were more likely than Whites to believe parents who whip their children for bad behavior were cruel.

Table 2. Binary Logistic Regression Results; B Coefficient Reported.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent Variables</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Academic Level</th>
<th>Republican</th>
<th>Independent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I believe that whipping (8 lashes) an adult who has stolen $1000 is: Cruel or Not Cruel.</td>
<td>.75**</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>-.37*</td>
<td>.51*</td>
<td>-.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe that whipping (8 lashes) an adult who has hit a victim in the face while stealing the victim’s wallet is: Cruel or Not Cruel.</td>
<td>1.06**</td>
<td>-.17</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>-.21</td>
<td>.65**</td>
<td>.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If convicted for minor drug possession, which would you prefer as a sentence: 8 lashes from a whip or 1 month in jail.</td>
<td>-.65**</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>-.34</td>
<td>-.25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The influence of Gender, Race, Age . . . on Corporal Punishment Attitudes

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Table 2, cont.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>t-value</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>If you were a judge, how would you sentence a first time offender for a minor drug violation: 8 lashes from a whip or 1 month in jail.</td>
<td>-0.89**</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>0.69**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which form of punishment do you think would be most likely to prevent criminals from committing the same crime again: 8 lashes from a whip or 1 month in jail.</td>
<td>0.66**</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>-0.82**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which punishment would you fear more: 8 lashes from a whip or 1 month in jail.</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>-0.54**</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>-0.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If whipping or caning was allowed as a form of punishment, should they be public: Yes or No.</td>
<td>-1.06**</td>
<td>-0.11</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>0.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Should we allow offenders to decide if they would rather be whipped or incarcerated: Yes or No.</td>
<td>-0.42*</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>-0.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Should parents be allowed to spank their children: Yes or No.</td>
<td>-0.41</td>
<td>-0.22</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe that parents who whip children for bad behavior are: Cruel or Not Cruel.</td>
<td>0.39*</td>
<td>-0.49*</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>-0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe the government should stop parents from whipping children for bad behavior: Yes or No.</td>
<td>0.45*</td>
<td>-0.26</td>
<td>0.10**</td>
<td>-0.46*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Due to space constraints, dependent variables are reported in the rows titles and independent variables are reported in the column headers. N = 611. Gender coded as 0 = female and 1 = male; Race coded as 0 = Nonwhite and 1 = White; Age measured in continuous years; Academic Level measured as 0 = lower level (freshmen and sophomore) and 1 = upper level (junior and senior); Republican measured if the respondent was affiliated with the Republican party (1) or not (0). Independent measured if the respondent marked that he/she was independent or another party. The reference group for the Republican and Independent variables is Democrat. The Wald test was used for statistical significance of the b coefficient.
Age also had only two significant associations. Older respondents were more likely to believe that corporal punishment of offenders should be public but were more likely to think that the government should stop parents who whip their children for bad behavior.

Academic level/division had a significant influence on three questions. Lower level students were more likely to believe that whipping an adult who stole $1000 was cruel. Upper level students were more likely to think whipping had a greater deterrent effect than incarceration and were more likely to think that the government should stop parents from whipping their children.

The variable measuring Republican party affiliation had a significant association with five of the questions. The reference group was those respondents who indicated they were affiliated with the Democratic party. Democrats were more likely to believe that whipping an offender for a nonviolent or violent crime was cruel and were more likely to agree that parents who whip their children were cruel. Republicans were more likely to sentence a first-time drug offender to jail than to be whipped. Conversely, respondents who indicated that they were affiliated with the Republican party were more likely to think that whipping or caning of criminals should occur in public. The variable political independence had a significant relationship with four of the questions. Again, the reference group was those respondents who indicated they were affiliated with the Democratic party. Those respondents who indicated that they were not affiliated with either the Republican or Democratic parties were more likely to sentence a first-time drug offender to receive eight lashes with a whip, were more likely to agree that offenders should be able to choose a sentence of corporal punishment or incarceration, were more likely to believe that parents who whipped their children for bad behavior were cruel, and were more likely to agree that the government should stop parents from whipping their children.

**Discussion and Conclusion**

The majority of respondents believed that whipping an offender who stole $1000 was cruel. There was greater support for whipping of an offender when the crime involved violence. The finding of greater support for corporal punishment for more violent crimes is reflected in the literature of corporal punishment of children. As indicated previously, support for corporal punishment of children increases as the seriousness of the misbehavior increases (Flynn, 1998; Grasmick et al., 1992; Ruane, 1993). It is interesting to note that support for whipping of offenders was lowest for the crimes for which corporal punishment is traditionally sanctioned and increased for violent crimes that are generally punished by imprisonment. Newman (1983) proposed that corporal punishment is a superior form of punishment to incarceration in some cases. Specifically, he argued that
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well controlled and monitored electric shocks could be a less cruel punishment for nonviolent offenders than being separated from family, employment, and the other dimensions of one’s life that result from incarceration. On the other hand, retribution is often provided as a reason for the use of corporal punishment of offenders (Bloom, 1995). Thus, under the retributive principle of punishment, support for corporal punishment should be greater when the harm done to the victim is greater. Responding with a violent punishment of whipping would be deemed more appropriate when the offender was violent with the victim. The results appear to support this postulation.

Deterrence is another reason advanced for use of corporal punishment (Caldwell, 1947; Walker, 1936; Henries, 1970; Scarre, 2003; Turner, 2003; Weiner et al., 1997). Many of the respondents indicated that they feared being whipped more than being sent to jail for a month. This fear may have led them to indicate that they would prefer incarceration rather than eight lashes for minor drug possession. It is unclear whether this fear would have any deterrent effect on their behaviors. Only about a third of the respondents believed that whipping would have a specific deterrent effect on offenders. This finding is interesting in light of the finding that the majority of respondents indicated that they would prefer to be sentenced to a month in jail than to receive eight lashes from a whip. It could be that they have a different view of deterrence for themselves and what they view as typical criminal offenders and think that corporal punishment would deter them but would not deter criminals. Respondents may view most offenders as living a tough life and having a fatalistic attitude of not caring that pain is inflicted on their bodies. This view may have led the respondents to perceive that corporal punishment would not deter offenders. On the other hand, respondents probably view themselves as rational human beings who are deterred by pain or, at the very least, try to avoid pain. It is also possible that the respondents do not believe deterrence is an effective means to deal with crime. They may believe that incarceration is a more effective response to crimes, which would explain why they were more supportive of a jail sentence for an offender rather than a whipping sentence. This area needs further exploration to reach a more definitive explanation.

It is unclear whether the threat of corporal punishment would actually deter people from committing crimes. The deterrent effects of corporal punishment on offenders have not been widely studied. Some of the research on corporal punishment of children suggests that it may actually lead to increased misbehavior rather than curbing it (Flynn, 1996; Straus, 2001). Caldwell (1947), in his study of whipping of offenders in Delaware, reported that whipping had little effect on recidivism of offenders. The respondents may have thought corporal punishment could lead to further offending when they indicated that incarceration would have a greater deterrent effect. Additionally, only a third of the
respondents thought that corporal punishment should be public. Newman (1983) argued that corporal punishment must be public to have its greatest deterrent effect. There does not appear to be much support in this study for public displays of corporal punishment.

The majority (67%) of the respondents indicated that they would rather sentence a first-time minor drug offender to a month in jail rather than to eight lashes from a whip. This is probably the result of their own personal fear of being whipped and their hesitation to use corporal punishment for nonviolent crimes. A common assumption underlying the criminal justice system in this country is that the punishment should fit the crime. This assumption is violated if an offender is punished in a violent manner for committing a nonviolent act. Interesting, most respondents believed that offenders should not be given the choice of selecting whipping or incarceration. This finding may reflect a basic belief that offenders do not have a right to choose their sentence, or it could also be due to society’s acceptance of prison as a normal and accepted form of punishment.

The vast majority of respondents believed that parents should be allowed to spank their children; however, there was an almost even split among respondents’ thoughts on the cruelty of whipping children. Determining whether whipping a child is cruel may depend on the respondents’ selective perceptions of what level of harm is inflicted in a whipping. Those respondents who perceive a whipping to be nothing more than a severe spanking may not consider it cruel. Other respondents may have been socialized to believe that inflicting bodily harm on a child, regardless of the misbehavior, is wrong and immoral. Additionally, there was division among the respondents regarding whether they thought that government should stop parents from whipping their children. This finding may reflect respondents’ attitudes toward the role of government as well as their attitudes toward corporal punishment. The popular media’s portrayal of child abuse may influence respondents’ hesitation in [allowing] [approving of?] whipping of a child for bad behavior as might respondents’ exposure to non-violent parenting techniques and information on the potential harm of corporal punishment on a child’s health and social development.

The multivariate analysis supported some but not all the hypotheses. Overall, women were less supportive of corporal punishment than men. This finding is consistent with the research on punishment and treatment views of men and women. This finding also supports Gilligan’s (1982) contention that men and women differ in their moral reasoning and perceptions of fairness and justice. Gilligan argued that men generally believe that people must be held accountable for their actions, and punishment is an acceptable sanction for a crime. Women, on the other hand, believe that people must be treated compassionately, and sanctions are used to change people for the greater good of the group. The second best predictor of corporal punishment views was political affiliation. In general, those respondents affiliated with the Republican party were more supportive of
corporal punishment than those students affiliated with the Democratic party. Thus, the differences observed in association with political affiliation in terms of general punishment and treatment views continue for corporal punishment views.

Academic level/division was not a strong predictor of corporal punishment views. There was a difference between the views of lower and upper level/division students on only three of the twelve multivariate questions. As predicted, upper level/division students were more likely to believe whipping for stealing was cruel and were more likely to believe that government should stop parents from whipping their children. Education appears to have some liberalizing effects. On the other hand, upper level/division students were more likely to believe that corporal punishment would have a greater deterrent effect than incarceration. There was no relationship between academic level/division and nine other corporal punishment views. It could be that there is no relationship between educational level and corporal punishment views in most circumstances. A limited measure of educational level was used in this study as it surveyed only undergraduate students. No respondents had less than a high school education or a graduate education. It is very possible that with a wider range of educational levels, a relationship between educational level and corporal punishment would have been observed. Similarly, age was a poor predictor of corporal punishment views. There was a significant relationship for age in only two of the twelve multivariate analyses. It could be that age is not linked to corporal punishment views when the effects of gender and political affiliation are taken into account. It is also possible that the lack of more relationships was due to the population surveyed. While age ranged from 18 to 69 years, the vast majority (85%) of the respondents were between the ages of 18 and 26.

Interestingly, race had a significant relationship in only two of the twelve multivariate models. It could be that race has little to do with attitudes about corporal punishment. There has been little, if any, research on views on corporal punishment of criminals. It is also possible that the dichotomous measure of being White or Nonwhite failed to capture the differences in views. Most of the research on views of punishment and views of corporal punishment of children has examined the differences between White and Black respondents. New multivariate analyses were run, dichotomizing the respondents as either Black or White. In addition to the significant effects of race Table 2 reports, the new measure had a significant association on one new question only. White respondents were more likely than Black respondents to believe that parents who whipped their children for bad behavior were cruel. This new finding is consistent with the literature that suggests Black individuals are more supportive of corporal punishment of children (Ellison & Sherkat, 1993; Flynn, 1994, 1998; Straus, 2001). It is possible that the relationship between race and corporal punishment views depends on the type of corporal punishment
that is examined and whether children or adults are being subjected to it. The literature suggests that White individuals are more likely to support punishment of offenders but are ambivalent on corporal punishment of children. Conversely, the literature reports that Black persons are more supportive of treatment for criminal offenders and opposed to the death penalty but are more supportive of corporal punishment of children. Thus the relationship between race and corporal punishment views may be complex and vary by the situation.

This study has limitations. It was but a single exploratory study that examined the corporal punishment attitudes of students at a Midwestern public university. There is a need for much more research in this area. If possible, a random sampling of people in the community should be done. In addition, incarcerated convicted offenders should be surveyed. There may also be regional differences in corporal punishment attitudes. The current study examined only a limited area of corporal punishment attitudes. Future research needs to examine other forms of corporal punishment. For example, this study did not examine the use of electrical shocks as Newman (1983) proposed. Additionally, this study asked only about the imposition of corporal punishment or incarceration. It is unknown what level of support there would be for joint sentences involving corporal punishment and another sanction, such as probation, house arrest, or incarceration. Future research may wish to examine the views on the use of corporal punishment in prisons and with juvenile delinquents. In addition to the personal characteristics of gender, race, age, educational level, and political orientation, other variables need to be explored to determine what relationship they have, if any, with corporal punishment attitudes. Research on views of corporal punishment of children has found that religious variables were important factors in explaining level of support (Ellison & Sherkat, 1993). This is clearly a need for more research in this area.

While offenders are not sentenced currently to corporal punishment in the United States, it is important to explore corporal punishment attitudes. Studying corporal punishment attitudes provides a better and richer understanding of people’s perspectives on crime and sanctioning of offenders. Additionally, there is a chance that corporal punishment of offenders may be reinstated in the United States. Undoubtedly, public opinion would influence such a legislative decision, and it may also be a factor in any subsequent judicial review (Hall, 1995). Regardless of whether corporal punishment is reestablished and/or constitutional, understanding corporal punishment views is necessary to broaden the scope and depth of criminal justice knowledge. It is hoped that this research will spark an interest in exploring people’s views on corporal punishment and why they vary.
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References


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