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Is Corporal Punishment the Best Punishment? A Millennial Perspective

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Departmental Honors Thesis

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Introduction

Corporal punishment, defined as “physical force resulting in pain or discomfort, but not significant injury...meant to alter a child’s unfavorable behavioral patterns,” remains a much debated topic of conversation in the United States (Straus & Donnelly, 2001, p. 4). Straus and Stewart (1999) reported that 94% of parents have spanked their children by the time of their fifth birthday. Moreover, the same study identified that 52% of parents continued to employ corporal punishment when their children were teenagers (twelve to thirteen years old) and 20% up until their children were seventeen years of age. However, spanking and similar forms of discipline previously employed in the school setting have, through policy revisions, been excluded, and now some scholars are calling for the eradication of such punishment in the home (Cuddy & Reeves, 2014). This is primarily due to various studies asserting that corporal punishment produces harmful effects including, but not limited to, depression, poor school performance, intensification of introversion and aggression, and cognitive injury (Berlin et al., 2009; Gershoff, 2002; Gershoff et al., 2010; Gershoff & Grogan-Kaylor, 2016; Gunnoe & Mariner, 1997; Kandel, 1990; Pagani et al., 2004; Simons, Simons, & Su, 2013; Straus & Paschall, 2009).

The existing literature on perceptions of corporal punishment is scant and many studies of corporal punishment more generally are quite dated. In order to add to this body of literature, the current study explores millennials’ perceptions of corporal punishment in order to determine whether this population believes there to be a better punishment than corporal punishment. Specifically, the current study relies on a college student sample to examine how various individual characteristics such as age, race, and sex influence students’ perceptions of corporal punishment.

Literature Review

The majority of the literature regarding corporal punishment has investigated the harm associated with spanking and similar discipline. Simons, Simons, and Su (2013) discovered that corporal punishment, depending upon the parenting style being employed, can lead to unexpected negative results including depression, delinquency, and/or poor school performance. For instance, children of vigilant/punitive parents, distinguished by their high demandingness (behavioral control) and low responsiveness (warmth and consideration), who employ corporal punishment were the most likely of the 683 subjects to experience depression. It should be noted that Simons et al.'s study suggested that even though spanking did not prove directly beneficial, it did not necessarily prove detrimental either. Specifically, their results indicated "that parents who are warm, involved, and engage in monitoring as well as consistent discipline do little harm by using corporal punishment..." (Simons et al., 2013, p. 1283).

In regard to corporal punishment's relationship with cognition, Straus and Paschall (2009) discovered that children of parents who did not resort to physical discipline gained cognitive ability faster than those who endured disciplinary spanking and slapping. Specifically, children two to four years old who were not subjected to corporal punishment during the study scored an average of 5.5 cognitive ability points higher than those subjected to spanking and/or slapping of the hands. Similarly, five to nine year-old subjects who were not subjected to corporal punishment during the study scored an average of about two points higher than those subjected to spanking and/or slapping of the hands.

Finally, studies suggest that corporal punishment might even stimulate behavior it is meant to deter (Berlin et al., 2009; Boutwell, Franklin, Barnes, & Beaver, 2011; Eisenberg, Chang, Ma, & Huang, 2009; Gershoff, 2002; Gershoff et al., 2010; Gershoff & Grogan-Kaylor,

2016; Gunnoe & Mariner, 1997; Kandel, 1990; Lau et al., 2005; Lynam et al., 2009; Minton, Kagan & Levine, 1971; Pagani et al., 2004). Gershoff's (2002) meta-analysis of eighty-eight scholarly articles investigating corporal punishment, together spanning sixty-two years and analyzing 36,309 subjects, revealed:

Parental corporal punishment is associated with the following undesirable behaviors and experiences: decreased moral internalization, increased child aggression, increased child delinquent and antisocial behavior, decreased quality of relationship between parent and child, decreased child mental health, increased risk of being a victim of physical abuse, increased adult aggression, increased adult criminal and antisocial behavior, decreased adult mental health, and increased risk of abusing own child or spouse (p. 544).

Similarly, Gershoff and Grogan-Kaylor's (2016) more recent meta-analysis of 79 studies relating to corporal punishment, which incorporates findings based on 160,927 children and spans five decades confirmed spanking has negative consequences for children. More specifically, their analyses revealed that it fosters the following detrimental outcomes: aggression, antisocial behavior, externalizing problems, internalizing problems, mental health problems, negative relationships with parents, lower moral internalization, lower cognitive ability, and lower self-esteem.

Despite highlighting the significant consequences of spanking, the extant literature has not sufficiently investigated millennials' experiences and perceptions of corporal punishment. A plethora of research, however, has identified how demographic characteristics influence the use and perceptions of corporal punishment. Focusing on race, many studies have suggested that corporal punishment is not homogeneously employed by all races. In particular, multiple studies suggest African-American children are more likely to experience corporal punishment than their

Caucasian counterparts (Berlin et al., 2009; Finkelhor et al., 2005; Gershoff, Lansford, Sexton, Davis-Kean, & Sameroff, 2012; Hanson et al., 2006; Hawkins et al., 2010; Lorber, O’Leary, & Slep, 2011; MacKenzie, Nicklas, Brooks-Gunn, & Waldfogel, 2011; Turner et al., 2006; Taillieu, Afifi, Mota, Keyes, & Sareen, 2014).

For instance, Taillieu et al. (2014) discovered that, though corporal punishment experiences are decreasing, minority races/ethnicities are more likely to experience and employ corporal punishment than non-Hispanic Caucasians. Examining trends across racial groups, this study found that 28.9% of Native Americans/Alaskan natives, 20.9% of African-Americans, 18% of Hispanics, 16.9% of Caucasians, and 11.3% of Asians/Native Hawaiians/Pacific Islanders reported experiencing harsh physical punishment as a child. The findings of Taillieu and colleagues suggest that harsh physical discipline has steadily decreased over the past seventy years among Caucasians with only 11.3% of twenty to twenty-nine year-olds reporting that they were spanked as children compared to 19.6% of fifty to fifty-nine year-olds. In contrast, there was little evidence of a change in the rates of harsh physical discipline among African-Americans with approximately 20% of all age groups reporting that they were spanked or subjected to some similar type of discipline. Interestingly, the rates of harsh physical discipline indicate that corporal punishment may be on the rise for Hispanics. Overall, Taillieu et al. found that older Americans are more likely to have experienced corporal punishment than younger Americans. Specifically, 20% (1,038) of fifty to fifty-nine year-old subjects reported undergoing harsh physical discipline as a child, followed by 18.7% (1,463) of forty to forty-nine year-olds, 17.8% (754) of sixty to sixty-nine year-olds, 17.2% (1,213) of thirty to thirty-nine year-olds, and 13.7% (724) of twenty to twenty-nine year-olds.

In respect to sex of the recipient and corporal punishment, the literature remains mixed. Limiting their definition of corporal punishment to being “spanked or hit a lot by...parents before age 12,” Douglas and Straus (2006) explored corporal punishment in a sample of 9,549 students from thirty-six universities spanning nineteen countries. Their findings indicate that boys have a greater probability of experiencing corporal punishment than girls. Other studies report similar findings (Day, Peterson, & McCracken, 1998; Dietz, 2000; Giles-Sims, Straus, & Sugarman, 1995). Despite some consistency across studies, some scholars suggest corporal punishment and gender may not be significantly related (Deley, 1988; Hanson et al., 2006; Regalado, Sareen, Inkelas, Wissow, & Halfon, 2004; Taillieu et al., 2014). For example, Taillieu et al. (2014) report that 17.7% (2,374) of males surveyed and 17.4% (3,088) of females surveyed stated they experienced harsh physical discipline as a child suggesting that males and females experience corporal punishment at similar rates.

Country of origin and regional location are other key demographic characteristics that researchers have examined when investigating the prevalence of corporal punishment. A study conducted by Lee and Altschul (2015) centered on a path model analysis of data collected from 1,089 Hispanic mothers and 650 Hispanic fathers, who were surveyed when their children became one, three, and five years of age, revealed that foreign-born Americans (or at least foreign-born Hispanic Americans) are less likely to employ spanking than their counterparts born on U.S. soil. Of the 1,089 Hispanic mothers surveyed, 671 of which were native-born (NB) and 418 foreign-born (FB), 21% of NB mothers reported spanking their three year-old children “a few times to nearly everyday” and 29% “once or twice in past month,” surpassing FB mothers’ spanking incidents by 11% and 8%, respectively. Similarly, NB mothers were more likely than FB mothers to discipline their five year-old children through spanking; 13% of NB subjects

reported spanking “a few times to nearly everyday” and 33% “once or twice in past month.” (Compare to 8% and 18% of NB mothers, respectively.)

In comparison, of the 650 Hispanic fathers surveyed, 350 of which were native-born and 300 foreign-born, 19% of NB fathers reported spanking their three year-old children “a few times to nearly everyday” and 28% “once or twice in past month,” surpassing FB fathers’ spanking incidents by 14% and 23%, respectively (Lee & Altschul, 2015). Similarly, NB fathers were more likely than FB fathers to discipline their five year-old children through spanking; 12% of NB subjects reported spanking “a few times to nearly everyday” and 22% “once or twice in past month.” This is in comparison to 4% and 10% of NB fathers, respectively. Again, this data suggests corporal punishment has become a distinctive part of American culture at least when compared to Hispanic cultures. Interestingly, the Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children (2014) reports thirty-nine countries have outlawed physical discipline including spanking, and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child “prohibits the use of any form of physical or mental violence against children” (Taillieu et al., 2014, p. 1886). In addition to revealing acculturation’s relationship with spanking, Lee and Altschul’s (2015) research suggests religiosity “[is] not a significant direct predictor of spanking or mediator of the effects of foreign birth on spanking for either mothers or fathers” (Lee & Altschul, 2015, p. 490). Moreover, other significant predictors of spanking three year-olds specifically beside nativity status include heavy alcohol use and intimate partner violence.

Regarding regional location, Flynn (1996), comparing students from a college in the Northeast and a university in the South, established that Northeasterners were less likely than their Southern counterparts to favor and employ spanking when interacting with their own children. Of the 242 University of New Hampshire students who were surveyed, 72.3% had been

spanked by at least one parent. In comparison, 87.6% of 177 students from the University of South Carolina in Spartanburg who were surveyed reported that they had been spanked. Flynn also looked at frequency of spanking and found that Southern subjects were spanked more frequently with 26.5% spanked six or more times by their mother and 22.8% spanked six or more times by their father. In comparison, 14.9% of Northeastern students reported that their mother spanked them six or more times and 13.0% reported that their father spanked them six or more times.

Of importance to the current study, Flynn (1996) also examined students' perceptions of corporal punishment and found that there were regional differences with Southern students reporting a greater acceptance of spanking as a disciplinary tool. In particular, he found that 65.9% of Southerners believed "it is sometimes necessary to discipline a child with a good, hard spanking" and 67.3% of Southerners believed "spanking a child usually works in correcting misbehavior." In comparison, 42.7% of Northeasterners believed "it is sometimes necessary to discipline a child with a good, hard spanking" and 40.9% of Northeasterners believed "spanking a child usually works in correcting misbehavior." When the subjects were asked whether they would spank their own children, over 75% of Southern students stated "Yes" while 60% of Northeastern students stated "No."

His findings suggest experiences and perceptions of corporal punishment may stem from specific regional characteristics such as the parents' education and the family's religious background/denomination (Flynn, 1996). More specifically, Flynn found evidence that parents in the Northeast had obtained higher levels of education and a greater number reported being Catholic compared to Southern parents who had lower educational attainment and more commonly identified as Protestant, suggesting those who are better academically educated and

originate from a Catholic versus Protestant background are less likely to favor corporal punishment. After a series of analyses of covariance, Flynn determined simply coming from the South or Northeast did not substantially affect your experience with corporal punishment; however, region was determined to influence subjects' perceptions of the necessity of spanking as a means of punishment and intentions to use spanking to discipline their own children. Specifically, Southerners were more likely to believe corporal punishment is necessary and intend on employing such discipline when punishing their own children.

Furthermore, studies suggest those who experience childhood corporal punishment are more likely to employ corporal punishment when disciplining their own children (Buntain-Ricklefs, Kemper, Bell, & Babonis, 1994; Deater-Deckard, Lansford, Dodge, Pettit, & Bates, 2003; Gagne, Tourigny, Joly, & Pouliot-Lapointe, 2007; Simons, Whitbeck, Conger, & Chyi-In, 1991; Simons & Wurtele, 2010; Witt, Fegert, Rodens, Brähler, Lühns Da Silva, & Plener, 2017). In one study, Simons and Wurtele (2010) explored how past experience with spanking, either by hand or belt, influenced current use of corporal punishment with one's children. Based on data from 102 families from a Southwestern University and the surrounding community, they found that 81% of parents experienced corporal punishment as children, and 71% reported that they employ corporal punishment when disciplining their own children. Similarly to surveyed parents, 87% of children who were commonly spanked supported corporal punishment as a disciplinary measure for punishing a brother/sister, compared to 20% of children who never experienced corporal punishment. Moreover, 63% of children who were commonly subjected to corporal punishment stated they would be willing to strike a peer in an effort to achieve conflict resolution, compared to 12% of children who were not as commonly spanked. In addition, 100% of children who never experienced corporal punishment supported partially if not wholly "pro-

social conflict resolutions” such as sharing and compromising. In summary, the authors discovered that respondents who experienced spanking were the most likely to endorse physically disciplining their own children and/or siblings and peers.

Finally, in regards to socioeconomic status, various studies contend that individuals who belong to lower socioeconomic groups are more likely to employ corporal punishment when disciplining their children compared to higher socioeconomic groups (Dietz, 2000; Friedson, 2016; Luster, Rhoades, & Haas, 1989; Pinderhughes, Dodge, Bates, Pettit, & Zelli, 2000; Tudge, Hogan, Snezhkova, Kulakova, & Etz, 2000; Vittrup & Holden, 2010) . For instance, Pinderhughes and colleagues’ (1993) investigation based on 585 families, including 978 parents, from Nashville, Tennessee and Bloomington, Indiana found that “low-income parents tended to endorse harsher discipline responses in part because they held stronger beliefs about the value of spanking, and they experienced higher levels of stress” (p. 393). Similarly, Dietz’s study (2000) of 1,000 parents from across the nation reveals that parents whose annual earnings are \$15,000 or less are 1.5 times more likely to employ corporal punishment as a disciplinary measure.

In summary, various studies assert corporal punishment produces harmful effects including depression, poor school performance, the intensification of aggression, antisocial behavior, externalizing problems, internalizing problems, mental health problems, negative relationships with parents, a decrease in moral internalization and self-esteem, and cognitive injury (Berlin et al., 2009; Gershoff, 2002; Gershoff et al., 2010; Gershoff & Grogan-Kaylor, 2016; Gunnoe & Mariner, 1997; Kandel, 1990; Pagani et al., 2004; Simons et al., 2013; Straus & Paschall, 2009) . Several studies suggest those most likely to have experienced and presently experience corporal punishment are pre-millennial minority individuals (Berlin et al., 2009; Finkelhor et al., 2005; Gershoff et al., 2012; Hanson et al., 2006; Hawkins et al., 2010; Lorber et

al., 2011; MacKenzie et al., 2011; Turner et al., 2006; Taillieu et al., 2014). Regarding variables that affect perception of corporal punishment, the purpose of this article's investigation, the extant literature reveals natural-born Americans, Southerners, and those who experienced childhood corporal punishment are more likely to favor and employ corporal punishment than those born into a Hispanic culture, from the Northeast, and who did not experience childhood corporal punishment, respectively (Buntain-Ricklefs et al., 1994; Deater-Deckard, 2003; Flynn, 1996; Gagne et al., 2007; Simons et al., 1991; Simons & Wurtele, 2010; Witt et al., 2017). Finally, various studies contend that lower-class individuals are more likely to employ corporal punishment when disciplining their children (Dietz, 2000; Friedson, 2016; Luster et al., 1989; Pinderhughes et al., 1993; Tudge et al., 2000, Vittrup & Holden, 2010).

Current Study

Do millennials favor corporal punishment or believe in a better punishment? Are their perceptions shared despite the respondents' diversity in gender, race, and other demographics? These questions are what the present study addresses. The following sections will describe the data, the sample, and the variables that were used for this study. Further, a description of the plan for analysis will be provided, and then findings from the current analyses will be presented.

Data and Sample

The data for the current research were collected during the fall of 2017. Due to the nature of this study and the constricted timetable, as this research was initially for a student's thesis, a convenience sample versus randomized sample was employed. Specifically, the convenience sample for the project is comprised of data drawn from 318 students attending the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. Data from 314 of the sample of 318 participants was used for this study. Any individuals born prior to 1980 and under the age of eighteen were excluded from the

sample so as to limit the subjects to those of the adult millennial population. See Table 1 for sample characteristics. All subjects were administered the same IRB-approved survey instrument on-site. The survey included a wide variety of measures including items assessing participants' experience with corporal punishment and belief in a better punishment than corporal punishment. Additionally, demographic information was collected from each participant regarding his or her age, sex, race, political affiliation, household of origin setting, and childhood residency.

Independent Variables

Sex

Sex was coded as male (0) and female (1). This allowed for the examination of the effects of belonging to a specific sex on the belief of a better punishment than corporal punishment. Approximately 34.3% (n = 107) of the sample identified as male and 65.7% (n = 205) of the sample identified as female.

Race

Race was coded as White (0) and non-White (1). This allowed for the examination of the effects of belonging to a specific race on the belief of a better punishment than corporal punishment. Approximately 79.7% (n = 243) of the sample identified as White and 20.3% (n = 62) of the sample identified as non-White.

Punished with Corporal Punishment

Individuals were asked "Did your parent(s)/guardian(s) ever use corporal punishment to discipline you when you were growing up?" Individuals who were not punished with corporal punishment were coded as "0," and individuals who were punished with corporal punishment were coded as "1." This allowed for the examination of the effects of experiencing corporal punishment on the belief of a better punishment than corporal punishment. Approximately

86.9% (n = 272) of the sample were punished with corporal punishment and 13.1% (n = 41) of the sample were not punished with corporal punishment.

Resident of U.S. as Child

Respondents were asked “For the majority of your childhood, did you reside in the United States?” Individuals who did not reside in the United States for the majority of their childhood were coded as “0,” and individuals who did reside in the United States for the majority of their childhood were coded as “1.” This allowed for the examination of the effects of residing in the United States for the majority of childhood on the belief of a better punishment than corporal punishment. Approximately 96.7% (n = 290) of the sample resided in the United States for the majority of their childhood and 3.3% (n = 10) of the sample did not reside in the United States for the majority of their childhood.

Political Affiliation

Participants were asked to identify their primary political affiliation. Responses were dummy coded into three different variables: Republican, Democrat, and Other. For each variable, individuals were coded as “1” if they indicated they associated with that particular political affiliation and “0” if they did not. This allowed for the examination of the effects of political affiliation on the belief of a better punishment than corporal punishment. Approximately 42.4% (n = 129) of the sample identified as Republican, 28.3% (n = 86) of the sample identified as Democrat, and 29.3% (n = 89) of the sample identified as “Other.”

Household of Origin Setting

Each participant was asked “What type of setting best describes where you grew up?” Similar to political affiliation, the setting of one’s household of origin was dummy coded to create variables for suburban, urban, rural, and small town settings. For each variable, individuals were coded as “1” if they indicated they reported this particular setting for their

household of origin and “0” if they did not. This allowed for the examination of the effects of household of origin setting on the belief of a better punishment than corporal punishment.

Approximately 13.3% ($n = 41$) of the sample grew up in a rural setting, 33.1% ($n = 102$) of the sample grew up in a small town setting, 43.5% ($n = 134$) of the sample grew up in a suburban setting, and 10.1% ($n = 31$) of the sample grew up in an urban setting.

Age

Age was coded as a scale variable ranging from 18-31. This allowed for the examination of the age on the belief of a better punishment than corporal punishment. The average age of the sample was 19.7 years old with a standard deviation of 2.1.

Dependent Variable

Belief in a Better Punishment

A single measure is used to determine if a participant believed in a better punishment than corporal punishment. Specifically participants were asked to rate their agreement with the following statement: “There are better ways to punish a child than using corporal punishment.” All participants were asked to rate on a four-point Likert scale (1 =strongly agree, 2 = agree, 3 = disagree, 4 = strongly disagree) whether they agreed with the statement. For the current study, the responses to this item were recoded as “1” if participants indicated that they agreed or strongly agreed with the item and “0” if they disagreed or strongly disagreed. Approximately 71.1% of the sample indicated that they believed in a better punishment than corporal punishment.

Table 1. Characteristics of Sample

	n	%	\bar{x}	s	Range
Sex					
Male	107	34.3	--	--	--
Female	205	65.7	--	--	--
Race					
White	243	79.7	--	--	--
Non-White	62	20.3	--	--	--
Punished with Corporal Punishment					
No	41	13.1	--	--	--
Yes	272	86.9	--	--	--
Resident of U.S. as Child					
No	10	3.3	--	--	--
Yes	290	96.7	--	--	--
Belief in a Better Punishment					
No	88	28.9	--	--	--
Yes	216	71.1	--	--	--
Political Affiliation					
Republican (1 = yes)	--	--	0.4243	0.4951	0 – 1
Democrat (1 = yes)	--	--	0.2829	0.4512	0 – 1
Other (1 = yes)	--	--	0.2928	0.4558	0 – 1
Household of Origin Setting					
Rural (1 = yes)	--	--	0.1331	0.3403	0 – 1
Small town (1 = yes)	--	--	0.3312	0.4714	0 – 1
Suburb (1 = yes)	--	--	0.4351	0.4966	0 – 1
Urban (1 = yes)	--	--	0.1006	0.3014	0 – 1
Age	--	--	19.7261	2.1243	18-31

Plan of Analysis

The analysis for the current study was conducted in stages. First, univariate statistics were estimated to examine the distribution of variables; then bivariate analyses were estimated to examine the relationship between each of the independent variables and the dependent variable. Specifically, chi-square analyses were used to examine the relationships between two

dichotomous variables, and t-tests were used to examine the relationship between interval/ratio level variables and the dichotomous outcome. Finally, a multivariate logistic regression model was estimated to test the relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable. This model is appropriate because the outcome for the current study is dichotomous.

Results

In this section, you will find the results of all of the analyses estimated to explore the current study's research questions. First, findings from the bivariate analyses examining the relationships between the stated independent variables and the dependent variable will be reported. Secondly, results from a multivariate logistic regression model estimating the effects between the stated independent variables and the dependent variable will be reported.

Bivariate Results

Cross-tabulations and chi-square analyses were estimated to examine the relationships between dichotomous independent variables and the dichotomous outcome variable, belief in a better punishment than corporal punishment. These bivariate analyses revealed that belief that there was a better punishment than corporal punishment was associated with sex ($\chi^2 = 24.843$; $p = 0.000$), experience with corporal punishment ($\chi^2 = 10.378$; $p = 0.001$), and household of origin setting ($\chi^2 = 4.205$; $p = 0.040$). Specifically, approximately 80.1% ($n = 161$) of females in comparison to 52.5% ($n = 53$) of males believed in a better punishment than corporal punishment. In regard to experience with corporal punishment, approximately 92.7% ($n = 37$) of those who did not experience corporal punishment in comparison to 67.7% ($n = 178$) of those who did experience corporal punishment believed in a better punishment than corporal punishment. Focusing on household of origin, approximately 86.7% ($n = 26$) of those raised in an urban setting in comparison to 68.7% ($n = 184$) of those raised in a rural, small town, or

suburban setting believed in a better punishment than corporal punishment. In summary, the bivariate analyses indicated that a greater percentage of individuals who were female, did not experience corporal punishment, and resided in an urban environment for the majority of their childhood believed there was a better punishment than corporal discipline methods. None of the other independent variables were significantly associated with belief in a better punishment at the bivariate level.

Multivariate Results

As previously discussed, a multivariate logistic regression model was estimated to investigate the relationships between the independent variables (sex, race, experience with corporal punishment, childhood residency, political affiliation, household of origin setting, and age) and the dependent variable (belief in a better punishment than corporal punishment). The findings of the logistic regression model predicting belief in a better punishment than corporal punishment are presented in Table 2. As with the bivariate analyses, sex, experience with corporal punishment, and origin of household setting were significantly related to belief in a better punishment. Specifically, the odds of individuals who experienced corporal punishment indicating there was a better punishment than corporal punishment were approximately 82% lower than individuals who did not experience corporal punishment, holding all else constant in the model.

In addition, the odds of females believing in a better punishment than corporal punishment were approximately four times the odds of men, holding all else constant in the model. Regarding household of origin, the odds of individuals whose childhood took place in an urban environment believing in a better punishment than corporal punishment were approximately 4.7 times the odds of those who grew up in a suburban setting, holding all else

constant in the model. Finally, the logistic regression model revealed race and identifying as an “Other” political affiliation were significantly related to belief in a better punishment.

Specifically, the odds of non-White individuals indicating there was a better punishment than

Table 2. Logistic Regression Predicting Belief in Better Punishment (n = 267)

Variable	b(SE)	OR
Age	0.089 (0.078)	1.093
Resident of U.S. as Child (yes = 1)	-0.093 (0.949)	0.911
Experienced Corporal Punishment (yes = 1)	-1.719 (0.659)	0.179**
Sex (Female = 1)	1.364 (0.340)	3.912***
Race (Non-White=1)	-1.075 (0.466)	0.341*
Democrat ^a	0.236 (0.438)	1.266
Other ^a	0.937 (0.387)	2.553*
Rural ^b	-0.211 (0.453)	0.810
Smalltown ^b	-0.593 (0.337)	0.552
Urban ^b	1.555 (0.719)	4.736*
Constant	-0.029 (1.940)	0.971
Nagelkerke Pseudo- r ²		0.229
-2 Log-Likelihood		275.813 ^a

* < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

^a Referent is republican.

^b Referent is suburb.

corporal punishment were approximately 66% lower than White individuals, holding all else constant in the model. Regarding political affiliation, the odds of individuals identifying as an “Other” political affiliation indicating there was a better punishment than corporal punishment were approximately 2.5 times the odds of those identifying as Republican, holding all else constant in the model.

Discussion & Conclusion

The purpose of the current study was to examine millennials’ perceptions of corporal punishment to determine whether they believe there to be a better punishment than corporal punishment. Bivariate analyses revealed that belief that there was a better punishment than corporal punishment was associated with sex, experience with corporal punishment, and

household of origin setting. Specifically, a greater percentage of individuals who were female, did not experience corporal punishment, and resided in an urban environment for the majority of their childhood believed there was a better punishment than corporal discipline methods. None of the other independent variables were significantly associated with belief in a better punishment at the bivariate level. Similarly, the multivariate analyses indicated sex, experience with corporal punishment, and origin of household setting were significantly related to belief in a better punishment; those who were female, did not experience corporal punishment, and resided in an urban versus suburban environment for the majority of their childhood tended to believe in a better punishment than corporal punishment. Moreover, the multivariate analyses suggested race and identifying as an “Other” political affiliation were significantly related to belief in a better punishment. Specifically, those who were Caucasian and identified with an “Other” political affiliation were more likely to believe in a better punishment.

As previously stated, this study finds Caucasians are significantly more likely than those of minority races to believe in a better punishment than corporal punishment, contributing to the empirical validity of the literature’s previous assertions that non-White populations, specifically African-Americans, are more likely to employ corporal punishment than the White population (Berlin et al., 2009; Finkelhor et al., 2005; Gershoff et al., 2012; Hanson et al., 2006; Hawkins et al., 2010; Lorber et al., 2011; MacKenzie et al., 2011; Turner et al., 2006; Taillieu et al., 2014). This could be due to racial subcultural acceptance of corporal punishment resulting from the strain of socioeconomic disadvantage more often characteristic of African-American households than Caucasian households. (Dietz, 2000; Friedson, 2016; Institute on Assets and Social Policy, 2013; Luster et al., 1989; Pinderhughes et al., 2000; Tudge et al., 2000; UNC Center on Poverty, Work, and Opportunity, 2011; Vittrup & Holden, 2010). In reference to experience with corporal

punishment, this study supplements the findings of the extant literature that those who experience childhood corporal punishment are more likely to favor and/or employ corporal punishment when disciplining their own children (Buntain-Ricklefs et al., 1994; Simons et al., 1991; Simons & Wurtele, 2010). This phenomenon may be best explained by Simons and Wurtele (2010), who state “there is a hidden curriculum that accompanies each use of CP [corporal punishment]. When parents use CP, it teaches children about the morality of hitting; that it is morally acceptable to hit those you love when they ‘do wrong’” (Simons & Wurtele, 2010, p. 645). In pertinence to childhood country residency, the present study did not discover a significant relationship between belief in a better punishment and residing in the United States versus a foreign country, seemingly refuting Lee and Altschul’s (2015) conclusion that perceptions of corporal punishment hinge upon the country of initial acculturation. However, this lack of significance could be attributable to the present study’s low number of non-native U.S. citizens. Finally, the phenomenon of females being significantly more likely than males to believe in a better punishment than corporal punishment exposed in the present study may indirectly substantiate the literature contending males are more likely than females to experience childhood corporal punishment; as documented by various studies including the present investigation, those who experience childhood corporal punishment are more likely to favor and/or employ corporal punishment when disciplining their own children, suggesting that females, since they are more likely to believe in a better punishment (according to the present study), are less likely to experience corporal punishment (Buntain-Ricklefs et al., 1994; Day et al., 1998; Deater-Deckard, 2003; Dietz, 2000; Douglas & Straus, 2006; Gagne et al., 2007; Giles-Sims et al, 1995; Simons et al., 1991; Simons & Wurtele, 2010; Witt et al., 2017).

Limitations for this study include the employment of a convenience sample, which is not necessarily representative of the population of the United States of America. Those surveyed included only those attending the University of Tennessee in Chattanooga on campus. Moreover, the convenience sample may not be representative of the population of Tennessee because those surveyed were restricted to those attending college. Incorporation of those not in college, possessing high school degrees or less, would have been ideal and confirmed education's relationship, if any, with the belief in a better punishment. Finally, this study lacked a measurement for socioeconomic status. However, this was due to the restriction of the sample to college student. In 2014, 54% of college completers' immediate families earned \$116,466 or more annually, substantially surpassing the 2016 median household income of \$59,039. This seems to suggest that the wealthy are overrepresented among college students and the incorporation of a socioeconomic status measure into the present study would have been superfluous (The Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education, 2015; United States Census Bureau, 2017). However, incorporation of a socioeconomic status measurement by future studies employing a sample representative of the American population could be informative. Finally, the incorporation of a measurement allowing subjects to indicate what alternative punishment they believe to be a "better punishment" than corporal punishment could inform childhood discipline scholars about the present and future disciplinary trends and where they need to redirect their testing. Scholars have heavily documented the dangers of corporal punishment; however, these findings do not negate the possibility that the millennial "better punishment" is dangerous and that the better punishment should be subjected to the same testing as undergone by corporal punishment.

The present study's findings suggest males, suburbanites, non-Whites, and Republicans are not as aware and/or do not respect the documented harm of corporal punishment and thus should be targeted by corporal punishment scholars. Moreover, 75% of the present study's sample reported they believed there to be a better punishment than corporal punishment. If future research corroborates the present study's findings, then perhaps scholars should begin investigating the consequences of what millennials believe to be "better punishment" in addition to the ramifications of corporal punishment; just because millennials consider "better punishment," whatever that is, to be better than corporal punishment does not necessarily mean it is not harmful. Finally, if future studies determine that millennials not only believe in a better punishment but also classify corporal punishment as abuse, then perhaps the legal definition of child abuse should be expanded to incorporate spanking and similar physical discipline.

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