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Familial Violence Socialization in Childhood and Later Life Approval of Corporal Punishment: A Cross-Cultural Perspective

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The use of corporal punishment has been associated with several negative outcomes for children. As a result, scholars have begun to study factors that are associated with the approval of corporal punishment. Using data from the International Dating Violence Study, the author implemented analysis of covariance and multilevel modeling analyses to determine that there were significant associations among culture, personal and group experiences of familial violence socialization, and attitudes about corporal punishment.

Keywords: corporal punishment, approval of corporal punishment, cultural influences

Within the past few decades, some family violence scholars have turned their attention away from extreme forms of violence to actions within families that are often judged to be more acceptable. Corporal punishment, or the act of inflicting physical pain without injury on a child in an effort to correct the child's behavior (Straus, 2001), has received increasing levels of attention as a potential threat to a child's well-being. Although there is considerable debate about the lasting consequences of corporal punishment, there is sufficient evidence to conclude that the experience of corporal punishment in childhood serves as a risk factor for many problems (Gershoff, 2002), such as higher rates of criminal activity, perpetration of partner assault, abuse against one's own children, depression (Straus, 2001), and substance abuse problems (Straus & Kaufman Kantor, 1994). Some research that has found that parents who approve of corporal punishment and who experience high levels of stress are considered to be at a higher risk for physically abusing their children (Crouch & Behl, 2001). Moreover, there is evidence to suggest that when providers in the "helping professions," such as medicine and social work, are more tolerant of corporal punishment, they are less likely to perceive and to make reports concerning suspected or known child maltreatment (Ashton, 2001; Tirosh, Shechter, Cohen, & Jaffe, 2003).

Such findings have led scholars to assess factors that are associated with the approval of corporal punishment in an effort to understand how one might change such attitudes. This article addresses approval ratings of corporal punishment and factors that are associated with this approval within the context of an international sample. Looking at the approval rates across cultures can provide useful information for intervention efforts and can help the field better understand how campaigns might need to be shaped for different audiences.

Rates of Approval

Most studies that address approval rates of corporal punishment have found that the majority of Americans approve of hitting children as part of necessary discipline techniques. Over the last 3 decades, during which corporal punishment has increasingly received attention, and perhaps because of this attention, there has been a drastic decline in the approval of corporal punishment. Straus and Mathur (1996) documented that rates of approval dropped considerably between 1968 and 1994. Using seven nationally representative samples gathered in this 24-year period, they found that overall approval rates of using corporal punishment against children dropped from 94% in 1968 to 68% in 1994. A recent study by Sun Media found similar rates of approval in Canada, with 64% of Canadians supporting the use of physical force in the disciplining of a child (Rodgers, 2004).

The approval of hitting children and adolescents is ingrained in our cultural norms and supported by legal statutes throughout the United States. Straus (2001) noted that, as of 2001, every state in the United States gives parents the legal right to hit their children and adolescents. Some developed countries, however, have taken a stand against this type of parental action against children. According to the website *Discipline and the Law*, seventeen countries to date have statutes outlawing the hitting of a child or teenager: Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Israel, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Sweden, and Ukraine (Discipline and the Law, n.d.).

Factors Related to the Approval of Hitting a Child

There are a number of factors that have been demonstrated to be related to the approval of corporal punishment, such as culture or regional residence, experiences in childhood, and demographic factors such as income, race, gender, and religion.

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Culture

Jambunathan and Counselamn (2002) assessed the attitudes concerning corporal punishment of Asian Indian–born mothers who had lived in the United States for fewer than 5 years and a group of mothers living in India. In this small sample of 57, the authors determined that the mothers living in India favored the use of corporal punishment more than the mothers living in the United States, despite the singularity of their ethnic heritage. Similar results were found for parents from Jamaica, where children are routinely flogged both in the home and in school (Smith & Mosby, 2003), and Fontes (2002) discussed a higher level of acceptance of corporal punishment among Latino families, which often proves problematic for recent immigrants into the United States. Although corporal punishment is legal and accepted within the United States, Fontes noted that the regularity with which Latino families rely on physical discipline often puts them at odds with American child welfare agencies. Other researchers have noted the strong endorsement of corporal punishment in Russia (Ihanus, 1996) and an unwavering 70% approval rate for corporal punishment among Barbadian adults (Payne, 1989). Flynn (1994) examined regional differences in attitudes about corporal punishment within the United States and found a statistically significant difference between respondents from the northeast and respondents from the south, with a higher level of approval from southerners.

Several studies have confirmed a relationship between membership in a conservative religious organization and approval of corporal punishment (Flynn, 1994) as well as greater approval for parents whose values are consistent with right-wing authoritarianism (Danso, Hunsberger, & Pratt, 1997). Gershoff, Miller, and Holden (1999) found that conservative Protestant mothers not only were more likely to approve of using corporal punishment than mothers of other religious backgrounds but also were less likely to attribute any negative consequences to the use of corporal punishment.

Childhood Experiences

Some researchers have examined whether the parenting that one received as a child could be related to attitudes in adulthood about hitting a child. One such study examined whether the violence to which one is exposed during childhood might be related to later life approval of corporal punishment and found that no such relationship existed (Ringwalt, Browne, Rosenbloom, Evans, & Kotch, 1989). Despite these findings, other studies have found a significant relationship between experiences of corporal punishment as a child and approval rates in adulthood (Bower-Russa, Knutson, & Winebarger, 2001). A recent study demonstrated that approval rates of corporal punishment were higher among young adolescents who had experienced this form of parental discipline (Deater-Deckard, Lansford, Dodge, Pettit, & Bates, 2003). Other characteristics of parenting that have been found to be related to the approval of corporal punishment include the degree to which one was punished by one's mother or father and the degree of nurturing received from one's mother (Ringwalt et al., 1989).

Demographic Characteristics

A number of demographic factors have proved to be related to an endorsement of corporal punishment. Gender has consistently been found to be a predictor for the approval of corporal punishment, with women reporting lower levels of approval than men. Educational attainment is negatively associated with approval rates of corporal punishment, and age is positively associated with corporal punishment, so that older individuals and those who are less educated are more likely to approve of corporal punishment. Blacks report higher levels of approval for the use of corporal punishment, whereas Whites report less approval (Flynn, 1994; Straus, 2001).

Current Study

The literature concerning the approval of corporal punishment is limited in a number of ways. First, the research that examines the extent to which rates of approval of corporal punishment vary by region or culture is limited by the number of studies that have been conducted. The concept of culture is a worthy topic to address in the study of approval of corporal punishment, because it could help to shape prevention and intervention efforts. If the approval of corporal punishment is linked to culture, it can also help providers to understand that antiviolence campaigns might need to vary for different audiences. Second, although childhood experiences of violence and corporal punishment have been linked to later attitudes about corporal punishment during adulthood among American samples, it is unknown whether this is true across different world regions and cultures. Third, there is no research to date that has examined the combined influence of experiences of family violence within a region on an individual's attitudes about corporal punishment. In an attempt to address some of these gaps in the literature, I cover the following questions in this study:

1. Are there culture-based differences with regard to opinions about corporal punishment?

2. Is one's own experience with and exposure to violence within one's family associated with one's approval of the use of corporal punishment?

3. Do combined experiences of "familial violence socialization" within a group of people have an association with an individual member's attitude about corporal punishment?

Although this study cannot claim to measure the attitudes of cultures, it can make approximations of different cultural attitudes by using a data set that is composed of information gathered from university students from different world regions.

Method

The data for this study came from the International Dating Violence Study (IDV). The IDV is a study that involves multiple consortium members from across the world. All consortium members use a core questionnaire to measure the incidence of intimate partner violence and psychological characteristics among university students. Each consortium member translates the questionnaire into the language of the target population and has the option of adding 10 "site-specific" questions to the survey that are of special interest to the consortium member. This study was initiated in 2000 at the University of New Hampshire, and at the time that this particular set of analyses was conducted, data from 32 sites in 17 countries were available for analysis.

Sample

The sample for the data set consisted of 8,834 respondents. Roughly 1,500 of these respondents were not used in the analyses because of missing data resulting from unanswered questions that are the focus of this study. The final sample size that was used totaled 7,371. Characteristics for the entire sample as well as for each of the 32 sites in the study are noted in Table 1.

Procedure

Convenience sampling was used to select a sample for the IDV study. Consortium members recruited participants of introductory-level social science classes, such as psychology, sociology, and social work, by asking them to complete the survey during a 1-hr block of class time. Students were told that they were not required to participate in the study and that any lack of participation would have no reflection on their course grade. Students were informed that the survey covered sensitive topic matters, such as intimate relationships and sexual experiences. At each site, students were also given the names and contact information for the investigators of the study as well as for crisis responders should they want to discuss any concerns that might have arisen as a result of completing the survey. The procedures for conducting this study were approved by the proper boards of ethics at each of the institutions at which the surveys were administered.

Measures

The primary measure of violence socialization and violence approval used in this study came from the Personal and Relationships Profile questionnaire (Straus & Mouradian, 1999). Additional information was gathered from respondents regarding their demographic profile, such as gender, age, socioeconomic status, and social desirability response bias. The sample size and means for each geographic site are listed in the Table 1.

Personal and Relationships Profile. The two scales of the Personal and Relationships Profile that were used for this study included (a) Violence

Table 1
Sample Characteristics (N = 7,371)

Sample	*n*	% of total sample	% male	Mean age (years)[a]	Mean family SES[b]	Mean violence socialization score[c]	Mean social desirability score[d]
Total	7,371	100.0	29.20	21.97	3.03	8.14	34.08
Asia and Middle East							
China, Hong Kong	193	2.6	39.38	23.86	2.99	9.02	33.29
India, Pune	103	1.4	31.07	22.41	3.33	8.64	33.11
Singapore	246	3.3	30.08	24.92	2.99	8.14	32.86
South Korea, Pusan	274	3.7	36.50	24.27	3.05	9.52	31.73
Australia–New Zealand							
Australia, Adelaide	230	3.1	20.00	23.74	2.99	8.25	33.92
New Zealand, Christchurch	121	1.6	23.14	20.99	2.97	7.95	32.24
Europe							
Belgium, Flemish	483	6.6	23.60	20.30	3.00	6.42	34.03
Freiburg, Germany	162	1.9	41.36	23.75	3.04	8.13	32.15
The Netherlands, Amsterdam	155	2.1	25.81	21.96	3.06	7.55	34.41
Portugal, Braga	171	2.3	60.23	21.95	3.10	7.84	35.53
Scotland, Glasgow	219	3.0	16.44	21.90	3.01	8.98	33.74
Switzerland, Fribourg, French speaking	239	3.2	30.13	21.40	3.03	7.74	33.33
Switzerland, Fribourg, German-speaking	141	1.9	24.11	19.35	2.87	7.13	34.82
Latin America							
Brazil, Sao Paulo	346	4.7	33.53	21.28	2.97	7.79	34.60
Mexico, Northern	228	3.1	16.67	20.69	2.95	9.71	37.06
Middle East							
Israel, Emek Yezreel	357	4.8	17.37	23.08	3.01	7.33	34.34
North America							
Canada, Hamilton	259	3.5	14.29	21.47	3.02	8.12	33.52
Canada, London	120	1.6	46.67	19.39	3.12	8.06	33.45
Canada, Montreal	289	3.9	20.76	23.63	2.98	7.06	34.66
Canada, Toronto	245	3.3	33.47	20.23	2.99	8.68	34.04
Canada, Winnipeg	140	1.9	10.71	22.17	3.10	8.11	33.21
USA, Ohio, Cincinnati	318	4.3	48.74	20.48	3.06	8.52	34.29
USA, Indiana, Terre Haute	236	3.2	28.39	19.83	3.08	8.42	34.75
USA, Louisiana, Grambling	128	1.7	37.50	21.57	3.05	10.02	36.31
USA, Mississippi, Jackson	216	2.9	10.65	28.50	3.09	9.76	35.56
USA, New Hampshire, Durham	354	8.9	30.85	20.09	3.12	7.41	34.20
USA, Pennsylvania, Small College	233	3.2	23.61	20.05	2.99	7.55	33.57
USA, Texas, Mexican American	243	3.3	39.09	24.63	2.40	8.89	35.63
USA, Texas, non-Mexican American	237	3.2	45.57	23.91	3.63	8.52	34.12
USA, Texas, Nacogdoches	114	1.5	27.19	20.60	3.01	8.76	33.10
USA, Utah, Logan	180	2.4	37.22	21.98	3.03	8.10	33.64
USA, Washington, DC	87	1.2	13.79	20.41	3.02	10.23	33.14

[a] Range = 18–40. [b] Range = 1–5. [c] Range = 5–20. [d] Range = 15–52.

Approval and (b) Violence Socialization. Both scales have demonstrated good internal reliability, with alpha coefficients of .72 and .73, respectively (Straus & Mouradian, 1999). Two items were used from the Violence Approval scale to measure a respondent's approval of using corporal punishment, one against children, and another against adolescents: "It is sometimes necessary to discipline a child with a good, hard spanking," and "It is sometimes necessary for parents to slap a teen who talks back or is getting into trouble." Response categories to these questions ranged from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (4).

A subscale of the Violence Socialization scale that measures violence socialization within the *family* was used to measure respondents' childhood experiences with or exposure to physical aggression within their family of origin. This scale is composed of five questions that ask respondents about having been hit as a child and as a teenager, receiving instructions as a child about the importance of "hitting back" when hit or insulted by other children, and having witnessed aggressive acts by parents and nonparental family members. The response categories for all of these questions were the same as for the items measuring violence approval.

University site. One variable indicated the university site for each student. As there were 32 universities participating in this study, this nominal variable ranged from 1 to 32.

Demographic variables. Men were coded 1, and women were coded 0. Over two thirds of the students were female (71%) because the questionnaires were administered in social science courses, which routinely have a higher enrollment of women than men.

I created a socioeconomic status (SES) scale for each site using three variables: years of education for the student's father and mother and family income. To create a scale that measured the SES of a student relative to others at his or her university, I transformed the variables to *Z* scores (which is a standardized way of scoring observations to indicate the direction and degree that any given raw score deviates from the mean) and summed them. Within each site, the scale measured SES as the number of standard deviation units each student was above or below the mean of his or her site. The scores were then categorized into five quintiles, so that 1 = the lowest quintile and 5 = the highest quintile.

Students' ages ranged from 18 to 40 years; however, the vast majority (84%) of the sample was under the age of 24.

Social Desirability scale. Respondents' tendency to minimize socially undesirable behavior was controlled for with the Social Desirability scale of the Personal and Relationships Profile. This 13-item scale includes behaviors and emotions that are slightly undesirable but true of most people, such as, "I sometimes try to get even rather than forgive and forget." The more items a respondent denies, the more likely it is that the respondent will avoid reporting potentially embarrassing opinions or experiences, such as those related to violence. The theoretical range of the scale is 13 to 52. In this sample, the scores ranged from 15 to 52 (M = 34.08).

Analyses

Two types of analyses were conducted in this study. First, SPSS was used to conduct a 2×32 analysis of covariance (ANCOVA). This analysis allows one to determine whether there is a significant difference present among several sample means while holding some factors, such as age or SES, constant. ANCOVA was used to address Question 1, to determine whether there were differences among university sites in the approval of spanking a child and approval of slapping a teenager. Several control variables were used in the regression model, including sex of the respondent, age, SES, and social desirability response bias of the respondent.

The second set of analyses was conducted via multilevel modeling. Both Questions 2 and 3 were addressed with this statistical technique. Multilevel modeling is a technique that allows one to investigate the potentially unique contribution of hierarchical structures within data and data analysis by examining group effects on individuals. For example, students' school performance may depend not only on individual characteristics but also on classroom membership, so that students within classrooms may have similarities in outcome measures. Alternatively, patient outcomes may be linked to care at particular hospitals rather than to treatment regimens or personal characteristics. Multilevel modeling allows one to examine how group influences interact with individual characteristics (Goldstein, 2003).

There are several different applications that can be used to conduct multilevel analyses. The analyses in this study used hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) statistical software to assess the association of group experiences (termed "Level 2" data) of familial violence socialization with individual attitudes (termed "Level 1" data) toward corporal punishment. The influence of individual-level experiences of violence socialization on attitudes about corporal punishment was also assessed with this procedure, as HLM is essentially a regression technique that permits data analysis at both individual and group levels. Control variables used in the analyses included sex of the respondent (grand centered), age (grand centered), socioeconomic status (group centered), and social desirability response bias of the respondent (grand centered). The variable measuring familial violence socialization, both at Level 1 and at Level 2, was entered as grand centered. Level 1 data and Level 2 data were linked to one another by the variable that coded university site of respondent. The equation for the analysis is below.

$$\text{Level 1 (individual): CP approval} = \beta_0 + \beta_1(\text{VS}) + \beta_2(\text{sex}) + \beta_3(\text{age}) + \beta_4(\text{SES}) + \beta_5(\text{SD}) + r. \quad (1)$$

$$\text{Level 2 (group): } \beta_0 = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01}(\text{VS}) + \mu_0$$
$$\beta_1 = \gamma_{10} + \mu_1$$
$$\beta_2 = \gamma_{20} + \mu_2$$
$$\beta_3 = \gamma_{30} + \mu_3$$
$$\beta_4 = \gamma_{40} + \mu_4$$
$$\beta_5 = \gamma_{50} + \mu_5. \quad (2)$$

In these equations, CP approval represents (a) spanking a child as one dependent variable and (b) slapping a teen as another dependent variable, VS represents violence socialization within the family, and SD represents the Social Desirability scale.

Results

Table 2 displays the zero-order correlations among the individual-level variables in this study. Table 3 displays the rates of approval for corporal punishment for the total sample as well as for each site and by gender. The first row of Table 3 provides the rates of approval for the entire sample. Below this, university sites are listed in descending rank order of approval. There was a higher level of support for using corporal punishment against a child than against a teenager. Rates of approval for hitting a child for the combined sample, however, were not greater than 40%, and they were not greater than 50% for either of the sexes.

Differences Among University Sites: ANCOVA

The results from the ANCOVA are displayed in Table 4 and indicate that there were significant differences in the approval of corporal punishment among university sites for both the hitting of children and the slapping of teenagers. The far-right column of Table 4 lists scores for eta-squared, which show that the relationship between university site and violence approval was stronger

Table 2
Zero-Order Correlations for Individual-Level Variables (N = 7,371)

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Gender of respondent	—							
2. Age of respondent	.04	—						
3. Family SES of respondent	.06	−.12	—					
4. Social desirability response scale	−.04	.02	−.04	—				
5. Familial violence socialization	.12	.13	−.13	−.22	—			
6. University site of respondent	−.03	−.01	.00	−.06	.00	—		
7. Approve of spanking a child	.16	.04	−.03	−.15	.26	.00	—	
8. Approve of slapping a teenager	.15	−.06	−.06	−.14	.23	.02	.55	—

for hitting children than for hitting teenagers, indicating less variance among university sites in the approval of hitting teenagers. The different rates of approval based on university site are listed in Table 3; the approval of spanking a child ranged from 12% to 85%, with a median score of 38%. Approval rates for slapping a teenager ranged from 13% to 72%, with a median approval rating of 32%. In 12 of the sites, spanking a child was condoned by more than 50% of the students; however, in only 6 of the sites was slapping a teenager condoned by more than 50% of the students.

Effect of Violence Socialization: Multilevel Modeling

Before running the full Level 2 models for HLM, I ran two lower level models to determine whether there were between-groups differences in predicting rates of approval for the use of corporal punishment. Both the null model and the Level 1 model showed differences among the students at different university sites. Interclass correlations for these models, or scores that indicate what percentage of the total variance is between groups (or be-

Table 3
Approval Rates of Using Corporal Punishment: Percentage Who Agreed or Strongly Agreed (N = 7,371)

	Approve of spanking a child				Approval of slapping a teen		
Regional site	Total	Men	Women	Regional site	Total	Men	Women
Total sample	40.0	50.7	35.5	Total sample	33.0	41.4	29.1
South Korea, Pusan	85.0	85.0	85.1	India, Pune	71.8	71.9	71.8
USA, Washington, DC	78.2	91.7	76.0	Portugal, Braga	70.8	72.8	67.7
USA, Louisiana, Grambling	77.3	79.2	76.3	USA, Washington, DC	63.2	75.0	61.3
Singapore	69.5	77.0	66.3	South Korea, Pusan	55.5	62.0	51.7
India, Pune	66.0	50.0	73.2	Switzerland, Fribourg, German speaking	55.3	64.7	52.3
USA, Texas, Nacogdoches	63.2	77.4	57.8	USA, Louisiana, Grambling	53.9	50.0	56.3
USA, Texas, non-Mexican American	62.0	71.3	54.3	USA, Texas, Mexican American	48.6	51.6	46.6
Portugal, Braga	60.8	68.9	48.5	Singapore	42.7	52.7	38.4
USA, Texas, Mexican American	58.9	60.0	58.1	Mexico, Northern	40.8	50.0	39.0
USA, Mississippi, Jackson	57.9	43.5	59.6	USA, Texas, Non-Mexican American	40.5	47.2	34.9
USA, Ohio, Cincinnati	54.7	58.1	51.5	USA, Mississippi, Jackson	38.4	26.1	39.9
Mexico, Northern	54.4	57.9	53.7	Canada, Toronto	37.6	48.8	31.9
USA, Indiana, Terre Haute	49.6	59.7	45.6	Brazil, Sao Paulo	37.0	44.0	33.5
Switzerland, Fribourg, German speaking	44.7	55.9	41.1	USA, Ohio, Cincinnati	36.5	35.5	37.4
Canada, Toronto	43.7	53.7	38.7	Scotland, Glasgow	34.7	52.8	31.2
Brazil, Sao Paulo	41.6	48.3	38.3	USA, Indiana, Terre Haute	32.6	41.8	29.0
China, Hong Kong	35.8	50.0	26.5	USA, Texas, Nacogdoches	32.5	32.3	32.5
New Zealand, Christchurch	35.5	28.6	37.6	Israel, Emek Yezreel	27.7	24.2	28.5
Canada, London	35.0	42.9	28.1	Canada, London	27.5	37.5	18.8
USA, Utah, Logan	31.1	43.3	23.9	Freiburg, Germany	25.9	40.3	15.8
Germany, Freiburg	28.4	44.8	16.8	China, Hong Kong	25.9	34.2	20.5
Canada, Hamilton	27.8	40.5	25.7	Canada, Hamilton	25.5	35.1	23.9
Australia, Adelaide	27.4	45.7	22.8	USA, Pennsylvania, Small College	22.8	32.7	19.7
Scotland, Glasgow	26.0	50.0	21.3	Australia, Adelaide	22.6	41.3	17.9
Canada, Winnipeg	25.0	46.7	22.4	USA, New Hampshire, Durham	22.5	29.1	19.6
USA, Pennsylvania, Small College	24.5	30.9	22.5	The Netherlands, Amsterdam	20.7	30.0	17.4
Israel, Emek Yezreel	24.4	25.8	24.1	Belgium, Flemish speaking	19.9	35.1	15.2
Switzerland, Fribourg, French speaking	23.9	34.7	19.2	New Zealand, Christchurch	19.8	21.4	19.4
USA, New Hampshire, Durham	23.6	33.0	19.3	Switzerland, Fribourg, French speaking	19.3	26.4	16.2
The Netherlands, Amsterdam	21.3	37.5	15.7	Canada, Montreal	17.3	23.3	15.7
Belgium, Flemish speaking	16.2	30.7	11.7	USA, Utah, Logan	16.7	23.9	12.4
Canada, Montreal	12.5	13.3	12.2	Canada, Winnipeg	12.9	26.7	11.2

Table 4
Analysis of Covariance of Approval of Corporal Punishment as a Function of Geographic Site and Respondent Sex (N = 7,371)

Variable	*df*	SS	MS	*F*	η^2
Approval of spanking a child under 12 years					
Regional site	32	1124.63	35.15	50.07***	.177
Respondent sex	1	95.86	95.86	136.58***	.018
Respondent age	1	4.12	4.12	5.87***	.001
Respondent (SES)	1	14.43	14.43	20.56*	.003
Social desirability	1	157.76	157.76	224.77***	.029
Error	7460	5,235.84	0.70		
Total	7460	42,660.00			
Approval of slapping a teenager					
Regional site	32	534.10	16.69	24.48***	.095
Respondent sex	1	88.89	88.89	130.36***	.017
Respondent age	1	12.01	12.01	17.61***	.002
Respondent (SES)	1	27.26	27.26	39.98***	.005
Social desirability	1	134.49	134.49	197.45***	.026
Error	7454	5,082.62	0.682		
Total	7491	38,330.00			

Note. SS = sum of squares; MS = mean square.
* $p \leq .05$. ** $p \leq .01$. *** $p \leq .001$.

tween university sites, in this study), ranged from 16% to 18% for approval of hitting a child and from 10% to 11% for approval of slapping a teenager. The multiple correlation squared scores of 52% and 19% in the final models for approval of hitting a child and approval of slapping a teen, respectively, state the proportion of between-groups differences within the data. Finally, the reduction in the size of the deviance score within each phase of the analyses is an indication of a good fit for each model.

The results of the multilevel modeling are displayed in Table 5. The individual-level (Level 1) experiences of familial violence socialization had a significant, positive effect on the attitudes of students concerning corporal punishment. This finding was true for both dependent variables—spanking a child and slapping a teenager. That is, as violence socialization increased, so did the propensity to endorse corporal punishment as a good disciplinary technique.

Although not a focus of this study, there were significant Level 1 findings for all of the demographic variables included in this model. As shown in Table 5, younger students were more likely to approve of corporal punishment, as were men and students from less affluent families.

There was also a significant university-level (Level 2) finding for familial violence socialization. Placing the Level 2 variable of familial violence socialization at the intercept of the model resulted in findings that indicated that, beyond the rate at which violence socialization influenced individual students, being a member of a group with higher levels of familial violence socialization produced a higher rate of Level 1, or individual, acceptance of the use of corporal punishment. This was true for approval rates of both spanking a child and slapping a teenager.

Discussion

The growing attention to the potentially lasting effects of corporal punishment has paralleled a growth in the literature about factors associated with the approval of corporal punishment. This study confirms what other studies have found, in that demographic characteristics, such as sex, age, and socioeconomic status, were significant predictors of corporal punishment. However, the most significant contributions of this article to the study of approval rates of corporal punishment are its international focus and multilevel perspective.

This study sought to determine whether culture, indicated by different university sites worldwide, makes a difference in determining attitudes about corporal punishment. It also sought to determine whether individual experiences with familial violence socialization across cultures, at the individual and group levels, are predictors of attitudes about hitting children. The results concerning the associations between demographic factors and approval rates of corporal punishment indicate that being male makes one more likely to endorse the use of corporal punishment. Coming from a more affluent family and being older make one less likely to endorse corporal punishment. This finding concerning age is inconsistent with other research that has found that older, not younger, people are more likely to endorse corporal punishment. It is difficult to determine the importance of this discrepancy or its source, as 84% of the sample were under the age of 24 and 98% were under the age of 35.

As previous work has suggested, this study found that the approval of corporal punishment was related to the values and norms within different world regions. For example, there was a uniformly higher level of approval for corporal punishment among students from Asian universities than among students from European universities. Even within single countries, however, there was significant variation among university sites about the beliefs regarding the appropriateness of using corporal punishment as a disciplinary technique on children. For example, there were large differences in rates of approval from the students within both Canada and the United States. The rates of approval among Canadian students for spanking a child ranged from 12% to 44%, whereas rates among American students ranged from 20% to 78%. This finding of variation within countries is consistent with the work of Flynn (1994).

The socialization of violence within the family was related to attitudes about corporal punishment at both the individual and the group levels. Students who had experienced a higher level of

Table 5
Hierarchical Linear Modeling Summary of Results

	Approve of Spanking a Child		Approve of Slapping a Teen	
Variable	Coefficient	*SE*	Coefficient	*SE*
Regional site level				
Violence socialization	0.281***	0.032	0.131***	0.036
Individual level				
Intercept	2.184***	0.049	2.050***	0.048
Violence socialization	0.044***	0.005	0.049***	0.005
Respondent sex	0.231***	0.032	0.224***	0.027
Respondent age	−0.006*	0.003	−0.012***	0.003
Respondent (SES)	−0.021**	0.008	−0.032***	0.006
Social desirability	−0.025***	0.002	−0.022***	0.003

*** $p \leq .001$.

familial violence socialization were more likely to endorse the spanking of a child and the slapping of a teenager than students with lower levels of violence socialization. In addition to the individual experiences of students, the combined experiences of students at each university significantly affected the individual level of student endorsement of corporal punishment. Thus, students who were from universities with higher levels of violence socialization were more likely to endorse corporal punishment as a good disciplinary technique, regardless of their own experiences with violence socialization. This is an important result because it expands on previous findings already addressed in this paper: even after I controlled for individual experiences, group experiences (or culture—as it is loosely approximated in this study) was a significant predictor of attitudes about hitting children.

One factor that was not included in this study because of limitations concerning participating universities but that warrants exploration in future studies is the potential effect of laws that ban corporal punishment. The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (Boyson & Thorpe, 2002) documented that laws banning the use of corporal punishment have been growing throughout Europe since 1979; however, over half of these laws have only been passed since 1994. Moreover, the effect of these laws and their ability to change attitudes and parental behavior are not well known. There has been speculation that the 1979 statutory reform in Sweden banning corporal punishment has been successful in changing the attitudes of the public (Durrant, 1999); however, Roberts (2000) has shown that a rejection of corporal punishment techniques had been increasing for decades, and he speculated that this attitude change would have continued with or without the influence of the law. Only 7% of the data from this study were from countries with laws banning corporal punishment (Germany and Israel); thus, there was not enough power to definitively include such analyses in the current study. Nonetheless, preliminary analyses with logistical analysis revealed decidedly mixed results of the effect of a law banning corporal punishment on approval rates of this disciplinary technique. Because many countries are either considering laws (i.e., Canada) or have recently passed laws (i.e., Croatia, Latvia, Germany, Israel) that ban corporal punishment, this is an area that will warrant significant attention in the coming years.

Before conclusions can be drawn from these results, some important limitations need to be considered. Perhaps the most important limitation is that one cannot make generalizations about nations or even about university students in the nations where the data were gathered. This is because students are not necessarily representative of a nation and because the student samples were not chosen to be representative of all students. The only generalizations that can be made are about theory, not about specific sites. Second, over two thirds of the sample was female. Although readers should consider this when interpreting the results, gender was controlled for in all of the analyses. Third, the sample size greatly varied among sites, and the sample sizes for some sites were quite small. Finally, although all consortium members used the same words in the questionnaire that was administered, it is possible that the same construct was not measured at each site. For example, whereas *spank* in the United States primarily means to spank on the buttocks, in other regions of the world, *spank* may involve another kind of corporal punishment.

Despite these limitations, this study has confirmed that both personal history and cultural influences are important factors in determining attitudes about the use of corporal punishment on children—a research area that has been explored only minimally. Furthermore, the history of one's social and cultural group is as important as one's own individual experiences in understanding attitudes about hitting children. Such findings may prove to be important for providers who work to reduce our reliance on corporal punishment as a disciplinary technique, both within and among populations from different cultures.

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