THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
PARENTAL USE OF CORPORAL PUNISHMENT
AND CHILDHOOD SELF-ESTEEM

by

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Abstract

This study examines the relationship between parental use of corporal punishment and childhood self-esteem. 7,504 children between the ages of 4 and 9 years were chosen as subjects from Cycle 2 of the Canadian National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY). Results found a small but significant negative relationship between the variables. Parental use of corporal punishment is associated with a lower level of self-esteem for children. Religiosity, SES, gender and parental warmth and support are all used as control variables. The significant relationship between parental use of corporal punishment and childhood self-esteem holds while controlling for all four variables. Both gender and parental warmth and support are tested as moderators between the independent and dependent variables, however, their relationship is weak. Evidence from this study contradicts one of the main arguments put forth by defenders of corporal punishment that high parental warmth and support buffers children against the negative effects of corporal punishment. The research also contributes to the current gap that exists in the literature on the association between corporal punishment and internalizing childhood outcomes.
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Introduction

The topic of corporal punishment has been studied and discussed for many decades, and has sparked debate amongst academics, researchers and parents alike. Researchers have investigated all aspects of corporal punishment, such as which parental characteristics and circumstances, as well as outcomes for children, are associated with its use. While many questions have been answered, results in this area are often considered inconclusive due to the highly complex nature of family, and the many variables involved. While the use of harsh physical punishment and child abuse by parents are known to be highly related to behavior and psychological problems such as self-esteem in children (McLoyd & Smith, 2002; Gershoff, 2002), it is debated whether normative corporal punishment, such as spanking or slapping a child to induce behavioral compliance, is associated with negative behavioural and emotional traits in children.

This project investigates the relationship between parental use of corporal punishment and childhood self-esteem. The project is very timely, since there is international debate over whether the use of corporal punishment should be abolished worldwide. In the summer of 2003, the United Nations directed Canada to ban all types of corporal punishment of children. This direction, put forth by the world body's Committee on Rights of the Child, was made after the committee investigated Canada's child-care record (Edwards, 2003). Many countries have now made it illegal for parents to use corporal punishment with their children, such as Sweden, Austria, Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Israel, Italy, Latvia and Norway (Benjet & Kazdin, 2003).
Groups in other countries such as Canada and the United States are also lobbying the government to adopt the same laws. Currently, the Supreme Court of Canada has recently upheld the legality of allowing parents to use "reasonable force" when punishing a child. The court did, however, amend the law by placing age restrictions on the use of corporal punishment with children, allowing it between the ages of 2 and 13.

Specifically, the ruling states that,

"Corporal punishment of children under two years is harmful to them, and has no corrective value given the cognitive limitations of children under two years of age. Corporal punishment of teenagers is harmful, because it can induce aggressive or antisocial behavior. Corporal punishment using objects such as rulers or belts is physically and emotionally harmful. Corporal punishment which involves slaps or blows to the head is harmful. These types of punishment, we conclude, will not be reasonable" ("Spanking Permitted," 2004).

This ruling is a result of many years of legal action spurred by a variety of special interest groups who oppose the use of corporal punishment with children, such as Save the Children Canada and the Canadian Foundation for Children, Youth and Law.

In the child outcome of self-esteem, there have been many different conclusions reached. Some researchers say that there is no association between the use of corporal punishment and self-esteem, and that children who are spanked have no less self-esteem than those who are not. Other researchers claim that corporal punishment is detrimental to self-esteem; their studies back up these claims with research showing that children who are spanked have significantly lower self-esteem than those who are not. Both camps claim that the others' research contains methodological flaws, and that therefore their argument is not substantiated. The intention of this project is to lend more information to this
current debate in order to clarify what the best needs are for children and families in Canada.

Literature Review

Corporal Punishment

The International Encyclopedia of Marriage and Family (2003) adopts the definition given by Murray Straus (1994) for corporal punishment. It is defined as:

"the use of physical force with the intention of causing a child to experience pain, but not injury, for the purpose of correction or control of the child's behavior"

The encyclopedia also adds that:

"Shoving, shaking, grabbing, and even keeping a child in an uncomfortable position for a prolonged period of time probably ought to be included to form a more complete definition."

(Addleman, p. 1558).

In Canada, physically punishing a child is considered legal and is covered in Section 43 in the Criminal Code of Canada, under the general topic "Protection of Persons in Authority". It states:

"Every schoolteacher, parent or person standing in the place of a parent is justified in using force by way of correction toward a
pupil or child, as the case may be, who is under his care, if the force does not exceed what is reasonable under the circumstances."

The prevalence and chronicity of corporal punishment has been widely studied in the United States. Straus and Stewart (1998) used data from the 1995 Gallup Organization's National Social Audit Program in order to review how widespread the use of corporal punishment actually is. The overall prevalence rate of corporal punishment was 35% for infants and 94% for children aged 3 years and 4 years. For parents who used corporal punishment on toddlers, the average was approximately three times per week. Just over half the sample hit children at age 12, one third at age 14, and 13% at age 17.

I located only one published article which researched the prevalence and chronicity of corporal punishment among Canadian mothers (Durrant et al., 2003). A total of 104 Canadian mothers took part in the study; all had children between the ages of 33 and 71 months (2 years and nine months to just under 6 years of age). In this sample, 71% of Canadian mothers reported having used corporal punishment with their children at some time. Forty-seven percent of Canadian mothers sampled used corporal punishment less than once per week; 18% used it 1 or 2 times per week; 2% 3 or 4 times per week; 1% 5 or 6 times per week; and 2% 7 or 8 times per week. Compared to the United States, Canada has published a very small amount of information on the national level of chronicity and prevalence of corporal punishment use by parents.

**Corporal Punishment and Child Outcomes**

There have been two meta-analyses recently conducted which have investigated the overall child outcomes of parental use of corporal punishment. Larzelere (2000) reviewed 38 studies published between 1995 and February 2000. The criteria for
selection was three-fold. First, the study must have been published in a professional peer-reviewed journal in the English language. Second, the child outcome variable or variables in the study had to be clearly beneficial or detrimental to the child. Third, each study had to include at least one measure of "nonabusive or customary physical punishment"; this eliminated studies where there was severe abuse, or other studies where nonspanking tactics (e.g. washing a child's mouth out with soap, yelling, restraint, etc) were investigated.

Larzelere found that corporal punishment is beneficial in the following ways: it reduces noncompliance and fighting, it enhances parental warmth, and it makes milder discipline tactics, such as time-out or reasoning, more effective. The study found that corporal punishment was detrimental in that it predicted higher rates of externalizing problems in children, more mental health problems and lower overall child competencies. Larzelere points out that these negative effects are cancelled out in African American and Protestant families.

Gershoff's (2002) meta-analysis looked at 88 studies published between 1938 and 2000; there were a total of 36,309 subjects overall. Articles or theses were chosen for selection if they met the following criteria: the study had to include punishment methods that were nonabusive; no other type of punishment could be combined with corporal punishment in the study; the corporal punishment had to have been administered by the parent or parents; the dependent variable in the study had to be one of the eleven being investigated in the analysis; and the study had to include statistics sufficient enough to calculate effect size.

The results of the meta-analysis showed that corporal punishment was associated with the following negative child and adult outcomes: decreased moral internalization,
increased child aggression, increased child delinquent or 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 one’s own child or spouse. Corporal punishment was associated with one positive child outcome: increased immediate compliance.

As is evident from the meta-analyses, there are mixed results when investigating the possible effects of corporal punishment on children. This difference reflects the ideological and methodological differences in research perspectives. Gershoff (2002) gives a broad overview of published works spanning a 62 year period. While she excludes many articles because they do not fit into her selection criteria (e.g. form of punishment is too severe), she does include many articles which Larzelere (2000) questions. For example, she includes retrospective studies in her overall analysis. Larzelere (2000) critiques the use of retrospective studies, stating that detrimental child outcomes are more likely when using a retrospective design. Larzelere (2000) also states that only 16 of Gershoff’s 88 used studies would be considered for analysis within the framework of his meta-analysis. Larzelere (2000) cites that he would not utilize the majority of the articles collected by Gershoff because of “(i) the severity of the measure of physical punishment (17 studies), (ii) an overly broad measure of punishment (17 studies), (iii) a cross-sectional design (22 studies), (iv) a focus on physical punishment of teenagers (19 studies), or (v) no unambiguous child outcome variable (1 study).” (Larzelere, 2000, page 201). Gershoff (2002), however, states that she placed many restrictions on the articles she used in her selection process, and did not include articles in which overly severe forms of punishment were utilized. She also discusses the
drawbacks of including studies which use a cross-sectional design, but includes them in her analysis since this type of design is considered a valid means of analysis.

Larzelere’s meta-analysis focuses mainly on uncovering the positive or beneficial outcomes of corporal punishment. While Larzelere’s analysis does look at negative outcomes, they are limited compared with the positive outcomes he researches. For example, Larzelere (2000) studies the negative impacts on children, but in his discussion on the results of these studies, critiques the methods used in the analyses, claiming that many of the studies which show detrimental impacts on children only do so because of the design method. Gershoff’s (2002) meta-analysis investigates more negative outcomes than beneficial. For example, Gershoff (2002) begins her research looking at eight child outcome variables; seven of the eight are considered negative child outcomes, and one of the eight, child compliance, is considered a beneficial child outcome. Later in her discussion of the meta-analysis, Gershoff (2002) critiques the overall acceptance in research of child compliance as a beneficial child outcome variable. Gershoff (2002) argues that child compliance may be beneficial in terms of short-term outcomes in children, but in the long-term may be detrimental to children since physical punishment has been associated with decreased moral internalization. These two different approaches in ideology and design contribute to the drastically different findings resulting from the two meta-analyses.

What is pertinent in the findings from the meta-analyses is that researchers find associations, be they positive or negative, between parental use of corporal punishment and child behavioral and emotional outcomes. It is interesting to note that there is not a substantial body of research that has been conducted on the association between corporal punishment and self-esteem. Within the two meta-analyses, Gershoff (2002) does not
include self-esteem in her analysis, presumably because it does not fit into her selection criteria, which could mean that not enough research has been done in the area for her to conduct a proper analysis. In Larzelere's (2000) analysis as well, only 3 studies investigated looked at self-esteem outcomes in children. One of these studies by Adams (1995), is widely cited in literature pertaining to corporal punishment and self-esteem outcomes in children, however, it is an unpublished doctoral dissertation. The second study is conducted by Larzelere, Klein, Schumm & Alibrando (1989) and is included under the section Corporal Punishment and Self-Esteem. The third study is by Sears (1970), who studies the relationship between early socialization experiences and self-concept in middle childhood. While Larzelere (2000) reviews that Sears (1970) includes extent of physical punishment as a variable in the study, physical punishment is not directly examined. Instead, Sears (1970) measures parent dominance, which is defined as "which parent disciplines when both are present" (p. 275). Because type of discipline is not specified, it is not included in the literature review of corporal punishment.

There are two prominent researchers who defend the use of corporal punishment with children (when used within certain guidelines), both citing positive outcomes. The first, Diana Baumrind, (1996) states that, "Reasoning used in conjunction with power-assertive methods clarifies the behavioral contingencies for the child by specifying what is acceptable and unacceptable behavior. When compliance cannot be obtained by repeating the directive, the addition of aversive consequences, which can include a couple of smart spans, may be indicated" (p. 828). Baumrind recommends the use of reasoning used in conjunction with a limited amount of corporal punishment so that children will internalize the norm of compliance to established authority. Baumrind (1994) also claims that affective warmth from parents (approval and expressions of love)
will counteract any potential negative outcomes of corporal punishment, and will result in no negative child outcomes.

The second researcher who finds some beneficial outcomes with the parental use of corporal punishment on children is Larzelere. As well as his meta-analysis (2000), Larzelere (1996) conducted an analysis of all journal articles between the years of 1984 to 1993 researching the parental use of corporal punishment (which he refers to as nonabusive physical punishment) and its effects on children. Of the total of 35 articles analyzed, 9 articles found beneficial outcomes to parental use of corporal punishment, 12 articles found detrimental outcomes, and 14 articles published neutral outcomes. Larzelere found that those studies which reported beneficial outcomes tended to control more for such variables as parenting characteristics. Overall, the analysis found that beneficial or neutral outcomes resulted from parental use of corporal punishment when it was:

"used less than weekly, used at nonabusive levels of severity, used by parents who were not physically violent against other family members, used without a potentially damaging instrument, used during ages 2 and 6 and possibly between ages 7 and 12, used privately, used with reasoning, preferably with an intermediate level of child distress, and used primarily as a back-up for less aversive discipline responses. Parents who obtained better outcomes associated with physical punishment were positively involved with their child, had child-oriented motivations for using spanking rather than parent-oriented motivations, did not increase their children's fear of parental discipline, followed through with their warnings, and cooperated with each other in discipline responsibilities. They
did not use verbal put-downs, and they changed their main discipline method to grounding when their children got older" (p.827).

Based on these findings, Larzelere also defends the use of corporal punishment with children, provided that how the punishment is used follows the above guidelines. Overall, there has been an extensive amount of research done in the area of corporal punishment and child outcomes. However, childhood self-esteem has not been studied extensively as an outcome variable associated with the parental use of corporal punishment. While there have been some articles published in this area, they are few when compared with articles published on parental use of corporal punishment and negative externalizing outcomes in children, such as aggression. The lack of research in the area could be due to self-esteem being an internalizing problem, which may be more difficult to study as compared with an externalizing behaviour. Also, all of the research in this area has been conducted in the United States. Although Canada and the United States have many cultural similarities, they also have many differences with respect to their view of how children should be treated. For example, the United States is one of two countries out of 189 who are part of the United Nations who will not ratify the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, a document created to protect children during times of war (“UN Convention on the Rights of the Child”, n.d.). It is therefore important to study the relationship between corporal punishment and self-esteem with a Canadian sample in order to get a clear picture of Canadian children and their families.

**Self-Esteem**

In this study, self-esteem is defined as:

"the evaluation which the individual makes and customarily maintains with regard to himself: it expresses an attitude of approval or disapproval, and
indicates the extent to which the individual believes himself to be capable, significant, successful, and worthy. In short, self-esteem is a personal judgment of worthiness that is expressed in the attitudes the individual holds toward himself". (Coopersmith, 1967, p.5)

It has been shown that children with high self-esteem score higher on tests of intelligence, active and independent participation in social groups, creativity, academic achievement, and popularity among peers (Growe, 1980). Battle (1992) also summarized, based on the original work of Coopersmith (1967), that individuals with high self-esteem will be more effective at meeting environmental demands; experience more self-respect, self-acceptance and self-love; are more independent in conformity-inducing situations; defend themselves against threats more easily; and have greater confidence in their ability to deal with events. The author also states that individuals with low self-esteem will have a tendency to withdraw from others and experience consistent feelings of distress; are more intro-punitive and passive when adapting to new environmental demands or pressures; experience more feelings of inferiority, timidity, self-hatred, lack of personal acceptance and submissiveness; exhibit higher levels of anxiety and more frequent psychosomatic symptoms and feelings of depression; have more difficulty forming friendships; tend not to resist social pressures; are invisible members in a group; and are more self-conscious when interacting with others.

Considering the potential differences that can exist between individuals based on their levels of self-esteem, it is evident that self-esteem plays a vital role in an individuals’ life, and the experiences that individual has. Having a high level of self-esteem is associated with positive experiences as well as more favourable self-evaluations, while having a low level of self-esteem is associated with negative
experiences and unfavourable self-evaluations. Battle (1991) summarizes that, overall, self-esteem affects a person's accomplishments, interactions with others, achievement patterns, level of mental health and state of well-being. The vast scope of influence that self-esteem is associated with in the lives of individuals makes it a very important aspect of human psychology to investigate. When looking at the well-being of children, self-esteem is associated with many factors which contribute to the successful development of a child in our society. For example, academic success, level of confidence, and ability to deal with difficult situations are all factors which contribute to well-being of individuals, and are just three examples which are associated with individuals' level of self-esteem. It is therefore important to evaluate a child's level of self-esteem; this will give a better picture of the child's current and future possibilities of success, both intra and interpersonally, and within their experiences in society as well.

It is important to note that while the area of self-esteem research originally developed by investigating differences in self-esteem levels (such as high vs. low), it has eventually expanded to study the characteristics of self-esteem. This is because many researchers have argued that research looking at the difference between high and low self-esteem does not "capture the role of self-esteem in psychological processes" (Greenier et al., 1999, p. 186). Many studies discuss the negative (or dark) side of self-esteem, while also presenting a more balanced picture of low self-esteem. Testing high on self-esteem measures, therefore, is not always indicative of 'true', 'genuine' or 'optimal' high self-esteem (Kernis, 2003). For example, Wells and Sweeney (1986) studied the effects of stable versus unstable self-esteem where stability of self-esteem was defined as "the degree to which self-esteem is constant and characteristic across attributes, occasions and situations", and instability of self-esteem was "thought to reflect
uncertainty or insecurity in self-feelings” (p. 2). Individuals with high but unstable self-esteem rated themselves higher on their level of academic ability than objectives measures would predict, and as compared to individuals with high but stable self-esteem. These results show that simply testing the level of an individuals’ self-esteem may not accurately reflect the actual self-esteem of the individual, due to bias in self-assessment and level of fluctuation of self-esteem. Kernis (2003) looks at the difference between fragile versus secure high self-esteem. He asserts that optimal self-esteem is characterized by qualities such as being genuine (versus defensive), true (versus contingent), stable (versus unstable), and congruent with implicit feelings of self-worth (versus discrepant). While individuals may score high on global self-esteem inventories, when investigating these different aspects of high self-esteem, the result may be entirely different. For example, the individuals’ self-esteem may be contingent on success in a certain area, rather than reflecting inner, or true, feelings of self-esteem. While research in this area of self-esteem has been very valuable, many researchers still focus on self-esteem level and use it as their main measurement variable due to its high value in the area of social science research (Greenier et al., 1999). It is important to remember, when studying self-esteem, that it is a complex variable, and that level alone may not uncover all of the characteristics or qualities of an individual.

**Parental influence in children's self-esteem**

Much research has shown that parents have a large degree of influence over the development of self-esteem of their children. Lauer and Handel (1977), in a review of some of the literature associating parenting and children's self-esteem, show that parental warmth and love, respectful treatment of children, and other expressions of concern for the child's well-being are all associated with the development of self-esteem in children.
Mruk (1995) states that acceptance, appreciation, care and love are all important in the development of a child's self-esteem. Demo (2001) summarizes that in his overall investigation of the relationship between parenting practices and childhood self-esteem, "there is persuasive evidence that parental approval, encouragement, responsiveness, warmth, nurturance, support, and affection are related to children's and adolescent's self-esteem" (p. 143). The large body of research in this area indicates that parental behaviors have a profound impact on the self-esteem of their children. It is therefore important to investigate whether the parental use of corporal punishment also has such an impact on children, or whether it is other factors that matter more in the development of a child's self-esteem.

**Parental Warmth and Support and Self-Esteem**

Supportive parental behaviour is determined in research by such actions as the amount of praise and attention parents give to their children, and how much children feel they are listened to by their parents (Felson & Zielinski, 1989).

Research in this area consistently shows that the higher the warmth and support given to children by their parents, the higher the children's self-esteem will be. Conversely, high amounts of such unsupportive parental behaviours such as criticism, neglect, punishment and favouritism toward other siblings are associated with low levels of self-esteem in children (Felson & Zielinski, 1989; Sears, 1970; Growe, 1980; Bean, Bush, McKenry & Wilson, 2003; Reitzle, Metzke & Steinhausen, 2001; VanAken, Asendorpf & Wilpers, 1996).

There are very few researchers who have studied how parental warmth and support moderates the relationship between parental use of corporal punishment and childhood self-esteem. Baumrind (1994), however, cites parental warmth and support as two
significant factors which affect the outcome of parental use of corporal punishment.

Baumrind conducted three longitudinal studies investigating the impact of parental use of corporal punishment on children. She found that where there is supportive and warm parenting, the use of parental corporal punishment will be "both effective and harmless" on children (p.365). It is important, therefore, to investigate whether parental warmth and support affects any potential relationship between parental use of corporal punishment and self-esteem, and whether this relationship is significant.

Corporal Punishment and Self-Esteem

Some of the earliest work in the area of corporal punishment and child outcomes comes from Rollins and Thomas (1979), who studied 'Parental support, power, and control techniques in the socialization of children'. One part of their study was to look at parental coercion with children, which they defined operationally as "a summation of the frequencies of such parental behaviors as physical punishment, deprivation of material objects or privileges, the direct application of force, or the threat of any of these in situations where parents are attempting to influence their child's behavior" (p. 321). The researchers conducted their study by analyzing all literature related to the area between 1960 and 1974; this amounted to a total of 235 published and unpublished studies, with 8 of these focusing on childhood self-esteem. Self-esteem was one of seven child behaviors studied that were seen as representing competent social behavior for the era in which the study was conducted. Rollins and Thomas found that an inverse relationship existed between parental coercion and childhood self-esteem; that is, the greater the parental coercion, the lower the self-esteem of the child, and the greater the parental support, the greater the self-esteem in children. The authors did however note that they considered
support for these conclusions to be weak due to the limited number of studies that had been conducted in the area.

Eamon (2001) also found a significant relationship between parental use of corporal punishment and self-esteem characteristics. Eamon used data from the 1992 and 1994 United States National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, which included 1397 children between the ages of 4 and 9. Physical punishment was measured by the number of times the mother reported spanking her child in the past week, and internalizing problems were measured by 14 indicators such as worrying, withdrawing, crying, anxiousness, sadness and dependency. The author found that parental use of physical punishment was associated with socio-emotional problems, such as low self-esteem, in the children.

Amato and Fowler (2002) used data from Waves 1 and 2 of the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH), conducted between 1987-1988 and 1992-1994 to study the relationship between parental use of corporal punishment and self-esteem in children. In Wave 1, 3,400 households with a focal child between the ages of 5 and 18 were sampled on a variety of parenting practices and child behaviors; frequency and type of discipline was one of these practices surveyed. Self-esteem was evaluated at Wave 2, so that a comparison between discipline style used at a younger age could be compared with current level of self-esteem. The study concluded that parents' use of corporal punishment predicted lower self-esteem.

Conversely, Larzelere, Klein, Schumm and Alibrando (1989) conducted a study with 157 home economics students to assess the effect of spanking on self-esteem. Subjects were asked to report retrospectively on frequency of spanking before 13 years of age, as well as communication patterns with their parents, and parents' attitudes and motivations in parenting. Authors report that "there were few significant correlations with self-
esteem" and that "perhaps the most common danger in parental use of spanking may be a tendency to use it in place of more positive approaches, especially more positive communication with the child" (p.1141).

Stormshak and Bierman (2000) conducted a study with parents of 631 behaviorally disruptive kindergartners to investigate the relationship between the use of corporal punishment and its effect on children's internalizing and externalizing behaviors. This study also found that parental use of corporal punishment did not predict internalizing behavior problems.

Again, it is clear from the research that there are mixed results when studying the association between parental use of corporal punishment and childhood self-esteem. Also, the majority of these studies do not measure self-esteem specifically, but rather characteristics that correspond to self-esteem. Research that directly measures self-esteem, and how it is affected by parental use of corporal punishment, is greatly needed.

Gender and Self-Esteem

Many studies have shown that boys score higher on self-esteem evaluations than girls do, indicating either that boys have higher self-esteem than girls, or that evaluative methods are gender-biased in favour of boys (Chapman & Mullis, 2002). Mruk (1995) notes that Epstein discovered in his studies that women reported more experiences of acceptance and rejection than men, and that men reported more experiences of success and failure than women. Mruk concludes that "women in our society seem to gravitate toward the worthiness component of self-esteem (being valued in terms of acceptance or rejection), and men tend to be pulled by the competence dimension (success or failure) to a relatively greater degree" (p. 65).
Davies and Bremer (1999) conducted an eight year cross-sectional study measuring the self-esteem of 1488 children in grade 6. In all but one of the eight cohorts studied, boys had significantly higher global self-esteem than girls. Chan (2000) also found a significant difference between boys and girls in a study which measured the self-esteem of 1303 children. Boys in the sample had significantly higher mean scores in self-esteem than the girls. However, other studies have shown the opposite, with girls scoring higher on self-esteem inventories than boys (Fuchs-Beauchamp, 1996). Davies and Bremer (1999) point out that gender effects on self-esteem outcomes are still a topic of debate. When measuring global self-esteem, researchers are finding different results indicating that there are possible differences in self-esteem between boys and girls.

**Socio-economic Status and Self-Esteem**

Socio-economic status (SES) is assessed by examining an individual's, or in the case of children, their families' level of education, occupational status and income. The study between SES and self-esteem among children has had mixed results. In a meta-analytic review using 446 studies including 312, 940 participants, Twenge and Campbell (2002) found overall that SES had a small but significant relationship with self-esteem. Participants with higher SES reported higher self-esteem, and those with lower SES reported lower self-esteem.

However, many studies contradict these findings, showing children of lower SES having higher self-esteem than those children with middle or higher SES. For example, Trowbridge (1972) found in three separately conducted studies that children with low SES scored higher on measures of self-esteem than their peers, who were of middle or high SES.
Results from studies indicate that a relationship between socio-economic status and self-esteem is possible, and may vary depending on the sample studied.

*Religiosity, Corporal Punishment and Self-Esteem*

Many studies have shown a connection between religion, chronicity and prevalence of corporal punishment, and overall effects of parental use of corporal punishment. Specifically, studies in the United States have focused on Protestants. Conservative Protestants have shown to be more likely to both support the use of corporal punishment as a discipline method with young children, and use it with their children (Bartkowski & Wilcox, 2000; Ellison, Bartkowski & Segal, 1996; Gershoff, Miller & Holden, 1999). Other authors have shown that the negative effects of corporal punishment on children are significantly less when the child is raised in a Protestant home (Larzelere, 2000). While there are no published articles about self-esteem and Protestantism, the highly documented relationship between Protestantism and parental use of corporal punishment with their children indicates that religiosity may be useful to look at as a control variable. If Protestantism acts to lessen the effects of corporal punishment on children in other areas, then it may also function in this manner with childhood self-esteem.

*Theory*

The effects of the use of corporal punishment on childhood self-esteem can best be theoretically explained by the tenets of symbolic interactionism. Symbolic interactionism holds that individuals give meaning to such things as people, objects and actions. Individuals therefore respond to objects and events in terms of the symbolic meaning they have given them (Lauer & Handel, 1977).
A major tenet of symbolic interactionism is that individuals develop both a concept of self and an identity through social interaction. Charles Cooley, considered one of the major influential founders of symbolic interactionism, coined the term "looking glass self" to explain the process whereby a child forms his or her social self. Cooley's theory is that, at birth, children are not born with a sense of self, but must form a social self through interactions with others. The child will then form a looking glass self, which arises from: an individual's perception of others' imagination of her or him; her or his imagination of their assessment; and her or his reaction or self-feeling (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). Cooley explains that the looking glass self is formed in primary groups, such as a family, where more intimate interactions can occur. As LaRossa and Reitzes (1993) summarize in Cooley's work: "it is in the family that an infant becomes aware of others and interested in gaining their approval and support for a positive self-conception" (p. 138). It is possible that when parents use corporal punishment with a child, that child gives meaning to the act which is reflective of the child's self-worth.

Considering that a child has a looking glass self, a child may have an internal response to the act of being punished, which then may affect his or her self-esteem. According to researchers who believe that corporal punishment has no negative contribution to a child's self-esteem, the child's perception might be that the parent uses corporal punishment out of love or respect or to make them into a "good" child who is capable of behaving properly. A child might then internalize these perceptions, seeing themselves as lovable or deserving of respect, or as children who are capable of behaving properly. It is also possible that children have no emotional reaction to the act of being corporally punished. They would therefore not internalize any feelings about the punishment, or the feelings would be positive, and it would then have no impact on their
self-esteem. According to researchers who believe that corporal punishment does
diminish a child's self-esteem, the child's perception may be that their parent or parents
use corporal punishment with them because they do not love and respect them. The child
may imagine that the reason the parent is using corporal punishment is because they are a
"bad" child who cannot behave properly. It is possible that the child then internalizes
these perceptions, thereby coming to believe that they are unlovable, not deserving of
respect or cannot do anything right. Also, the child may be very upset after being
punished, or may not understand why they were being hurt by their parent. They may
then internalize the experience, feeling upset that someone who loved them could hurt
them. This may bring into question their level of comfort around this parent, making
them more anxious, which is an indicator of low self-esteem.

Barrish (1996), in her dissertation about remembered parental physical punishment
and its relationship to self-concept and self-esteem, also uses symbolic interactionism as
a means of explaining how self-esteem develops in children. Using Cooley's looking
glass self concept, she says, "if we are met with disdain or contempt, or if we are judged
harshly by others, we will adopt the negative "other" view that is reflected back to us" (p.
18). This "incorporation of their caretakers' judgments" (p. 19) explains the internalizing
process that children undergo when being punished by their parents, and the subsequent
formation of their self-esteem.

Symbolic interactionism explains well the process of meaning-making in different
situations, from the individual view. Learning theory is also often used to explain the
relationship between parental use of corporal punishment and child outcomes.
Researchers who believe that parental use of corporal punishment leads to negative
outcomes in children explain that it is through the modeling of violence that parents teach
their children that inflicting pain on others is justified (Benjet & Kazdin, 2003). Children therefore witness their parents hitting them and learn that it is socially appropriate to do so. They may therefore become aggressive with others, both as children and as adults. Supporters of the use of corporal punishment with children cite it as an effective agent of behavioral change. When used under the appropriate conditions, corporal punishment can teach a child about appropriate versus inappropriate behavior (Holden, 2002). Children therefore learn which behaviors will be negatively reinforced with the use of corporal punishment, and will then choose not to act them out. Social learning theory is very valuable in understanding how corporal punishment can lead to certain external behavioral responses in children. However, it does not clearly explain as well as symbolic interactionism does, exactly how children internalize the experience of corporal punishment and how it potentially affects their self-esteem.

Method

Sample

Data for this study comes from the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY), a long-term survey designed to measure child development and well-being. Developed jointly by Human Resources Development Canada and Statistics Canada, the NLSCY began in 1994 with its first cycle, and has recently released cycle 4 data. For the purposes of the present study, data from cycle 2 is used, collected between 1996 and 1997. Only cross-sectional data of the NLSCY is available for public use, not including cycle 4, which cannot be accessed for public use at this time. Due to protection of privacy for the participants in the study, the longitudinal data is only made available upon application to Statistics Canada (which includes a fee and wait period for approval).
Longitudinal analysis, using the NLSCY, would be the next step for future research in the area of parental use of corporal punishment and childhood self-esteem.

Within the cycle 2 data of the NLSCY, a total of 16,897 children between the ages of 0 to 13 were surveyed, resulting in a total of 11,190 households in all 10 provinces across Canada. The NLSCY surveyed children, one of their parents and their teachers in order to receive the most comprehensive data possible about the lives of the children.

This study included a total of 7,507 children between the ages of 4 and 9 years of age.

Research Questions

This study asks the following research questions:

- Is there a relationship between parental use of corporal punishment and childhood self-esteem?
- Does the relationship between parental use of corporal punishment and self-esteem hold when controlling for gender?
- Does the relationship between parental use of corporal punishment and childhood self-esteem hold when controlling for parental warmth and support?
- Does the relationship between parental use of corporal punishment and childhood self-esteem hold when controlling for SES?
- Does the relationship between parental use of corporal punishment and childhood self-esteem hold when controlling for religiosity?
- Does gender of the child moderate the relationship between parental use of corporal punishment and childhood self-esteem?
• Does parental warmth and support moderate the relationship between parental use of corporal punishment and childhood self-esteem?

In order to answer these questions, parental use of corporal punishment is the independent variable; childhood self-esteem is the dependent variable; SES, gender and parental warmth and support are the three control variables; and gender and parental warmth and support are investigated as possible moderator variables.

Scales of measurement

Corporal Punishment – Independent Variable

The present study uses the definition given by Straus (1994) who defines corporal punishment as "the use of physical force with the intention of causing a child to experience pain, but not injury, for the purpose of correction or control of the child's behavior". In order to measure corporal punishment, a measurement variable, one question from the NLSCY is used. In the survey, parents are asked: "Just about all children break the rules or do things they are not supposed to. Also, parents react in different ways. Please tell me how often you use physical punishment when [name of child] breaks the rules or does things that he/she is not supposed to. Answers are: Never, Rarely, Sometimes, Often, and Always.

The overall distribution of the sample shows that .1% of respondents always use physical punishment with their children, .4% often use physical punishment, 7.5% sometimes do and 32.1% rarely do. This makes a total of 40.1% of the sample that physically punishes their child to correct a behavior. 59.4% of the respondents answered that they have never used corporal punishment to correct child behavior. Because the variability of the data on use of corporal punishment is skewed, with the majority of the responses falling into two of the five response categories, the variable is collapsed into a
dichotomous variable with children falling into one of two categories. Children are categorized as either having received corporal punishment, or not. This is similar to previous studies, which also treat corporal punishment as a dichotomous variable due to the majority of the responses falling into two categories (Straus, 1994). Straus and Stewart (1999) also speculate that, due to social desirability, respondents may not answer a sensitive question such as “How often do you use physical punishment with your child?” with accuracy. It is therefore possible that many of the respondents who answered ‘Rarely’ to this question may actually be a part of the ‘Sometimes’ or ‘Often’ group. Also, the response categories given are subjective; for some respondents, rarely may mean once per week, while to others it may mean once per year. Placing the responses into two categories eliminates the interpretation of these categories.

**Self-Esteem – Dependent Variable**

The present study uses the definition for self-esteem previously cited by Coopersmith (1967) which is "the evaluation which the individual makes and customarily maintains with regard to himself: it expresses an attitude of approval or disapproval, and indicates the extent to which the individual believes himself to be capable, significant, successful, and worthy. In short, self-esteem is a personal judgment of worthiness that is expressed in the attitudes the individual holds toward himself".

Evaluations of child self-esteem are based on parent report of that child; due to the age and number of children in the study, they are not directly evaluated on their self-esteem. The following questions were chosen to evaluate self-esteem, based on two scales that were specifically developed to measure childhood self-esteem. The first scale, developed by Coopersmith (1967) is called the Self-Esteem Inventory, and the second, developed by Battle (1981) is called the Culture-Free Self-Esteem Inventory. Both scales
have been extensively used with children, and tested for reliability and validity
(Coopersmith, 1967; Battle, 1981). The scales reflect four dimensions of global self-
esteem: general, social/peer-related, academics/school-related, and parents/home-related.
This study measures the global self-esteem of the children, thereby capturing all of the
listed dimensions.

Table 1 shows the original composite measure created to evaluate the children’s
global self-esteem. The left hand column shows the questions asked to the PMK in the
NLSCY which reflect childhood self-esteem, while the two right hand columns give the
source of the questions, either from the Coopersmith scale or the Battle scale. Questions
1, 2 and 4 refer to general self-esteem; questions 5 and 7 refer to social/peer-related self-
esteem; questions 3, 6 and 8 refer to academic/school-related self-esteem and questions 9
and 10 refer to parents/home-related self-esteem.
Table 1: Original scale items chosen to measure self-esteem.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NLSCY</th>
<th>Coopersmith</th>
<th>Battle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Using the answers Never or not true,</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>Sometimes or somewhat true,</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>or Often or very true,</strong> how often would you say that your child:</td>
<td><strong>I’m pretty happy (#24)</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>I’m never unhappy (#20)</strong></td>
<td><strong>I am happy most of the time (#11)</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>I am as happy as most boys and girls (#38)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Seems to be unhappy, sad or depressed?</td>
<td><strong>I spend a lot of time daydreaming (#1)</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>I never worry about anything (#6)</strong></td>
<td><strong>I spend a lot of time daydreaming (#1)</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>I worry a lot (#41)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Is not as happy as other children?</td>
<td><strong>I don’t like to be with other people (#39)</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>I’m popular with kids my own age (#18)</strong></td>
<td><strong>I like to spend most of my time alone (#3)</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>I usually quit when my schoolwork is too hard (#9)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Can’t concentrate, can’t pay attention for long?</td>
<td><strong>I’m pretty happy (#24)</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>I’m never unhappy (#20)</strong></td>
<td><strong>I am happy most of the time (#11)</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>I am as happy as most boys and girls (#38)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Is worried?</td>
<td><strong>I spend a lot of time daydreaming (#1)</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>I never worry about anything (#6)</strong></td>
<td><strong>I spend a lot of time daydreaming (#1)</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>I worry a lot (#41)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Tends to do things on his or her own – is rather solitary?</td>
<td><strong>I don’t like to be with other people (#39)</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>I’m popular with kids my own age (#18)</strong></td>
<td><strong>I like to spend most of my time alone (#3)</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>I usually quit when my schoolwork is too hard (#9)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Gives up easily?</td>
<td><strong>I’m pretty happy (#24)</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>I’m never unhappy (#20)</strong></td>
<td><strong>I am happy most of the time (#11)</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>I am as happy as most boys and girls (#38)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Using the answers Very well, no problems,</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>Quite well, hardly any problems,</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>Pretty well, occasional problems,</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>Not too well, frequent problems,</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>Not well at all, constant problems,</strong>&lt;br&gt;or Not applicable, answer the following questions:**</td>
<td><strong>My teacher makes me feel I’m not good enough (#49)</strong></td>
<td><strong>My teacher feels that I am not good enough (#54)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Using the answers Never, 1 day a week, 2-3 days a week, 4-5 days a week, or 6-7 days a week, about how many days a week does he/she do things with friends?</td>
<td><strong>My parents and I have a lot of fun together (#5)</strong></td>
<td><strong>I have lots of fun with both of my parents (#17)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Using the answers Never, Rarely,</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>Sometimes, Often or Always,</strong> how often do you:**</td>
<td><strong>My teacher makes me feel I’m not good enough (#49)</strong></td>
<td><strong>My teacher feels that I am not good enough (#54)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Since starting school in the fall, how well has he/she gotten along with his/her teacher(s) at school?</td>
<td><strong>My parents and I have a lot of fun together (#5)</strong></td>
<td><strong>I have lots of fun with both of my parents (#17)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. During the past 6 months, how well has your child gotten along with his/her parent?</td>
<td><strong>My parents make me feel that I am not good enough (#25)</strong></td>
<td><strong>My parents think I am a failure (#50)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Using the answers Never, that he/she is bad or not as good as others?</strong></td>
<td><strong>My parents make me feel that I am not good enough (#25)</strong></td>
<td><strong>My parents think I am a failure (#50)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Factor analysis of this 10-item scale reveals three underlying dimensions. However, the dimensions do not clearly fall along the four dimensions of global self-esteem. Also,
three items load significantly lower than the other items. They are: How often would you say that your child tends to do things on his or her own – is rather solitary?, About how many days a week does he/she do things with friends?, and How often do you tell him/her that he/she is bad or not as good as others? When these three items are removed from the scale, and the seven remaining items are loaded, two components are extracted, and again no clear dimensions are revealed. However, the intention of the study is to look at children’s global self-esteem. With all seven items loaded, extracting only one component, high loading values for each item result. These seven items make up the final self-esteem scale used in the analysis (see Table 2). The scale has a Cronbach’s Alpha of .68 for reliability.

Table 2: Self-Esteem Scale used in analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-Esteem Scale</th>
<th>Factor Loadings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How often would you say that your child seems to be unhappy, sad or depressed?</td>
<td>.654</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How often would you say that your child is not as happy as other children?</td>
<td>.606</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. How often would you say that your child can’t concentrate, can’t pay attention for long?</td>
<td>.574</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. How often would you say that your child is worried?</td>
<td>.550</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Since starting school in the fall, how well has he/she gotten along with his/her teacher(s) at school?</td>
<td>.544</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. How often would you say that your child gives up easily?</td>
<td>.543</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. During the past 6 months, how well has your child gotten along with his/her parent?</td>
<td>.608</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Parental Warmth and Support – Control and Moderator Variable

In the present study, parental support is defined as “parental behaviors toward the child, such as praising, encouraging, and giving physical affection, which indicate to the child that he or she is accepted and loved”. This definition originated from the work of Rollins and Thomas (1979). Parental warmth and support have often been measured separately as different variables, but have also been measured together as one variable due to the similarity of the dimensions represented in each (Whitbeck, Conger & Kao, 1993). In order to measure parental warmth and support, each are considered separately, and scales and previous studies are examined, however, a composite measure including both dimensions is used in order to capture both warmth and support.

Felson and Zielinski, (1989) in their study of children’s self-esteem and parental support, found in their research that parental support was multidimensional, and that it is best measured through analyzing types of parental behaviors. These authors chose six parental behaviors to measure parental support. They are: frequency of praise; frequency of criticism; frequency of physical affection; frequency of punishment; whether the parent favours a sibling over the child; and the children’s feelings about whether they can communicate with their parents, that is, whether their parents listen to them.

Ronald Rohner (1986) developed the Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire - child version (PARQ) in 1976 as part of his extensive international studies on the affects of parenting behaviors for children. 20 of the 60 items in the questionnaire measure parental warmth. Some examples of the items include: My mother says nice things about me; my mother makes me feel what I do is important; my mother makes me feel wanted and needed; my mother encourages me to bring my friends home, and tries to make
things pleasant for them. Rohner (1986) has confirmed the reliability and validity of the PARQ in several studies.

Table 3 shows the original questions chosen from the NLSCY to measure parental warmth and support and also compares all questions chosen to which dimensions they represent, while Table 4 shows the scale used during analysis. Originally, there were eleven questions on the Parental Warmth and Support Scale, however, eight items were removed after the proposal stage. The first four questions which were removed are: "In times of crisis we can turn to each other for support", "We feel accepted for what we are", "We confide in each other", and "We express feelings to each other". These four questions are part of the Family Functioning Scale in the NLSCY. The concern about the questions is that respondents would be thinking mainly about their spouse or partner, rather than their children, when answering this question. Factor analysis of these four questions reveals that they operate very differently than the other items. For these two reasons, the questions were eliminated from the scale. The next four questions which were removed from the scale are: "If you tell him/her he/she will get punished if he/she doesn’t stop doing something, and he/she keeps doing it, how often will you punish him/her?", "Just about all children break the rules or do things that they are not supposed to. Also, parents react in different ways. Please tell me how often you raise your voice, scold or yell at him/her when he/she breaks the rules or does things that he/she is not supposed to?", "How often do you get annoyed with him/her for saying or doing something he/she is not supposed to?" and "Of all the times that you talk to him/her about his/her behavior, what proportion is disapproval?" The concern about the first two questions is that they are too closely related to the independent variable of corporal punishment. Factor analysis reveals that all four questions load very highly together.
These items were therefore dropped from the original scale, leaving three questions remaining on the Parental Warmth and Support Scale. The Cronbach's Alpha for the scale is .64 for reliability.

In the present study, parental warmth and support is used as a control variable. It is also investigated as a possible moderator variable to determine whether varying levels of parental warmth and support weaken or strengthen the resulting outcome of childhood self-esteem. For example, it is possible that high levels of parental warmth and support may result in high levels of childhood self-esteem when parents use corporal punishment with their child. Also, low levels of parental warmth and support, when combined with parental use of corporal punishment, may result in low levels of self-esteem in children. It is also possible that level of parental warmth and support has little impact on self-esteem. Investigating parental warmth and support as a potential moderator in the study is intended to reveal more information about the variables of parental use of corporal punishment, parental warmth and support, and childhood self-esteem.
Table 3: Original scale items chosen to measure parental warmth and support.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NLSCY</th>
<th>Parental behaviors</th>
<th>PARQ:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parental Support</td>
<td>Parental Warmth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The following statements are about families and family relationships. For each one, please indicate which response best describes your family: strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. In times of crisis we can turn to each other for support.</td>
<td>Children’s feelings on whether they can communicate with parents.</td>
<td>My mother makes it easy for me to tell her things that are important.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. We feel accepted for who what we are.</td>
<td>Children’s feelings on whether they can communicate with parents.</td>
<td>My mother is really interested in what I do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. We confide in each other.</td>
<td>Children’s feelings on whether they can communicate with parents.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. We express feelings to each other.</td>
<td>Children’s feelings on whether they can communicate with parents.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For the following questions answer: never, about once a week, a few times a week, one or two times a day, or many times each day.</td>
<td>Frequency of praise</td>
<td>My mother says nice things about me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. How often do you praise him/her by saying something like “Good for you!” or “What a nice thing you did!” or “That’s good going!”?</td>
<td>My mother makes me feel proud when I do well.</td>
<td>My mother says nice things to me when I deserve them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. How often do you and he/she talk or play with each other, focusing attention on each other for five minutes or more, just for fun?</td>
<td>Frequency of physical affection.</td>
<td>My mother makes me feel what I do is important.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. How often do you do something special with him/her that he/she enjoys?</td>
<td></td>
<td>My mother lets me do things I think are important, even if it is inconvenient for her.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. How often do you get annoyed with him/her for saying or doing something he/she is not supposed to?</td>
<td>Frequency of criticism.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
9. Of all the times that you talk to him/her about his/her behavior, what proportion is disapproval?

Frequency of criticism.

10. If you tell him/her he/she will get punished if he/she doesn’t stop doing something, and he/she keeps doing it, how often will you punish him/her?

Frequency of punishment.

Just about all children break the rules or do things that they are not supposed to. Also, parents react in different ways. Please tell me how often you do each of the following when he/she breaks the rules or does things that he/she is not supposed to.

11. How often do you raise your voice, scold or yell at him/her?

Frequency of punishment
Table 4: Parental Warmth and Support Scale used in analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parental Warmth and Support Scale</th>
<th>Factor Loadings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How often do you praise him/her by saying something like “Good for you!”, “What a nice thing you did!”, or “That’s good going!”?</td>
<td>.779</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How often do you and he/she talk or play with each other, focusing attention on each other for five minutes or more, just for fun?</td>
<td>.823</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. How often do you do something special with him/her that he/she enjoys?</td>
<td>.692</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Gender – Control and Moderator Variable**

The nominal variable of gender is included in the NLSCY, and is used as a control variable. Gender is also examined as a possible moderator variable in order to determine if it affects the strength of the relationship between corporal punishment and self-esteem. For example, it could be that the self-esteem of boys is much more affected by receiving parental corporal punishment, than is that of girls. It is also possible that the reverse is true, and that the self-esteem of girls is much more affected by parental use of corporal punishment. Testing gender as a possible moderator is intended to give more information as to how the variables of parental use of corporal punishment, gender and childhood self-esteem operate together and affect one another.

**Socio-Economic Status – Control Variable**

In the NLSCY, SES is a composite measure which is operationally defined using measures that describe the occupational prestige, education levels, and economic
positions of the child’s parents. The NLSCY uses five sources to create their measure of SES. These are: the level of education of the PMK; the level of education of the spouse/partner; the prestige of the PMK’s occupation; the prestige of the occupation of the spouse/partner; and household income. SES was not selected to investigate as a potential moderator since all literature in this area does not indicate that SES acts a potential moderator between parental use of corporal punishment and self-esteem.

Religiosity – Control Variable

The participants in the NLSCY are specifically asked about what religious group, if any, they belong to, and given 15 responses to choose from. However, in the available data provided by Statistics Canada, this answer is suppressed in order to maintain the confidentiality of the participants. However, the participants are also asked how often they attend religious services. They are asked to respond from the following answers: At least once a week, at least once a month, at least 3 or 4 times a year, at least once a year, and not at all. Attendance of religious services, according to Silverman (1986) is one of the six ways of measuring religiosity. In a review of measures that assess religiosity, the author discovers that there are six dimensions overall. They are: religious belief, religious activity, religious experience, religious norms, religious knowledge, and institutional religiousness. The question from the NLSCY regarding frequency of attendance to religious services captures the dimension of religious activity.

In the sample, 25.5% of the respondents did not attend religious services, 12.4% attended at least once a year, 19.7% attended at least 3 or 4 times a year, 17.2% attended at least once a month, and 25.3% attended at least once a week. Religiosity was therefore measured based upon attendance of religious services, ranging from low religiosity to high religiosity. Religiosity is not investigated as a potential moderator variable since
literature in this area does not speculate that it acts as a moderator between parental use of corporal punishment and childhood self-esteem.

Results

Bi-variate OLS regression reveals that a significant relationship exists between parental use of corporal punishment and childhood self-esteem (p=.000). As shown in Table 5, children who have received corporal punishment have significantly lower self-esteem on average than those who have not received corporal punishment ($B=-.354$). The $R^2$ value is .030, indicating that 3% of the variance in childhood self-esteem can be explained by parental use of corporal punishment.

When controlling for religiosity, gender, SES and parental warmth and support, the association between parental use of corporal punishment and childhood self-esteem remains significant (p=.000). There is a small change in the relationship between parental use of corporal punishment and childhood self-esteem indicating that the difference between those children who have received corporal punishment and those who have not is smaller ($B=-.352$), however, the relationship is still significant. The $R^2$ value changes to .068, indicating that 6.8% of the variance in childhood self-esteem can be explained by parental use of corporal punishment, religiosity, gender, SES and parental warmth and support.

Control Variables

The analysis also revealed some interesting results on the relationship between the control variables and childhood self-esteem (see Table 5). In this sample, the higher a family's religiosity, the higher the child's self-esteem is ($B=.034$). Conversely, the higher
a family’s SES, the lower the child’s self-esteem is ($B = -0.041$). There is a stronger, but also small, relationship between parental warmth and support and childhood self-esteem. The higher the parental warmth and support a child has, the higher his or her self-esteem is ($B = 0.158$). Also, as seen in Table 6, in the sample, boys have slightly lower self-esteem than the girls do ($B = -0.140$).

Table 5: Regression of parental use of corporal punishment (CP) on childhood self-esteem.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$B$</td>
<td>$\beta$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CP</td>
<td>-0.354</td>
<td>-0.173*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religiosity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>-0.140</td>
<td>-0.071*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SES</td>
<td>-0.041</td>
<td>-0.060*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental Warmth and Support</td>
<td>0.158</td>
<td>0.159*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.142</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>0.030</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. (Model 1 is direct relationship; Model 2 includes all control variables). * = $p < 0.001$
Table 6: Correlation matrix with means and standard deviations (SDs) for scale variables.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SES</th>
<th>Religiosity</th>
<th>PWS Scale</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SE Scale</td>
<td>-.080**</td>
<td>.060**</td>
<td>.178**</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PWS Scale</td>
<td>-.043**</td>
<td>.004*</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religiosity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>1.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SES</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4.70</td>
<td>1.43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* = p > .05; ** = p < .001

Moderator variables

Gender

There is very little difference between boys and girls both in whether or not they receive corporal punishment, and its strength of association with their self-esteem. In the sample, 62.1% of the girls did not receive corporal punishment, and 37.9% received corporal punishment. Within the group of boys, 57.4% did not receive corporal punishment, while 42.6% did receive corporal punishment. Although in the sample this difference between the two genders is significant ($\chi^2 = 17.17; p < 0.001$), the difference between the boys and girls is small. In order to test whether gender moderates the relationship between parental use of corporal punishment and childhood self-esteem, first girls were selected from the sample (n=3161) and then boys (n=3289), followed by OLS regression between the independent and dependent variables for each group. For girls, the relationship between parental use of corporal punishment and childhood self-esteem is significant (p=.000). There is a significant difference in self-esteem, with girls who have been corporally punished having lower self-esteem than girls who have not received corporal
punishment \((B=-.340)\). The \(R^2\) value is .030, indicating that parental use of corporal punishment explains 3% of the variance in girls' self-esteem level. For boys, the relationship between parental use of corporal punishment and childhood self-esteem is also significant \((p=.000)\). Boys who have received corporal punishment have lower self-esteem than boys who have not received corporal punishment \((B=-.352)\). The \(R^2\) value is .028, indicating that for boys parental use of corporal punishment explains 2.8% of the variance in self-esteem level. While there is only a small difference in the strength of the relationship between parental use of corporal punishment and childhood self-esteem when comparing boys with girls, there is a greater effect on the self-esteem of girls who have received corporal punishment, as compared with the effect on the self-esteem of boys who have received corporal punishment. Gender was also tested as a moderator by creating an interaction term between corporal punishment and gender, and then running a regression between the independent and dependent variables, including the interaction term in the analysis. The interaction between corporal punishment and gender shows that gender does act as a moderator in the relationship between parental use of corporal punishment and childhood self-esteem \((p=.000)\). However, there is only a small difference between boys and girls, and the strength of the relationship between the interaction of corporal punishment and gender on self-esteem is weak \(\beta=-.060\) (see Table 7).
Table 7: Regression of parental use of corporal punishment (CP) on childhood self-esteem for boys and girls.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th></th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>β</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>β</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CP</td>
<td>-.352</td>
<td>-.167**</td>
<td>-.340</td>
<td>-.173**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religiosity</td>
<td>.027</td>
<td>.040*</td>
<td>.040</td>
<td>.066**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SES</td>
<td>-.046</td>
<td>-.064**</td>
<td>-.036</td>
<td>-.055*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental Warmth and Support</td>
<td>.130</td>
<td>.124**</td>
<td>.188</td>
<td>.200**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>.074</td>
<td></td>
<td>.207</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>.028</td>
<td></td>
<td>.030</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. *=p<.05; **=p<.001

*Parental Warmth and Support*

In order to test parental warmth and support as a moderator, the sample was split at the median into two groups, high and low parental warmth and support. The results show only a small difference between the two groups (see Table 7). In the group with high parental warmth and support, the relationship between parental use of corporal punishment and childhood self-esteem is significant (p=.000). Children with high parental warmth and support who receive corporal punishment have lower self-esteem than those children who also have high parental warmth and support but do not receive corporal punishment ($B=-.308$). In the group with low parental warmth and support, the relationship between parental use of corporal punishment and childhood self-esteem is also significant (p=.000). Children with low parental warmth and support who receive corporal punishment have lower self-esteem than those children with low parental
warmth and support who do not receive corporal punishment ($B=-.359$). While there is only a small difference in the strength of the relationship between parental use of corporal punishment and childhood self-esteem when comparing children who receive high parental warmth and support versus those children who receive low parental warmth and support there is a greater effect on the self-esteem of children with low parental warmth and support who have received corporal punishment ($R^2=.043$), as compared with the effect on the self-esteem of children with high parental warmth and support who have received corporal punishment ($R^2=.040$). Parental warmth and support was also tested as a potential moderator by creating an interaction term between corporal punishment and parental warmth and support, and then running a regression between the independent and dependent variables, including the interaction term in the analysis. The interaction between parental warmth and support and corporal punishment shows that parental warmth and support does act as a moderator between parental use of corporal punishment and childhood self-esteem ($p=.000$). However, the difference between high and low parental warmth and support is small, and the relationship between the moderator variable of parental warmth and support and corporal punishment on self-esteem is weak ($\beta=.098$) (see Table 8).
Table 8: Regression of parental use of corporal punishment (CP) on childhood self-esteem for high and low parental warmth and support (PWS).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>High PWS</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>Low PWS</th>
<th>Beta</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CP</td>
<td>-.308</td>
<td>-.159**</td>
<td>-.359</td>
<td>-.171***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religiosity</td>
<td>.022</td>
<td>.036*</td>
<td>.044</td>
<td>.065***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SES</td>
<td>-.035</td>
<td>-.057**</td>
<td>-.053</td>
<td>-.071***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>-.168</td>
<td>-.092**</td>
<td>-.114</td>
<td>-.055**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>.259</td>
<td></td>
<td>.039</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>.040</td>
<td></td>
<td>.043</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. 
*=p>.05; **=p<.05; ***=p<.001.

Discussion

This study shows that a small, but significant association between parental use of corporal punishment and childhood self-esteem exists in this sample. Children who received corporal punishment were significantly more likely to have lower self-esteem than those children who did not receive corporal punishment. Furthermore, this significant relationship held when controlling for religiosity, SES, gender and parental warmth and support. Although gender acts as a moderator between parental use of corporal punishment and childhood self-esteem in the regression analysis, the
relationship is weak. Parental warmth and support is also a weak relationship between corporal punishment and childhood self-esteem.

While parental use of corporal punishment explains only a small percent of the variance in childhood self-esteem, this is not unlike other studies in this area, where the specific effects of corporal punishment on children have shown small negative, but significant associations (Paolucci & Violato, 2004; Straus, 1994). These relatively weak associations between parental use of corporal punishment and childhood self-esteem could explain the small number of published studies in the area. While there are many published studies on the association between parental use of corporal punishment and childhood aggression, the lack of published studies in the area of self-esteem is not an indication that it is less important. Self-esteem is a trait that is so vital in the process of socialization and the development of self, that, although it is an internal trait, should be considered highly in the overall assessment of children. It should be noted, however, that some researchers claim that a reverse relationship also exists between parental use of corporal punishment and childhood self-esteem. That is, that specific child temperaments may elicit parents to respond to their children with corporal punishment (Baumrind, 1994; Muller, Hunter, & Stollak, 1995; Day, Peterson, & McCracken, 1998). However, this area of research also produces mixed results, and the relationship between child temperament and parent characteristics and behaviors is inconclusive (Holden, Coleman, & Schmidt, 1995).

The control variables in this study provide even more insight into the relationship between parental use of corporal punishment and childhood self-esteem. While controlling for gender, parental warmth and support, SES and religiosity, the relationship between parental use of corporal punishment and self-esteem was still significant. It was
speculated that, because all of these variables have been extensively studied in combination with either parental use of corporal punishment or childhood self-esteem (or both), and there have been many significant relationships between the variables, that they each had potential to in some way affect the results of the data. They are therefore controlled for in the study, and even with the controls, the significant relationship between parental use of corporal punishment and childhood self-esteem holds. This indicates that the relationship between parental use of corporal punishment and childhood self-esteem is a strong one; it is not easily influenced by individual, family or parenting factors. This is important since the self-esteem of a child is influenced by so many factors; it is easy to argue that a significant relationship would not exist if the child, for example, were from a different socio-economic background or if the family had more traditional religious values. Indeed, this has been the main argument of Baumrind (1996), who says that, for children who have warm and supportive parents, there will be no negative effects of corporal punishment. This study shows the opposite, that there are negative effects between parental use of corporal punishment and childhood self-esteem, even when controlling for parental warmth and support.

It was hypothesized that parental warmth and support may act as a moderator between parental use of corporal punishment and childhood self-esteem. However, for children who received corporal punishment, there was only a small difference in their self-esteem whether they received high or low parental warmth and support. These findings also contradict those authors who claim that high parental warmth and support will act as a buffer against the negative effects of corporal punishment.

It was also hypothesized that gender may act as a moderator between parental use of corporal punishment and childhood self-esteem. This hypothesis also did not hold in the
final analysis. Whatever differences may exist between the self-esteem of boys and girls, it is only slightly affected by their experiences of corporal punishment. These results are important since there is so much literature written on the relationship between gender and self-esteem. Although there have been many significant relationships found between gender and self-esteem, it is important not to assume that corporal punishment is a possible antecedent in this relationship, and that it is other social and familial factors that create this relationship.

There are many limitations in the present study, due to the sample used, and the complex relationship involved in measuring children's emotional well-being. The most obvious limitation is that it is not possible to establish a causal relationship between corporal punishment and self-esteem because self-esteem in children was measured concurrently in the data with parental use of corporal punishment. Also, many other factors contribute to the formation of a child's self-esteem. Life events, relationships, environment, and school are all examples that show how diverse and many the influences are in a child's life. However, each of these contributing factors plays a role in the formation of a child's self-esteem. When these factors become more clear individuals can then choose parenting practices based on the educated knowledge of what is clearly beneficial in promoting the best possible self-esteem in their child.

Other limitations include accuracy of reporting from individuals in the survey. Some researchers (Straus & Mouradian, 1998; Straus, 1994) have claimed that parental use of corporal punishment is underreported due to concealment of information from parents during survey questioning. At this point in society, the issue of corporal punishment is highly debated, and many individuals and parents speak out openly against its use. Social desirability may cause many parents who use corporal punishment with their children to
not report accurately. It is also possible that parents, when questioned on their child's self-esteem, are either undervaluing or overvaluing the level. For questions related to parental warmth and support, it is possible that parents answer according to what they believe to be the "right" or acceptable" answer, rather than the truth.

The NLSCY also only receives responses from one parent, the Person Most Knowledgeable (PMK). In the majority of cases it is the mother who responds. It is possible that important information about discipline is missed by not interviewing the other parent. Interviewing both parents where available would also give more confirmation to accuracy of reporting.

Another limitation involves the measure used to determine parental use of corporal punishment. In the NLSCY, parents are asked how often they use physical punishment on their child. Because the question does not specify which type of physical punishment, the measure will include all levels, from spanking to harsh punishment. This study is not meant to include families in which there is parental use of harsh punishment, however, these families will represent a portion of the data due to the nature of the question.

The NLSCY also has many restrictions placed on data availability. In order to maintain the confidentiality of the participants they have had to suppress many important variables which may have lent valuable information to this project. The best examples of this are the ethnicity and religion variables. Ethnic background has been strongly linked to different child outcomes with the parental use of corporal punishment. It may have altered the data if more information were available about this aspect of families. Also, attendance of religious services does not give information about specific religious groups. Examining different religious groups, such as Protestant, would have given a
clearer picture of the role that specific religious groups play in the formation of their child's self-esteem.

The final Parental Warmth and Support Scale is also limited in that it captures only two dimensions of parental support and one dimension of parental warmth. Ideally, more dimensions of parental warmth and support would be represented in a scale in order to fully capture the variable.

Despite its limitations, this study contributes a great deal to the existing literature on the effects of corporal punishment on children. While most studies that look at parental use of corporal punishment and child outcomes investigate externalizing behaviours, this study investigates the internalizing behaviour of self-esteem. Research on childhood self-esteem, and its association with parental use of corporal punishment, is greatly needed. This is especially true in Canada where, in comparison with the United States, there is very little information on this topic available about Canadian parents and children. The findings from this study also contradict the argument of defenders of corporal punishment who claim that children who have high levels of parental warmth and support will not experience the negative emotional and behavioural consequences of corporal punishment. One of the main arguments put forth in defense of corporal punishment is that when applied within a loving, warm and supportive relationship, there will be no negative effects on the child. This study calls that argument into question; further research into this area could give more credence to this area within the debate, and help to clearly distinguish if there actually are familial characteristics which can negate the effects of corporal punishment on children.

Overall, these findings show a significant, yet weak, relationship between parental use of corporal punishment and childhood self-esteem. Based on previous literature, and
the current debate that exists about corporal punishment and child outcomes, these results can be interpreted in one of two ways. Those who uphold that corporal punishment is a valid means of discipline for parents could look at the findings and conclude that although there is a negative relationship that exists between parental use of corporal punishment and childhood self-esteem, the association is, overall, weak. They may further interpret that because the association is weak, any negative consequences would be, overall, negligible. Some defenders of corporal punishment, who see benefits to its use, may believe that the benefits of corporal punishment outweigh any potential negative outcomes, and therefore decide that it is still a valid means of disciplining children. On the other hand, opponents of corporal punishment may look at the significant relationship as a justification for not using it as a means of discipline with children. The argument here would be that any amount of negative effect, no matter how small, is still negative, and that therefore another means of discipline, besides corporal punishment, should be chosen by parents.

Overall, the results of this study alone do not drastically change the climate of the ongoing debate about whether or not corporal punishment should be used with children as a discipline method. However, this research does provide more knowledge into an area which is very important: the development of a child's self-esteem. With every piece of new information, researchers, educators and parents greatly benefit because they can then make informed and educated choices about child discipline. For some, that may be continuing with the use of corporal punishment if they believe the negative effects will not be overly damaging. For others, it may mean choosing a discipline strategy in which there are no negative effects, so that their child will potentially have no negative outcomes related to discipline techniques.
For future research, it is pertinent that corporal punishment be examined in conjunction with other forms of discipline, such as time-outs or verbal reasoning. This can then take the emphasis away from the polarized debate over whether corporal punishment should or should not be allowed, and focus the discussion on what is best and non-harmful for children.
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