

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORY

Two bodies of previous research inform our work. These are studies which explore:

- (1) Religious practice and domestic violence;
- (2) Christian fundamentalism and corporal punishment;

Religious practice and domestic violence.

Regular church attendance is inversely associated with domestic violence for both men and women (Ellison and Anderson, 2001). This inverse relationship holds for male perpetrators who attend weekly or more often and for females who attend monthly or more. It holds as well for both male and female victims (Cunradi, Caetano, and Schafer, 2002). These results support other research suggesting that church attendance maintains individuals' contact with normative reference groups (Roberts, Koch, and Johnson, 2001). We imagine this to be particularly evident among church attendees who would avoid the risk of having fellow congregants witness the effects of domestic violence such as visible bruising, seasonally inappropriate clothing to hide bruises, or other more subtle signs of marital discord and trauma that may become evident through interacting with others in a religious setting.

Even so, a conservatively religious sub culture that supports the use of corporal punishment, and also uses Biblically based family life education may also create a context conducive to hierarchical, if not overtly abusive family dynamics (Capps, 1992; Nason-Clark, 2000). However, data cast some limited doubt on making these assumptions (Brinkerhoff, Grandlin, and Luperi, 1992; Ellison, 1996). Thus, this body of research leads us to initially propose that religiosity itself is not likely associated with intimate partner violence.

Christian fundamentalism and corporal punishment.

Christian fundamentalism is a system of beliefs and practices rooted in a literal interpretation of the Bible, the experience of being “born-again,” and the belief that adherence to strict behavioral and social norms through a Christian fellowship are precursors to eternal life (Ammerman, 1987). There is a debate among scholars and practitioners over the appropriate application of these religious principles regarding the use of corporal punishment with children. Christian parenting specialists tend to support its limited use (Bartkowski, 1995). Survey data also show that parents holding fundamentalist Christian beliefs are more likely to use corporal punishment than are others (Ellison, Bartkowski, and Seagal, 1996; Grasmick, Bursick, and Kimpel, 1991). There is a shortage of direct empirical evidence linking support for and use of corporal punishment with the increased likelihood of child abuse or domestic violence, even among fundamentalists (Ellison, 1996). However, others argue that, at a minimum, corporal punishment creates a family environment more tolerant of other forms of violence (Strauss, 1994; Strauss and Gelles, 1990). Moreover, Nason-Clark (2000) cautions that institutionalized norms of patriarchal authority among Christian fundamentalists elevate the risk for child and spouse abuse.

This study tries to partially adjudicate that debate. Rather than making assumptions about the beliefs and behavior of individuals resulting from attending a fundamentalist church, or declaring themselves to be part of a conservative religious tradition or denomination, we directly compare respondents’ expression of Christian fundamentalist beliefs with their tolerance for, or engagement in, violence approval, psychological, and physical aggression. A positive correlation among these variables strengthens the case for linking corporal punishment with an enhanced likelihood of domestic violence in Christian fundamentalist families. We propose that

authoritarian and patriarchal norms emerging from a fundamentalist faith ultimately makes violence more likely.

Based on the review of literature, we offer the following hypotheses:

Hypotheses

- H1: As religiosity increases violence approval decreases.
- H2: As fundamentalism increases, violence approval increases.
- H3: As religiosity increases, psychological aggression decreases.
- H4: As fundamentalism increases, psychological aggression increases.
- H5: As religiosity increases, intimate partner violence decreases.
- H6: As fundamentalism increases, intimate partner violence increases.

SAMPLE AND METHODS

The sample is comprised of 626 undergraduate students from two universities in the southwestern United States. Data were collected during the Fall of 2003 and the Spring of 2004. After IRB review and obtaining informed consent, students enrolled in undergraduate Sociology classes responded to questions administered through an anonymous questionnaire. They were offered nominal extra credit for participating and all in attendance on the data collection days chose to do so.

Survey questions used are as follows:

Dependent Variables, Scales, and Questions

1. Violence Approval (“Strongly Agree, Agree, Not Sure, Disagree, Strongly Disagree”):

Family Violence

- 1) It is sometimes necessary to discipline a child with a good hard spanking.
- 2) It can think of a situation when I would approve of a wife slapping a husband’s face.
- 3) It can think of a situation when I would approve of a husband slapping a wife’s face.
- 4) It is sometimes necessary for parents to slap a teen who talks back or is getting into trouble.

Male Violence

- 5) When a boy is growing up, it’s important for him to have a few fist fights.
- 6) A man should not walk away from a physical fight with another man.
- 7) A boy who is hit by another boy should hit back.

Sexual Aggression

- 8) A woman who has been raped probably asked for it.
- 9) If a wife refuses to have sex, there are times when it may be okay to make her do it.
- 10) Once sex gets past a certain point, a man can't stop himself until he is satisfied.

2. Psychological Aggression (Responses were "Yes" or "No" in relationships):

- 1) Insulted or swore at my partner
- 2) Shouted or yelled at my partner
- 3) Stomped out of the room or house or yard during a disagreement.
- 4) Said something to spite my partner.
- 5) Called my partner fat or ugly
- 6) Destroyed something belonging to my partner
- 7) Accused my partner of being a lousy lover
- 8) Threatened to hit or throw something at my partner.

3. Intimate Partner Violence (Responses were "Yes" or "No" in relationship):

- 1) Threw something at partner
- 2) Twisted arm or hair
- 3) Pushed or shoved
- 4) Grabbed
- 5) Slapped
- 6) Used knife or gun on partner
- 7) Punched or hit
- 8) Choked
- 9) Slammed against wall
- 10) Beat up
- 11) Burned or scalded
- 12) Kicked

Independent Variables:

1. Religiosity:

- 1) How often do you attend a place of worship (church, synagogue, etc.) now?
 - 1) Never
 - 2) Once or twice a year
 - 3) Several times a year
 - 4) About once a month
 - 5) 2-3 times a month
 - 6) Weekly or more often
- 2) In general, would you consider your religious faith to be?
 - 1) Non-existent
 - 2) Very weak
 - 3) Moderately weak
 - 4) Moderately strong
 - 5) Very strong

3) About how often do you pray?

- 1) Never
- 2) Several times a day
- 3) Daily
- 4) Several times a week
- 5) Once a week
- 6) Less than once a week

4) Beliefs about God?

- 1) I don't believe in God
- 2) I don't believe in a personal God, but I believe in a higher power of some kind.
- 3) I find myself believing in God some of the time, but not at other times.
- 4) While I have some doubts, I feel that I do believe in God.
- 5) I know that God really exists and I have no doubts about it

2. Christian Fundamentalism ("Strongly Agree, Agree, Not Sure, Disagree, Strongly Disagree.")

- 1) I am sure the Bible contains no errors or contradictions.
- 2) It is very important for true Christians to believe that the Bible is the infallible Word of God.
- 3) The Bible is the final and complete guide to morality; it contains God's answers to all important questions about right and wrong.
- 4) Christians should not let themselves be influenced by worldly ideas.
- 5) Christians must try hard to know and defend the true teachings of God's word.
- 6) The best education for a Christian child is in a Christian school with Christian teachers.