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EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

Consequences of Corporal Punishment Among African Americans: The Importance of Context and Outcome

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Abstract Corporal punishment is a controversial practice used by the majority of American parents and is especially prevalent among African Americans. Research regarding its consequences has produced mixed results although it is clear that there is a need for considering the context within which corporal punishment is administered. To assess the impact of spanking, we employed an expanded parenting typology that includes corporal punishment. Longitudinal self-report data from a sample of 683 African American youth (54 % female) were utilized to evaluate the relative impact of the resulting eight parenting styles on three outcomes: conduct problems, depressive symptoms, and school engagement. Results from Negative Binomial Regression Models indicate that the effect of corporal punishment depends upon the constellation of parenting behaviors within which it is embedded and upon the type of outcome being considered. While it is never the case that there is any added benefit of adding corporal punishment, it is also the case that using corporal punishment is not always associated with poor outcomes. Overall, however, our findings show that parenting styles that include corporal punishment do not produce outcomes as positive as those associated with authoritative parenting.

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Introduction to the Controversy around Corporal Punishment

There has perhaps been no topic pertaining to the scholarship on parenting that has received as much attention or created as much controversy as corporal punishment. Conclusions and recommendations have been wide-ranging and have included the position that spanking can have positive outcomes in some populations (Larzelere 1996, 2000), can be effective in the short term (Gershoff 2002), makes no difference in child outcomes whether used rarely or moderately (Baumrind 2001), is ineffective (Zolitar et al. 2008), or that it is child abuse (Straus et al. 1994) and should be banned as an illegal practice (Nolen 2009; Zamani and Farmer 2009). Corporal punishment is a very common practice among American parents. Indeed, findings from a nationally representative sample indicated that 90 % of parents spank their toddlers, 52 % use corporal punishment with children at ages 12–13, and 20 % hit offspring who are age 17 (Straus and Stewart 1999). While the vast majority of parents use corporal punishment, almost all clinicians and practitioners would advise parents against this form of discipline and the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP 2011) has taken a stance strongly opposing hitting a child for any reason.

There has been even more controversy about spanking among African Americans. Research suggests that African Americans utilize spanking at higher rates than the general population (Straus and Stewart 1999). Studies also have reported, however, that the use of corporal punishment by African Americans parents often is combined with

nurturance and support (Collett et al. 2001; Reitman et al. 2001; Steele et al. 2005) and/or with firm behavioral expectations and monitoring (Brody and Flor 1998; Young 1974). Horn, Joseph and Cheng (2004) conducted a meta-analysis of the research on the consequences of non-abusive spanking among African Americans and determined that physical punishment appears to be associated with both positive and negative developmental outcomes for African-American children. They concluded their review by indicating that greater clarity would be brought to this set of contradictory findings if future studies could improve upon past research by utilizing longitudinal designs, socioeconomically diverse samples of African Americans, measures of both frequency and severity of corporal punishment, baseline measures of the child behaviors being assessed as outcomes, and contextual factors that accompany the use of corporal punishment. The present study attempts to address each of these concerns and thus fill a major gap in the research on the consequences of corporal punishment among African Americans.

We use three waves of data obtained from a sample of nearly 700 African American youth to examine the effect of parenting styles both with and without corporal punishment on three adolescent outcomes. Prior studies have focused upon the issue of context by investigating how the effect of corporal punishment is moderated by or interacts with other parenting behaviors such as warmth (Harper et al. 2006; Hicks-Pass 2009; Simons et al. 2002). The present article goes beyond identifying interaction effects to specify the relative effectiveness of various parenting styles. Our approach allows us to rank order these various styles of parenting, some of which include corporal punishment and some of which do not, in terms of their impact on three outcomes: conduct problems, depressive symptoms, and school engagement. The result is a more nuanced examination of the effects of corporal punishment.

Parenting Styles and Corporal Punishment

Parenting styles usually are determined by the levels of demandingness and responsiveness displayed by parents (Maccoby and Martin 1983). Demandingness, also referred to as behavioral control, refers to "the claims parents make on children by their maturity demands, supervision, disciplinary efforts and willingness to confront the child who disobeys" (Baumrind 1991, pp. 61- 62). Responsiveness, also referred to as parental warmth or supportiveness, refers to "the extent to which parents intentionally foster individuality, self-regulation, and self-assertion by being attuned, supportive, and acquiescent to children's special needs and demands" (Baumrind 1991, p. 62). In the past several decades, there has been a multitude of studies investigating the efficacy of the four parenting styles formed by the various combinations of demandingness and responsiveness. Overall, these studies provide rather convincing evidence that authoritative parenting (high responsiveness combined with high demandingness) produces the best child outcomes whereas neglectful parents (low responsiveness combined with low demandingness) foster the worst. Children with authoritarian parents (low responsiveness combined with high demandingness) and permissive parents (high responsiveness combined with low demandingness) generally fall somewhere in the middle, with the nature of the outcome (e.g., depressive symptoms, conduct problems, school performance) determining which is more effective than the other (Simons and Conger 2007; Steinberg et al. 2006).

Although the authoritative parenting style is less common in ethnic minority and poor families, its advantageous effects on adolescent development have been found across ethnic and socioeconomic groups (Knight et al. 1994; Mason et al. 1996; Spera 2005; Steinberg et al. 2006; Taylor et al. 1995). Some researchers (Brody and Flor 1998; McGroder 2000) have argued, however, that the four parenting styles identified in the Maccoby and Martin typology do not reflect all of the naturally occurring parenting styles evident in ethnic minority populations. For example, Young (1974), in an ethnographic study of African American parents, identified a parenting style that he labeled "no nonsense parenting." This style was characterized by warmth and support coupled with high levels of control that included the use of physical restraint and corporal punishment. Using survey data collected from a sample of single-parent African American mothers, Brody and Flor (1998) found that the no nonsense style of parenting was widely prevalent and seemed to be related to positive child outcomes. The no nonsense style cannot be easily incorporated into the Maccoby and Martin typology. It is different from authoritarian parenting as it includes high levels of supportive or responsive interactions with the child, but most family researchers would argue that the use of physical punishment is contrary to authoritative parenting.

Meta-analyses of the effects of corporal punishment generally show it to have detrimental effects. It has been linked to increased antisocial behavior and depression among both children and adolescents (Apaolucci and Violato 2004; Gershoff 2002; Gershoff and Bitensky 2007). Reviews also suggest, however, that there may be ethnic differences in the consequences of physical discipline. Although some studies find negative effects across all ethnic groups, the majority find that the consequences are often neutral (Simons et al. 2002), but in some cases positive, for African Americans (Gershoff 2002; Horn et al. 2004). Further, there is evidence that the results of physical discipline are moderated by parental support. In these

studies, physical discipline has little if any detrimental effect when it is administered by parents who are generally warm and nurturing (Harper et al. 2006; Hicks-Pass 2009; Simons, Wu, Lin, Gordon and Conger 2000). Such findings suggest that the consequences of physical discipline vary depending upon the context of parenting practices within which it is embedded.

The idea that the meaning of a particular parenting practice varies depending upon the broader context of the parent–child relationship is the basic assumption behind research on parenting styles (Darling and Steinberg 1993; Lambourn, et al. 1991). Indeed, Maccoby and Martin (1983) emphasized the necessity of taking into account the combined effects of behaviors associated with responsiveness as well as those associated with demandingness. Specific parenting behaviors are seen as having different meanings depending upon the emotional climate within which they occur, and this emotional climate is determined by the style of parenting (Darling and Steinberg 1993; Steinberg 2001). This being the case, the meaning and consequences of corporal punishment are likely to vary depending upon the level of responsiveness and demandingness exercised by the parent and, conversely, the meaning and consequences of variations in responsiveness and demandingness may vary depending upon whether they co-occur with corporal punishment.

While the research on parenting typologies has been impressive and has produced useful results, it largely has ignored the issue of where corporal punishment fits into parenting. In practice, parental control may or may not include physical discipline. Most studies measure demandingness, regarded as a necessary component of good parenting, by assessing parental monitoring or supervision and consistent discipline, but do not include an assessment of whether the parent's disciplinary strategies include corporal punishment. Clearly, higher levels of corporal punishment, as an indicator of higher parental control, are not apt to be considered optimal parenting. Thus, because high levels demandingness *are* desirable it is not clear how a measure of demandingness could include a measure of corporal punishment. This is potentially an important omission given the high proportion of parents who use corporal punishment and the lack of clarity regarding how its consequences on youth outcomes vary by levels of responsiveness and demandingness. We believe that all of this provides support for our approach of examining the impact of corporal punishment by utilizing an expanded parenting typology.

An Expanded Typology of Parenting Styles

We constructed a typology of parenting styles that involved all combinations of responsiveness, demandingness, and corporal punishment. Essentially, this involved breaking down each of the original four parenting styles identified in the Maccoby and Martin typology (1983) into two styles based upon whether or not corporal punishment is used as a strategy for exercising discipline and control. The resulting eight parenting styles are presented in Table 1. We attempted to give each of the styles a name that identified its overall approach to parenting. Of course, the typology includes authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and neglectful parenting, each of which involve little or no corporal punishment. The table also includes four styles that do include corporal punishment.

Like authoritative parenting, *no-nonsense* parenting is characterized by high involvement with one's children both in terms of responsiveness and demandingness. Unlike authoritative parenting, however, it includes physical restraint or force as an approach to behavioral control. This is consistent with the definition used by Young (1974) and Brody and Flor (1998).

Vigilant/punitive parenting combines the absence of responsiveness and high levels of demandingness characteristic of authoritarian parenting with corporal punishment. Such parents are highly attuned to the actions and whereabouts of their offspring and are very consistent in applying sanctions for violations of behavior standards. They use physical punishment to reinforce the rules and punish transgressions yet they rarely exhibit warm, nurturing behaviors. This style is consistent to one referred to as harsh parenting by Simons et al. (1998).

Next, *lax/reactive* parenting, like permissive/indulgent parenting, includes high responsiveness and low demandingness but it also entails corporal punishment. This parenting style is similar to one first described by McGroder (2000) and corroborated using African American samples by Reitman et al. (2001) and Steele et al. (2005). Parents who use this approach are generally warm and supportive, exercise little behavior control, yet use corporal

Table 1 Typology of parenting styles based on combinations of responsiveness (R), demandingness (D), and corporal punishment (CP)

Parenting styles	High R	High D	High CP
Authoritative parenting	×	×	–
No-nonsense parenting	×	×	×
Authoritarian parenting	–	×	–
Vigilant/punitive parenting	–	×	×
Permissive parenting	×	–	–
Lax/reactive parenting	×	–	×
Neglectful parenting	–	–	–
Abusive parenting	–	–	×

"–" stands for no, and "×" for yes

punishment as a discipline strategy. The use of corporal punishment in the absence of monitoring and consistent discipline suggests that it is likely utilized on those occasions when the parent is emotionally overwhelmed with feelings of frustration and anger towards the child.

Finally, *abusive* parenting has some elements in common with neglectful/uninvolved parenting (low responsiveness and low demandingness) but involves frequent use of corporal punishment. Corporal punishment administered in the absence of warmth or behavioral standards is likely a capricious action that is more a function of the emotional state of the parent than the behavior of the child. Thus, the expanded typology includes four styles of parenting that have been discussed in the literature but are not assessed in the traditional parenting typology.

The Current Study

Having identified eight parenting styles, our study goals are twofold. First, we are concerned with the extent to which these various approaches to parenting are evident among African American families. The second and more fundamental goal of the study is to evaluate the relative impact of the various parenting styles on adolescent development. We are particularly interested in the extent to which the effect of corporal punishment varies by the broader style of parenting within which it is embedded, and whether styles that include corporal punishment are more, less, or comparably effective as styles with similar levels of responsiveness and demandingness but which eschew corporal punishment. We expect that the efficacy of the various parenting styles likely varies by the developmental outcome that is being considered. Therefore, we focused upon three outcomes previously addressed in the research on both parenting typologies and corporal punishment: conduct problems, depressive symptoms, and school engagement.

Based on extant research (see Simons and Conger 2007), we expect that authoritative parenting will be associated with the most positive results for each outcome and that no-nonsense parenting may function in a nearly equivalent fashion (Brody and Flor 1998). Further, we predict that the styles of parenting with high levels of demandingness (i.e., authoritative, authoritarian, no-nonsense, vigilant punitive) will be associated with the lowest levels of adolescent delinquency. Monitoring, supervision, and consistent consequences for violating behavioral expectations are related to lower rates of delinquent behavior. On the other hand, we predict that styles of parenting associated with high levels of responsiveness (i.e., authoritative, no-nonsense, permissive/indulgent, lax/reactive) will be associated with the lowest levels of depressive symptoms among adolescents. Interactions with parents that are characterized by warmth, nurturance, and affection are related to fewer depressive symptoms in youth. We hypothesize that parenting styles with both responsiveness and demandingness (i.e., authoritative and no-nonsense) will be related to the highest levels of school engagement. Having a set of clear expectations, parental supervision, and parental involvement are associated with positive academic outcomes for youth. Finally, we expect that parenting styles that do not involve corporal punishment will produce more positive outcomes when compared to the parallel parenting style which includes corporal punishment. That is, we expect that authoritative parenting will be associated with more positive outcomes than no-nonsense, authoritarian parenting will be associated with more positive outcomes than vigilant/punitive, permissive parenting will be associated with more positive outcomes than lax/reactive, and abusive parenting will be associated with more negative outcomes than negligent/uninvolved.

Family structure, parents' education (Simons et al. 2004), and community violence (Simons et al. 2002) are related to both parenting and child outcomes. Therefore, they are potentially confounding variables. Thus, we have included them as control variables in the model.

Method

Sample

Our analyses are based on data from Waves 1, 2, and 3 of the family and community health study (FACHS), a multisite investigation of neighborhood and family effects on health and development. FACHS was designed to identify neighborhood and family processes that contribute to school-age African American children's development in families living in a wide variety of community settings outside the inner-city core. Each family included a child who was in 5th grade at the time of recruitment. At Wave 1, the FACHS sample consisted of 889 African American children (411 boys and 478 girls). At study inception, about half of the sample resided in Georgia and the other half in Iowa. The children averaged 10.5 years of age at the beginning of the study in 1997–1998. They were, on average, 12.5 years of age at Wave 2 and 15 years of age at Wave 3. Of the 889 targets interviewed at Wave 1,778 were re-interviewed at Wave 2, and 767 at Wave 3 (86 % of the original sample). Those who dropped out of the study between Waves 1 and 3 did not differ from those retained with regard to family income, community disadvantage, family structure, parenting practices, or child delinquency, depressive symptoms, or school engagement. Further, there were no significant differences between the families from Iowa and those from Georgia.

Most previous research on African American youth has been based on inner-city samples; however, FACHS families were selected from 259 Census block group areas that represented the diversity of neighborhoods in which African American children are reared. The sample families resided in rural communities, suburban areas, and small towns and cities. The sample was generally representative of African American families in poor, working class, and middle class neighborhoods in Iowa and Georgia. Mean family annual income at Wave 1 was $28,184 and 36 % of the families were below the poverty line. Educational backgrounds of the primary caregivers were diverse ranging from a high school diploma (19 %) to a bachelor's or advanced degree (9 %) and their mean age was 37 years. Additional details regarding sampling procedures and the demographic characteristics of the participants utilized can be found in Simons et al. (2002). The present study is based upon the 683 cases that had complete data across all three waves on the variables used in our analyses.

Procedures

At each wave, computer assisted interviews were administered in the respondent's home and took on average about 2 hours. The instruments were presented on laptop computers. Questions appeared in sequence on the screen, which both the researcher and participant could see. The researcher read each question aloud and the participant entered an anonymous response that the interviewer could not see using a separate keypad.

Measures

We used assessments of each outcome at Wave 1 in order to establish baseline measures and then examined the way in which persistent exposure to parenting at Waves 2 and 3 produced change in the outcomes between Waves 1 and 3. We chose Waves 2 and 3 for the assessment of parenting, when the target was 12.5 and 15 years of age, rather than Waves 1 & 2, when the target was 10.5 and 12.5 years of age, because parenting has a relatively concurrent effect on child adjustment and the outcomes were assessed when the child was 15 years of age. Thus, our analytic strategy allowed us to assess how persistent exposure to a particular parenting style over a 2 year period was related to change in the outcomes between ages 10.5 and 15 years of age.

Delinquency

This construct was measured using child self-reports on the conduct disorder section of the Diagnostic Interview Schedule for Children, Version 4 (DISC-IV). The DISC was developed over a 15-year period of research on thousands of children and parents, and has demonstrated reliability and validity (Shaffer et al. 1993). The conduct disorder section contains 27 questions regarding whether during the preceding year (0 = *no*, 1 = *yes*) the respondent engaged in various deviant acts such as shoplifting, physical assault, lying, setting fires, cruelty to animals, vandalism, burglary, and robbery. Scores on the instrument were obtained by summing the number of acts reported. Coefficient α for the index was .66 at Wave 1 and .83 at Wave 3.

Depressive Symptoms

At Waves 1 and 3, the target children completed the depression section of the Diagnostic Interview Schedule for Children, Version 4 (DISC-IV). The depression section contains 22 questions regarding whether during the preceding year (0 = *no*, 1 = *yes*) the respondent had felt sad, irritable, tired, restless, or worthless; either slept more than usual or had trouble sleeping; had difficulty focusing and making decisions; or thought about death or suicide. Scores on the scale consist of a count of the symptoms reported. Coefficient α for the index was scale was .86 at Wave 1 and .87 at Wave 3.

School Engagement

At Waves 1 and 3, target children completed a 7-item scale that asks them to indicate how much they agree (1 = *strongly disagree*, 4 = *strongly agree*) with various statements about school, e.g., I like school a lot, school bores me, I don't do well at school, I try hard at school, grades are very important to me. Responses were coded so that higher scores indicated greater school engagement. Coefficient α for the scale was .67 at Wave 1 and .70 at Wave 3.

Parenting Styles

In an effort to assess the parenting style to which our respondents were rather persistently exposed, we used assessments of responsiveness, demandingness, and corporal punishment collected at both Waves 2 and 3. This provides a clearer and more accurate assessment of parenting over time rather than a measure of parenting at one point in time as has been done with most prior research. The items for the scales were from the parenting instrument developed for the Iowa Youth and Families Project (IYFP; Conger et al. 1992). These scales have been shown to have high validity and reliability. For example, analyses from IYFP has shown that parent and child reports correlate with each other and with observer ratings (Conger et al. 1992), and they predict various dimensions of child behavior across a several year period (Simons et al. 2001). Correlations of measure of various parenting behaviors across waves range from .35 to .45. Focus group feedback prior to

data collection indicated that these items are meaningful to African American parents and capture what they consider to be the important dimensions of effective parenting.

Responsiveness

This construct was measured using a 21-item scale. Target children were asked to report how often during the preceding year (1 = *never*, 4 = *always*) that their primary caregiver engaged in supportive actions (e.g., help you do something that was important to you, letting you know he/she really cares about you, acting loving and affectionate toward you), inductive reasoning (e.g., asking you what you think before making a decision about you, explaining the reason when you don't understand a rule, and disciplining by talking to you about what you did), and hostile behaviors (e.g., shouting or yelling at you, criticizing your or your ideas, and getting angry at you). The hostility items were all reverse coded. Coefficient α for this scale was .85 at Wave 2 and .89 at Wave 3.

Demandingness

This construct was assessed using an 11-item scale. Target children were asked to report how often during the preceding year (1 = *never*, 4 = *always*) that their primary caregiver engaged in monitoring and supervision of their behavior (e.g., knew what I did after school, knew how well I was doing in school, knew if I did something wrong) and engaged in consistent discipline (e.g., would be disciplined at home if parents knew I broke a school rule, would give up when I did not listen or continued to do something wrong (reverse coded), and discipline depended on my parent's mood (reverse coded). Coefficient α for this scale was .63 at Wave 2 and .70 at Wave 3.

Corporal Punishment

This variable was measured using 5 items from the conflict tactics scale (Straus 1990). Target children were asked to indicate how often in the past year (1 = *never*, 4 = *always*) their primary caregiver spanked them when they did something wrong, used a belt or paddle when disciplining them, slapped or hit them with hands, pushed, grabbed, or shoved them, and struck them with an object when disciplining them. Coefficient α was .70 and .73 for Waves 2 and 3, respectively.

Control Variables

We controlled for several family and community variables that past research has shown to be related to one or more of the outcomes. These included parent education (measured in years), family structure (0 = *two parent family*, 1 = *single-parent family*), child's gender (0 = *boy*, 1 = *girl*), and community violence. The later construct was assess using target child responses to a 6-item scale that asked how often (1 = *never*, 3 = *often*) during the past 6 months that various violent acts had taken place in their neighborhood (e.g., a fight involving a gun or knife, a violent argument between neighbors, a gang fight, a robbery, a murder). Coefficient α for the scale was .71. At Wave 2, education level of primary caregivers ranged from less than a high school diploma (19 %) to a bachelor's or graduate degree (10 %); the average number of years of education was 12.71. 51 % of the target children were living in a single-parent family, and the mean score for community violence was 7.88.

Categorization of Parenting Styles

Researchers have used two basic approaches to categorize parenting styles. Some use the bottom and top tertiles with regard to each of the parenting dimensions. This strategy was not feasible in the present study. Given the large number of parenting styles being assessed we could not afford to throw out a third of the cases. The second and commonly used approach to categorizing parenting styles is to dichotomize the sample using either the mean or median. Researchers utilize the median when the data is skewed or contains several outliers. This was not the case for our data. Additionally, the mean and median were virtually identical. Therefore, following the example of others (e.g., Berge, Wall, Neumark-Sztainer, Larson and Story 2010; Brody and Flor 1998; Jago et al. 2011), we used the mean as a cutpoint.

The scores for each of the three parenting scales were summed across Waves 2 and 3 and then divided by number of items to obtain an average score. The average score was 3.06 for responsiveness, 3.02 for demandingness, and 1.21 for corporal punishment ($sd = 0.27$). These scores were used as cut-points for classifying respondents as either high or low on each of the parenting dimensions. The cut-point of 3.06 for responsiveness meant that those classified as high had reported that on average their parent had engaged in the items listed on the scale "often" or "always" whereas those classified as low on this dimension of parenting averaged "sometimes" or "never". The same was true for those classified as high and low on the demandingness dimension of parenting. The cut-point of 1.21 for corporal punishment meant that those classified as low had reported, at most, that they had experienced one of the items on the corporal punishment scale "sometimes". Thus those in the low category had experienced little or no corporal punishment in the year preceding data collection for Waves 2 and 3. In contrast, those classified as high on

corporal punishment had reported that their parent had engaged in more than one of the acts listed on the corporal punishment scale on a more frequent basis. Having categorized the parenting received by each of our respondents as high or low on each of the three parenting dimensions, we then used the different combinations of these categorizations to classify the primary caregiver's parenting style using the typology presented in Table 1.

Analytical Strategy

We began our analysis by examining the proportion of cases that fell within each of the eight parenting styles. Once we had established that each of the styles had sufficient cases to be included in our investigation of the effect of the styles on the three outcomes, we use the Negative Binomial Regression Model (NBRM; Long and Freese 2003) available in STATA 8.0 to evaluate the effects of the various parenting styles on changes in children's delinquency and depressive symptom scores. This procedure was selected as both of these scales are count variables with Poisson distributions (high right skew). Symptom count variables almost always have high right skew. While the mean is low, there is a significant minority of individuals who engage in these behaviors quite frequently. OLS assumes normal distribution of the variable whereas NBRM accommodates this skew (Long and Freese 2003). Further, unlike the Poisson Regression Model, it can account for not only "observed heterogeneity" but also "unobserved heterogeneity" (Long and Freese 2003). Introducing an extra parameter alpha to capture unobserved heterogeneity, NBRM provides more accurate estimation of the effects of independent variables on outcome variables (Long and Freese 2003). In contrast to delinquency and depressive symptoms, school engagement is a continuous variable with a normal distribution. Therefore, we used Ordinary Least Squares Regression available in STATA 8.0 to evaluate the effect of parenting styles on this outcome.

Our regression analyses involved treating each of the parenting styles as a dummy variable. Our first set of regressions treated authoritative parenting as the omitted (or comparison) category. This decision was based upon the wealth of evidence indicating that authoritative is the optimal style of parenting. Studies indicate that children raised by authoritative parents almost always display better outcomes than those reared with other parenting styles (Simons and Conger 2007; Steinberg et al. 1994, 2006; Thompson et al. 2003), and while a few studies have found that some other style does nearly as well as authoritative parenting (i.e., no-nonsense parenting), no style has ever been shown to produce better results than authoritative parenting (Steinberg 2001). These regressions provided estimates of the extent and significance of the increase in delinquency and depressive symptoms (as indicated by the odds ratio) associated with each of the parenting styles compared to authoritative parenting. Having compared each of the styles to authoritative parenting, we reran the regressions treating, in turn, each of the parenting styles as the omitted category. These regressions allowed us to rank order the parenting styles from best to least effective for each outcome, and to determine the extent to which the differences between particular styles were significant.

It should be noted that all of our analyses involved the total sample which combined boys and girls. We tested whether there were gender differences in the impact of the parenting styles on the outcomes and, out of the 24 interaction terms tested, only one achieved marginal significance. This style no longer approached significance, however, once we corrected for number of interaction terms tested. Therefore, in order to simplify the analysis and maximize statistical power, we used the combined sample in the regression analyses. All regressions did, however, include controls for the child's gender as well as family structure, parent education, community violence, and Wave 1 assessments of the dependent variable.

Results

Table 2 shows the frequency distribution of the eight parenting styles within our sample. The table indicates that authoritative parenting is the most common parenting style with 28 % ($n = 193$) of caregivers categorized as authoritative. Surprisingly, neglectful/uninvolved parenting is second most common (17.7 %, $n = 121$). The least common style is lax/over- reactive. Only 4 % ($n = 27$) of caregivers fall into this category. Each of the remaining styles comprises from 6 % to 13 % of the sample. While the table shows some differences by the child's gender, none are statistically significant.

Table 2 shows that corporal punishment often is used by parents regardless of their levels of responsiveness or demandingness. Twenty-five percent of the parents with high responsiveness are also high on corporal punishment, and 42 % of the parents low on responsiveness are high on corporal punishment. Similarly, 29 % of the parents high on demandingness also engage in high levels of corporal punishment, while 35 % of the parents low on demandingness are high on corporal punishment.

Turning to the issue of the consequences of the various parenting styles, Table 3 presents the negative binomial regression model for change in delinquency. The average count of target children's reported delinquent behavior was 2 at Wave 1 and 3 at Wave 3. The table reports the results of regressing delinquency at Wave 3 on 7 dummy

Table 2 Distribution of parenting styles by gender of child

	Total Percentage (Frequency)	Boys Percentage (Frequency)	Girls Percentage (Frequency)
Authoritative parenting	28.3 (193)	26.5 (83)	29.7 (110)
No-nonsense parenting	9.8 (67)	10.9 (34)	8.9 (33)
Authoritarian parenting	8.5 (58)	7.3 (23)	9.5 (35)
Vigilant/punitive parenting	5.9 (40)	4.8 (15)	6.8 (25)
Permissive parenting	13.2 (90)	14.7 (46)	11.9 (44)
Lax/reactive parenting	4.0 (27)	5.1 (16)	3.0 (11)
Neglectful parenting	17.7 (121)	17.3 (54)	18.1 (67)
Abusive parenting	12.7 (87)	13.4 (42)	12.2 (45)
Total	100 (683)	100 (313)	100 (370)

Table 3 Odds-ratios obtained from negative binomial regression with delinquency regressed on parenting styles and controls (N = 683)

Independent variables	e^b	SE
Authoritative parenting	$-_{a}$	–
No-nonsense parenting	1.33_{b}	0.16
Authoritarian parenting	1.45_{b}	0.19
Vigilant punitive parenting	1.47_{b}	0.22
Lax/reactive parenting	1.49_{b}	0.16
Permissive parenting	1.69_{b}	0.14
Neglectful parenting	$1.86_{b, c}$	0.12
Abusive parenting	2.28_{c}	0.14
Delinquency w1	1.09**	0.02
Age w2	1.14*	0.06
Gender	0.89	0.08
Parent's education	1.03	0.02
Family structure	0.96	0.08
Community violence	1.03	0.02
LR test of $\alpha = 0$	645.61**	
χ^2	102.49**	
df	13	

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. Coefficients with different subscripts are significantly different at $p < .05$

variables, one for each of the parenting styles except for authoritative, which is the omitted or comparison group. The model also controls for several variables, including delinquency at Wave 1. The table rank-orders the parenting styles according to their ineffectiveness in decreasing participation in delinquency compared to authoritative parenting. Having compared each of the styles to authoritative parenting, we reran the regressions treating, in turn, each of the parenting styles as the omitted category. This allowed us to determine the extent to which the effects of each parenting style differed from that of each of the others. To begin, four styles—no-nonsense, authoritarian, lax/reactive, and vigilant/punitive -all show roughly comparable levels of ineffectiveness, compared to authoritative parenting, in regards to the level of delinquency. They are associated with a 33–49 % greater increase in delinquent behavior than authoritative parenting. Although these four styles are significantly less effective than the authoritative style, they do not differ significantly from each other. Continuing down the list of parenting styles, permissive is associated with a 69 % increase and neglectful/uninvolved an 86 % increase in delinquency compared to authoritative. By far the largest coefficient is for the abusive style. It is associated with a 128 % greater increase in delinquency. It appears that the only thing that is more detrimental than ignoring one's children is a parenting style that involves ignoring them except to hit them.

The parenting styles that best prevent delinquency (authoritative, no-nonsense, and authoritarian, vigilant/punitive) all involve high demandingness, whereas the least effective styles (lax/reactive, permissive, neglectful, abusive) are all low on demandingness. While the four that are most effective all involve high demandingness, authoritative scores significantly better than the other three. No-nonsense scores second and it is high on both demandingness and responsiveness like authoritative, but adds high use of corporal punishment. Rather than further reducing participation in delinquent activities, adding corporal punishment to the mix appears to dilute the effectiveness of the combination of demandingness and responsiveness. The third best approach, authoritarian, is characterized by demandingness in the absence of responsiveness. Its weaker performance compared to authoritative and no-nonsense suggests that that demandingness is associated with lower levels of delinquency when coupled with responsiveness. Therefore, while demandingness appears to be necessary to lower participation in delinquency, it alone is not sufficient. It must be combined with responsiveness and under optimal conditions does not include corporal punishment.

Table 4 presents the regression results for depressive symptoms. The table shows that, compared to authoritative parenting, the no-nonsense, permissive and lax/reactive styles increase depressive symptoms by 14, 21, and 25 %, respectively. None of these increases, however, are statistically significant. The increases associated with authoritarian, neglectful, abusive, and vigilant/punitive parenting, on the other hand, are statistically significant. The first four styles in the table are all high on

responsiveness whereas these last four styles are all low on responsiveness, suggesting that it is the absence of warmth and responsiveness that is most critical in fostering depressive symptoms. The pattern of results do not indicate that corporal punishment by itself contributes to depressive symptoms because two of the first four styles (no-nonsense, lax/reactive) and two among the bottom four styles (abusive, vigilant/punitive) involve high use of corporal punishment. However, the latter two styles show the highest increases in depressive symptoms of all the styles suggesting that corporal punishment in the absence of responsiveness puts youth at an increased risk for depressive symptoms.

Finally, Table 5 reports the results of using ordinary-least-squares regression to assess the impact of the parenting styles on school engagement. The table indicates that the impact of the no-nonsense style does not differ significantly from that of authoritative parenting. Indeed, the coefficient for no-nonsense parenting is virtually zero. The remaining parenting styles, however, are all associated with significantly less school engagement than authoritative parenting. The decreases in school engagement for both abusive and neglectful parenting are particularly large (−1.56 and −2.06, respectively) and are of greater magnitude than the decreases associated with any of the other parenting styles. The first four styles in the table are all high on demandingness whereas these last four styles are all low on demandingness, suggesting that it is control and demandingness that is most crucial in promoting school engagement. Further, the top two styles combine demandingness with responsiveness indicating that optimal outcomes are associated with a combination of these two dimensions.

Discussion

This study addressed prior recommendations made by Horn et al. (2004) in their meta-analysis of research on the consequences of corporal punishment for African American youth. Following their recommendations, we utilized a longitudinal study design, a socioeconomically diverse sample of African Americans, measures of both frequency and severity of corporal punishment, baseline measures of child outcomes, and contextual factors that accompany the use of corporal punishment. Thus, the results from the present study address a major gap in the literature.

We approached this task by employing an expanded typology of parenting styles as the mechanism by which to assess the impact of corporal punishment in combination with responsiveness and demandingness. A profusion of studies has investigated the effect of the four parenting styles created when using these two dimensions of parenting (i.e., authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and neglectful). Although the results vary somewhat depending upon the outcome being examined, authoritative parenting almost always shows the best results and neglectful parenting almost always produces the worst results (Simons and Conger 2007; Steinberg 2001). A limitation of the

Table 4 Negative binomial regression with depressive symptoms regressed with parenting styles and controls (N = 683)

Independent variables	e^b	SE
Authoritative parenting	$-_{a}$	–
No-nonsense parenting	$1.14_{a,b}$	0.14
Permissive parenting	$1.21_{a,b}$	0.17
Lax/reactive parenting	$1.25_{a,b}$	0.20
Authoritarian parenting	1.36_{b}	0.15
Neglectful parenting	1.36_{b}	0.12
Abusive parenting	1.37_{b}	0.13
Vigilant/punitive parenting	1.45_{b}	0.17
Depressive symptoms w1	1.03**	0.01
Age w2	$0.91^{\dagger}$	0.05
Gender	1.38**	0.08
Parent's education	0.98	0.02
Family structure	0.92	0.08
Community violence	1.02	0.02
LR test of $\alpha = 0$	1117.98**	
χ^2	52.90**	
df	13	

† $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. Coefficients with different subscripts are significantly different at $p < .05$

Table 5 Standardized regression coefficients for ordinary least square regression with school engagement regressed on parenting styles and controls (N = 662)

Independent variables	b	SE
Authoritative parenting	$-_{a}$	–
No-nonsense parenting	$-0.01_{a,b}$	0.41
Authoritarian parenting	$-.62_{c}$	0.43
Vigilant/punitive parenting	-1.05_{c}	0.49
Permissive parenting	-1.12_{c}	0.37
Lax/reactive parenting	-1.19_{c}	0.61
Abusive parenting	$-1.56_{c,d}$	0.38
Neglectful parenting	-2.06_{d}	0.34
School engagement w1	0.17**	0.04
Age w2	−0.25	0.15
Gender	0.53*	0.22
Parent's education	−0.05	0.05
Family structure	0.20	0.22
Community violence	0.05	0.05
Adjusted R^2	0.11**	

** $p < .01$. * $p < .05$. Coefficients with different subscripts are significantly different at $p < .05$

original typology is that it does not take into account the extent to which a parent's disciplinary approach includes corporal punishment. As a result, we do not know whether the consequences of any of the four parenting styles vary depending upon whether it involves the use of corporal punishment. This omission is particularly problematic when studying African American families as they employ corporal punishment more often than other ethnic groups (Straus and Stewart 1999). In the present study, we constructed a typology of parenting styles that included all combinations of responsiveness, demandingness, and corporal punishment.

We began by examining the frequency distribution for the various parenting styles in order to determine how corporal punishment relates to demandingness and responsiveness. It is frequently assumed that warm and nurturing parents are unlikely to utilize corporal punishment. We found that while parents who are high on responsiveness are less likely to use corporal punishment than parents who were low on responsiveness (25 and 42 %, respectively), the use of corporal punishment is still a frequent approach to discipline, even among warm and nurturing parents. It also often is assumed that corporal punishment is an indication of high parental demandingness or strictness. Data from the present study indicated that this is often not the case. Twenty-nine percent of parents high on demandingness were also high on corporal punishment, whereas 35 % of parents low on demandingness were high on corporal punishment. Thus, those high on demandingness were actually less likely than those low on demandingness to use corporal punishment. This suggests that corporal punishment may often be an angry, explosive, or emotional approach to discipline utilized by parents who otherwise exercise little behavioral control or demandingness.

The major concern of our study was the relative effectiveness of the various styles on youth development. We focused upon three outcomes—delinquency, depressive symptoms, and school engagement—as it seemed likely that the efficacy of a particular style might vary by type of developmental outcome. Our results indicated that, regardless of outcome, authoritative parenting produced the best results. Further, no-nonsense parenting was always second best. Indeed, our analysis indicated that its effect on depressive symptoms and school engagement did not differ from that of authoritative parenting. It was, however, associated with a 33 % increase in delinquency compared to authoritative parenting. This suggests that while adding corporal punishment to responsiveness and demandingness has little impact upon a child's academic success or emotional well-being, it increases the probability of delinquent behavior.

The impact of the other parenting styles showed even greater variation by outcome. Generally the styles that were high on demandingness produced the best results for delinquency. The four most effective styles associated with low levels of delinquent behavior (authoritative, no-nonsense, authoritarian, and vigilant/punitive, respectively) are all high on demandingness. Setting behavior standards, monitoring behavior, and consistently applying consequences for violations of behavioral expectations are the most important things that parents can do in order to reduce participation in delinquent behavior among youth.

In contrast, the parenting styles that were high on responsiveness are associated with the fewest depressive symptoms. The top four styles in terms of fewer depressive symptoms (authoritative, no-nonsense, permissive, and lax/reactive) are all high on responsiveness. Parenting that includes high levels of warmth, involvement, explanations of rules, and an absence of hostility are the most important things that parents can do in order to reduce depressive symptoms in their offspring.

Both responsiveness and demandingness are important in promoting school engagement while there is little indication that corporal punishment in and of itself either encourages or discourages school engagement. On the one hand, no-nonsense parenting is associated with a level of school engagement virtually identical to that of authoritative parenting. On the other hand, the vigilant/punitive, lax/reactive, and abusive styles all show significantly worse results than authoritative parenting. The latter two styles are at the bottom in terms of efficacy. This suggests that corporal punishment in the absence of demandingness is a particularly ineffectual approach to promoting school engagement. It should be noted, however, that the neglectful style is associated with the largest decrease in school engagement. Thus, our results suggest that it is a complete lack of involvement on the part of parents that is most destructive with regard to a child's interest and performance in school. However, the extent to which abusive parenting produces marginally better results than neglectful parenting suggests that a fear of harsh physical punishment is the only factor that motivates these youth to do well in school slightly more than being ignored does.

Overall, with the exception of authoritative and no-nonsense styles, which are high on both responsiveness and demandingness, the efficacy of the other parenting styles varies rather dramatically by outcome. The authoritarian and vigilant/punitive styles, both of which are high on demandingness, for example, do relatively well in terms of decreasing delinquency and increasing school engagement, but they rank 5th and 8th respectively with regard to decreasing depressive symptoms. In contrast, both permissive and lax/reactive styles, both of which are high on responsiveness, do relatively well in terms of decreasing depressive symptoms but are among the least effective with regard to delinquency and school engagement. Neglectful

and abusive parents score near or at the bottom for all three of the outcomes as they fail to provide either demandingness or responsiveness.

Our findings have important implications for the study of the impact of corporal punishment on youth outcomes. They indicate that the consequences of this disciplinary strategy seem to vary depending on the constellation of parenting behaviors within which it is embedded. No-nonsense parenting involves the use of corporal punishment within a context of warmth and support along with supervision and consistent discipline and thus it produces outcomes that most closely approximate those achieved by authoritative parenting. The vigilant/punitive parenting style couples corporal punishment with high demandingness but low responsiveness. One might expect children who are hit by parents who display little warmth or affection to become sad and demoralized. Consistent with this idea, our data indicate that the vigilant/punitive style produces a modicum of compliance, but that it is also associated with the highest levels of depressive symptoms.

In addition, corporal punishment in the absence of clear standards and expectations is an ineffective approach to producing positive outcomes. The lax/reactive style combines corporal punishment with high responsiveness and low demandingness. Although the warmth provided by the parents may alleviate the child's feelings of rejection in response to corporal punishment, such discipline in the absence of clear standards and expectations is likely to produce feelings of unfair treatment. Thus, it appears to be an ineffective approach to producing compliance with behavioral expectations. In keeping with this view, the lax/reactive style ranks in the middle on all three child outcomes, scoring neither among the more effective nor among the least effective parenting approaches.

Finally, the abusive style involves the use of corporal punishment in the absence of both responsiveness and demandingness. Children of such parents receive little affection, guidance, or supervision, but are regularly the recipients of corporal punishment. Such an approach should be both ineffective and demoralizing. Consistent with this expectation, it was among the most detrimental for all three child outcomes.

This pattern of results, consonant with the primary assumption behind research on parenting styles (Darling and Steinberg 1993; Steinberg 2001), suggests that the meaning and therefore the impact of physical discipline varies depending upon the broader context of the parent–child relationship. That said, it is also the case that the general pattern is one where the parenting style that adds corporal punishment does more poorly than its counterpart which does not include corporal punishment (viz., vigilant/punitive is generally less effective than authoritarian, lax/reactive is generally less effective than permissive, and abusive is generally less effective than neglectful).

Parents generally are concerned with whether corporal punishment is a "good" or "bad" discipline strategy. While our results cannot address moral questions regarding the use of physical force, we believe our findings do shed some light on the consequences of using this approach to discipline with adolescents. While it is never the case that there is any "bonus" to adding corporal punishment, it is also the case that using corporal punishment is not always associated with poor outcomes. Instead, its effects depend on the other behaviors regularly exhibited by parents. When either responsiveness or demandingness is provided by parents in conjunction with corporal punishment, the probability of negative effects is reduced. This may be because either responsiveness or demandingness can be interpreted by the child as an investment in his or her well-being, thereby making corporal punishment seen more legitimate and somewhat decreasing the likelihood that the child will feel rejected or unfairly treated in response to physical punishment. Regardless of the reason, however, our results indicate that parents who are warm, involved, and engage in monitoring as well as consistent discipline do little harm by using corporal punishment (though, again, there is no value added by utilizing it). On the other hand, parents who are uninvolved, low on warmth, and who engage little monitoring or consistent discipline have children who were more depressed, less engaged in school, and involved in more delinquent activities. These problems are only exacerbated by the addition of corporal punishment.

The present study makes a significant contribution toward the understanding of the consequences of corporal punishment among African American youth. A major strength of the study was the use of multiple child outcomes. This allowed us to assess the extent to which the efficacy of the various parenting styles varied by type of outcome. A second advantage involved the use of longitudinal data. Our assessment of parenting styles used data collected over a two-year period, thereby increasing the reliability of these classifications. Further, by controlling for earlier measures of our outcomes, we were able to assess the impact of parenting styles on changes in child development across time. Further, our analytic approach allowed us to examine the relative impact of each of the parenting styles by rank ordering the eight styles of parenting in terms of their efficacy with regard to various outcomes. The statistical procedures utilized in prior research have not provided this information.

It is the case, however, that our study also suffered from certain limitations. First, our assessments of parental behavior limited to children's reports. While this is the measurement strategy used in most studies of parenting

styles, a multi-method approach that included observer ratings would provide greater confidence in our classifications of parenting style. Second, all of the respondents in our sample were African American. On the one hand, this might be seen as an advantage. Scholars often have argued that the usual parenting typology may not apply to African Americans (McGroder 2000; Reitman et al. 2001; Steele et al. 2005; Young 1974) and that corporal punishment is used more frequently (Straus and Stewart 1999) and produces better results in the African American community (Gershoff 2002; Horn et al. 2004). On the other hand, it is not clear that our results can be generalized to other ethnic groups. Our findings need to be replicated using more diverse samples. One final caveat in interpreting these findings is that they are relevant to the use of corporal punishment with youth in late childhood and early adolescence. They may or may not correspond to what might be found with other age groups, particularly early childhood or late adolescence.

In conclusion, given that the majority of American parents sometimes employ corporal punishment, it important to identify the manner in which the effects of this disciplinary strategy vary by the family context within which it is utilized and the developmental outcome of concern. By expanding the traditional parenting typology to include corporal punishment, we were able to obtain a more nuanced assessment of these issues than has been available in past research. Importantly, our eightfold typology included four parenting styles that have been discussed in the literature on African American families but are not a part of the usual parenting typology. Our results indicate that the effect of corporal punishment depends upon the constellation of parenting behaviors within which it is embedded and upon the type of outcome being considered. Indeed, some parenting styles that include corporal punishment are more effective than certain parenting styles that do not. Overall, however, our findings show that parenting styles that include corporal punishment do not produce outcomes as positive as those associated with authoritative parenting. That is, parenting that is characterized by clear standard setting, enforcement of rules, open communication between parents and child, verbal give and take, and displays of warmth and support is related to optimal developmental outcomes such as greater school engagement, lower levels of depressive symptoms and less involvement in delinquent behaviors, each of which has important implications for positive development across the life span.

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LGS conceived of the study, participated in its design and coordination, interpreted the data, authored the manuscript; RLS participated in the study design and interpretation of the data; XS performed the statistical analysis. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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