

CHILDHOOD DISCIPLINE AND  
THE DEVELOPMENT OF MORAL COURAGE

BY

SETH IZEN

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Thesis Supervisor:  
Paula Rayman, Ph.D.  
Director, Peace and Conflict Studies Program  
Professor, Department of Sociology

## **Abstract**

This study investigated how the childhood discipline practices of corporal punishment and inductive reasoning were related to the development of moral courage. Moral courage is the willingness to risk one's life and oppose societal norms in order to act ethically. The components of moral courage (empathic concern, social responsibility, moral reasoning, and risk-taking) and the potential relationship between discipline and moral courage are derived from research on rescuers during the Holocaust. University students completed an adult recall survey of their childhood discipline experiences and self-report tests for the components of moral courage. Significant positive correlations were found between childhood experiences of inductive discipline and moral courage. No significant relationship was found between childhood experiences of corporal punishment and moral courage.

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Finally, I want to share my sincere hope that this research makes some contribution to bettering the world – whether through influencing policy, parenting or future research.

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## **Introduction**

*“Few are willing to brave the disapproval of their fellows, the censure of their colleagues, the wrath of their society. Moral courage is a rarer commodity than bravery in battle or great intelligence. Yet it is the one essential, vital quality for those who seek to change a world that yields most painfully to change.” - Robert Kennedy*

During the Holocaust, the Nazi regime murdered six million Jews and members of other marginalized groups in a state-sponsored and systematic genocide (Oliner & Oliner, 1988). Overall, in the twentieth century, eighty million people were murdered in genocides and cleansings that targeted them for their ideological or religious beliefs (Brzezinski, 1993). How is it possible that so many people were systematically murdered for who they were or what they believed? One reason is that there were few bystanders who had the courage to oppose the bloodshed.<sup>1</sup> It took an extraordinary person to be willing to risk his or her life and the life of family members to stand up for an oppressed group. However, across geographic, religious, and gender divides, there have been people with the moral courage to risk their lives to save others (Oliner & Oliner, 1988). It is important to study these people and learn about moral courage if we wish to avoid repeating the bloodshed of the twentieth century.

There are three key components to moral courage. The first is that it involves engaging in an act for ethical reasons and not for personal gain. Second, these acts are done in opposition to societal norms. Unlike heroism, acts of moral courage are done

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<sup>1</sup> Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority, has only verified 23,788 people who risked their lives to rescue Jews during the Holocaust (The Righteous Among the Nations, 2011). Even upper estimates of the total number of rescuers (250,000) would only account for ¼ of 1 percent of the total population under Nazi control during World War II. (Oliner & Oliner, 1988)

without the general support of the community at large and often in direct resistance to laws or norms. Finally, because acting with moral courage is done in opposition to societal laws and norms, it is especially dangerous. For instance, people in Poland were put to death for simple acts of offering a drink of water to a Jewish person. (Becker & Eagly, 2004). The Nazis gave bounties for reporting on people who rescued Jews, further increasing the danger of acting with moral courage. Therefore, moral courage will be defined as the “willingness to risk one’s life and oppose societal norms in order to act ethically.”

One way to explore moral courage is to study people who risked their lives to save others for no personal gain and in opposition to societal norms. The rescuers in the Holocaust are one such population. Research on Holocaust rescuers has been developed over the past 30 years and there have been several studies with populations of over 100 which have yielded significant results with substantive effect sizes (e.g. Oliner & Oliner, 1988; Fogelman, 1994; Fagin-Jones & Midlarsky, 2007). The main studies of Holocaust rescuers reviewed in this research use definitions of a rescuer that are in line with the definition of moral courage: A rescuer risked his or her life to save one or more Jews and was primarily motivated by altruistic motives.

### **Present Study**

Research on rescuers in the Holocaust found that four personality traits (empathic concern, social responsibility, moral reasoning, and risk-taking) accounted for 74% of the variance between rescuers and non-rescuers. (Fagin-Jones & Midlarsky, 2007) These personality traits are considered to comprise “moral courage” because they are traits that differentiate between those who were willing to risk their lives to save Jews and those

who were not. Research also found that there was a significant difference between rescuers and non-rescuers in the types of childhood discipline they experienced. The parents of rescuers tended to use more explanation and reasoning, also known as inductive discipline, and less corporal punishment than parents of non-rescuers (Oliner & Oliner, 1988). This study seeks to expand upon the relation between childhood discipline and moral courage by examining the correlations between these variables in a population of college students. Specifically, this research examines whether a positive relationship between inductive discipline and moral courage, and a negative relationship between corporal punishment and moral courage, would be present in a population of college students as it was in a sample of Holocaust rescuers and non-rescuers (Oliner & Oliner, 1988).

### **Research on Rescuers**

Research on rescuers during the Holocaust sought to answer a fundamental question: What led a small percentage of people to act with moral courage and risk their lives to save a marginalized group? Researchers examined demographic, situational and personality variables to answer this question. Demographic variables included religion, age, socioeconomic class, gender, and political orientation. Situational variables included awareness of danger posed to Jews, feelings towards Nazis, perceived risk of helping, material resources and being asked for help.

Results were largely mixed and inconclusive relating to most demographic and situational variables (Oliner & Oliner, 1988; Gushee, 1993; Fogelman, 1994; Fagin-Jones & Midlarsky, 2007). The most notable situational predictor was being asked for help; one-third of rescuers were directly asked for help either by a Jew or someone on behalf of

a Jew. This variable is moderated by a person's personality and views because someone would only be asked to become a rescuer if he or she were perceived to be the type of person who would help. Asking the wrong person would lead to dire consequences. Indeed, only personality variables were found to significantly and consistently distinguish between rescuers and non-rescuers (Fagin-Jones & Midlarsky, 2007). Furthermore, rescuers generally cite personality variables when asked why they acted (Oliner & Oliner, 1988).

Fagin-Jones and Midlarsky (2007) found that four personality traits – empathic concern, social responsibility, altruistic moral reasoning, and risk-taking – explained 74% of the variance between rescuers and non-rescuers and could accurately classify 96% of the rescuers and non-rescuers. Fagin-Jones and Midlarsky chose those variables because they had been identified with altruism and heroism in research by Peterson and Seligman (2004). As a result of the demonstrated success of these four variables to differentiate morally courageous rescuers from a control group, this study employs a moral courage scale composed of the same variables.

Empathic concern is a subtype of empathy. It is the tendency to be moved by others' pain. People with high levels of empathic concern feel compassion towards victims and anger against perpetrators (Davis, 1983). Empathy is "an affective response more appropriate to another's situation than one's own" (Hoffman, 2000, p.4). The distinction between empathic concern and empathy is important because it is possible to experience another's emotion *without* feeling concern for him or her. In other words, one may feel empathy by being affected by another's sadness but not have the empathic concern to want to help alleviate the other's pain. In fact, the Oliners (1988) found that

rescuers and non-rescuers had the same capacity for emotional empathy. Both groups were equally susceptible to be influenced by another's emotion. The distinguishing factor between the groups was the level of concern that the rescuers felt for those who were suffering. Rescuers were more likely to express empathic concern such as, "I can't feel good if others around me feel sad," "Seeing people cry upsets me," and "I get angry when I see someone hurt" (Oliner & Oliner, 1988, p. 174). Following the model used by Fagin-Jones and Midlarsky (2007), this paper will hereafter use "empathy" to refer to "empathic concern."

Feeling concern does not necessarily translate into taking action. One can rationalize the suffering, remove oneself from the situation, or shirk responsibility (Hoffman, 2000). Feeling responsible is a necessary factor in taking action in bystander situations (Darley & Latane, 1968). Fagin-Jones and Midlarsky (2007) measured this component with a social responsibility scale. Social responsibility is a norm that leads people to help others for no personal gain (Berkowitz & Lutterman, 1968). The socially responsible person possesses strong internal standards of right and wrong and is motivated to avoid guilt that results from acting incorrectly. Meeting all obligations, not letting friends down, and participating in civic commitments are hallmarks of the socially responsible person. Socially responsible people tend to have lower levels of ethnocentrism and anti-Semitism and possess deep concerns over unethical behavior driven by their high sets of standards (Berkowitz & Lutterman, 1968).

Altruistic moral reasoning is the capacity to make ethical decisions based on higher levels of concern for others and less concern about oneself. People who use altruistic moral reasoning operate from internalized principles of right and wrong that are

applicable universally. With this form of moral reasoning, one would risk his or her life to save someone not because they liked or pitied the person but because it was the right thing to do.

To engage in rescuing, a person must have been willing to endanger oneself and one's family. According to Paldiel (1988), the former Director of Yad Vashem's Righteous Gentiles division, the elements of risk and fear are some of the most important elements in differentiating rescuers and non-rescuers. The Nazis enacted laws banning aid to Jews and threatening death to anyone who violated the law. For example, in Warsaw, Poland, the following law was established: "Any Jew who illegally leaves the designated residential district will be punished by death. Anyone who deliberately offers refuge to such Jews or who aids them in any other manner... will be subject to the same punishment" (Becker & Eagly, 2004, p.169). Thousands of Poles were executed or died in concentration camps for trying to help Jews (Becker & Eagly, 2004). With the Nazis threatening swift and brutal retribution to anyone who defied their anti-Jewish measures, only the bravest people were willing to help Jews. Since the four variables of empathy, social responsibility, moral reasoning and risk-taking were found to be the most significant differentiators between rescuers and non-rescuers, they are considered in this study to comprise moral courage.

### **Childhood Discipline**

In her study of rescuers, Fogelman (1994) concludes that the process of acting with moral courage was not random but one that resulted from deep-seated beliefs that developed from childhood experiences:

“It was not a whim that led [the rescuers] to risk their lives and those of their families, but a response, almost a reflexive reaction in some cases, that came from core values developed and instilled in them in childhood” (Fogelman, 1994, p.253).

The Oliners’ (1988) research provides an initial indication into the childhood roots of these core values. They conducted a comprehensive survey of hundreds of rescuers and non-rescuers. The rescuers were drawn from the Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority list of verified people who risked their lives to save Jews.

The Oliners found that there were significant differences between the childhood discipline experienced by rescuers and non-rescuers. The parents of rescuers used explanation and reasoning more than physical punishment to correct their child’s behavior (Oliner & Oliner, 1988). These parents were less likely to use punitive measures such as slapping, spanking, kicking or beating than the parents of non-rescuers. Parents of rescuers resorted to physical punishment in 32% of discipline encounters and reasoning 21% of the time compared to 40% physical punishment and 6% reasoning for parents of non-rescuers. Therefore, the use of explanation and reasoning may be positively related – and corporal punishment may be negatively related – to the development of moral courage.

In interviews with the Oliners’ research team, rescuers emphasized how their parents used “explanation” to discuss misbehaviors. The parents conveyed a message that the child had made a mistake or not properly understood someone else’s perspective. These explanations were perceived as help more than punishment. A rescuer’s report of

her mother's discipline style encapsulates a common theme among the rescuers, "She told me when I did something wrong. She never did any punishing or scolding – she tried to make me understand with my mind what I'd done wrong" (Oliner & Oliner, 1988, p.182). The rescuers, more than non-rescuers, perceived parental punishment to be more appropriate or related to their behavior. They also felt that punishment was infrequent rather than a constant response. Furthermore, rescuers reported far less gratuitous punishment, which is a "cathartic release of aggression on the part of the parent" that is "unrelated to [a child's] behavior" (Oliner & Oliner, 1988, p.180). Only 0.9% of rescuers reported gratuitous punishment compared with 7.6% of non-rescuers. Therefore, punishment which is perceived as appropriate may be positively related to moral courage unlike punishment that is seen as gratuitous.

Some Holocaust researchers such as Gushee (1993) downplay the Oliners' findings by pointing out that the difference in use of physical punishment between rescuers and non-rescuers is relatively minor. He writes that these small percentage differences "raise questions about how seriously they should be taken" (p.374). However, while the effect size may be small, the outcome – whether someone would risk his or her life to save another human – is critically important. Furthermore, the Oliners' findings on punishment were replicated by Fogelman (1994) who interviewed rescuers and found that they experienced low levels of physical punishment as children. Thus, there are several studies that have found differences in childhood discipline experienced by rescuers and non-rescuers.

### **Corporal Punishment and Moral Courage**

Since the rescuers received less corporal punishment as children, it is possible that corporal punishment decreases one's capacity for moral courage. Corporal punishment is "the use of physical force with the intention of causing a child pain, but not injury, for purposes of correction or control of the child's behavior" (Turner & Finkelhor, 1996). Corporal punishment is a common practice in America; 94% of Americans spank their children by the time they are 3 or 4 years old (Gershoff, 2002). While corporal punishment decreases with the child's age, around half of children experience corporal punishment as they enter adolescence. (Turner & Finkelhor, 1996) Corporal punishment remains common because it increases immediate compliance (Gershoff, 2002). In addition, parents who refuse to use corporal punishment are sometimes viewed as too weak and unwilling to control their children (Turner & Finkelhor, 1996).

Research on the relationship between corporal punishment and moral development and empathy has been mixed.<sup>2</sup> Lopez, Bonenberger and Schneider (2001) surveyed college students on their moral development and parents' discipline styles. The researchers found that minor (non-severe) corporal punishment was significantly related to lower levels of empathy and principled morality. Severe corporal punishment, however, was not related to lower moral courage traits. Other research (e.g. Simons, Johnson, & Conger, 1994; Smith, Lindsey, & Hansen, 2006) concluded that corporal punishment is a spurious variable moderated by parental warmth or involvement.

While the research is limited on corporal punishment and moral courage, there are strong theoretical reasons for believing there is a negative relationship between the two variables. If parents use corporal punishment or power assertion to punish a child for

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<sup>2</sup> In the course of research for this study, no articles or books were found that covered the relationship between corporal punishment and social responsibility or risk-taking.

breaking a rule, the child may see the “adherence to the rule” as the primary value (Staub, 1986). The child would then behave in ways to avoid punishment, rather than focus on the effect of his or her actions on others. Research by Hoffman (2000) supports this theory; he found that the use of corporal punishment and other power assertive techniques were associated with a child’s moral orientation focused on avoiding external detection and punishment.

Corporal punishment limits the development of empathy (Hoffman, 2000). By focusing a child’s attention on the consequences of the action for himself or herself, instead of on the one who was harmed, an opportunity to promote empathy is lost. Furthermore, Hoffman (2000) hypothesizes that discipline encounters that create high levels of anxiety or fear in the child interfere with the natural development of empathy and moral reasoning. This theory is supported by a meta-review of dozens of studies on corporal punishment that found that children who experienced more corporal punishment had lower levels of guilt after misbehaving and were less likely to attempt reparative acts after harming others (Gershoff, 2002).

Psychoanalytic theory holds that if a child is not able to express anger towards a parent for fear of punishment, he may suppress and displace the anger onto peers or members of a socially marginalized group (Oliners, 1988). Adorno (1950) found that children of parents who used punitive discipline and corporal punishment possessed an “externalized view” of other people whereby they valued those who were high on the social scale and condemned those lower on the scale. This could be a result of the displaced anger. Alternatively, the externalized view may occur because corporal punishment models behavior that “might makes right” and that the stronger party can do

as they see fit (Greven, 1991). In this way, children learn to respect authority at any cost and feel empowered to disrespect marginalized groups.

Research has found that the improvement of one's self-esteem corresponds with an increased perception of another's needs (Staub, 1986). However, corporal punishment can lower a child's self-esteem (Gershoff, 2002). This can lead to a preoccupation with oneself, decreasing concern with another's wellbeing. Additionally, frequent corporal punishment puts children at three times greater risk for depression (Turner & Finkelhor, 1996). It would be expected that depression, lower self-esteem and the decreased focus on another's wellbeing would be negatively related to several components of moral courage such as empathy, moral reasoning, and social responsibility.

### **Inductive Discipline and Moral Courage**

Rescuers experienced more inductive discipline from their parents than did non-rescuers. Therefore, it is hypothesized that higher levels of inductive childhood discipline will be positively related with moral courage. Inductive discipline is a primarily non-punitive form of discipline in which a parent uses reason, teaching and explanation to correct behavior. In inductive discipline, the goal of the parent is to help the child understand why misbehaviors are wrong and can hurt others, why they should follow certain rules, and how they can change their behavior properly (Brody & Shaffer, 1982). According to Hoffman (2000), induction accomplishes two important tasks not achieved by other disciplinary practices such as corporal punishment, deprivation of privileges, and love-withdrawal. First, induction focuses the child's attention on the victim's distress which arouses *empathy* in the misbehaving child. Second, induction helps the child understand his or her causal role in the victim's distress which arouses *guilt* in the

misbehaving child. In the absence of induction, children will not necessarily notice the victim's suffering and experience empathy *and* understand their causal responsibility and experience guilt (Hoffman, 2000). Young children can show empathy by crying when they witness another child in pain but not realize their causal role in the victim's distress (Hoffman, 2000). Children can rationalize their transgression and project blame onto the victim or another child, thereby not feeling guilt over the misbehavior (Hoffman, 2000). Young children can also be oblivious to the victim's potential distress; one study found that children under 8 years old who read stories of children stealing from others thought the character in the story who stole would be happy and were unaware of any potential distress for the victim (Hoffman, 2000).

Induction's arousal of empathy for the victim's suffering and its arousal of guilt over the child's causal role are the primary mechanisms for moral development. Piaget recognized the power of emotions to shape behavior: "Affects, by being represented, last beyond the presence of the object that excites them. This ability to conserve feelings makes interpersonal and moral feelings possible and allows the latter to be organized into normative scales of values" (Piaget, 1954, p.44 as cited in Hoffman, 2000, p.159). After a transgression and parental induction, the emotions of empathy and guilt are not forgotten by the child. Instead, Hoffman theorizes that they form the basis of mental scripts around moral behavior. Scripts are internal guides for how to act. Children as young as 3 and 4 form scripts in their mind of expected behavior. They are proficient at explaining what happens in general during familiar situations (e.g. at the beach, Grandma's house, a favorite restaurant). Initially, the emotions and the related incident form tenuous connections in the mind of a child. After 5 times, script building occurs, allowing

children to more strongly connect certain behaviors with associated emotions (Hudson & Nelson, 1983).

Inductive discipline is able to form powerful scripts in children's minds partially because discipline encounters are so common among parents and children. A parent will discipline their child almost every 11 minutes when a child is one year old and around 50 times a day when a child is between 2 and 10 years old (Hoffman, 2000). Even if only ¼ of discipline encounters involve induction, that would amount to an average of 4000 inductions a year.

The script created through induction is *Transgression* → *Induction* → *Empathic distress and Guilt*. Reparation may be added to the end of the script if children are taught how to alleviate feelings of guilt through apologizing, making reparative acts, or changing their behavior. At the outset, individual scripts are created in the minds of young children for specific transgressions (e.g. kicking, spitting, lying) and older children for specific transgressions (e.g. betrayal of a friend, causing unnecessary worry to a parent). Over time, more generalized scripts around harming others form as children understand the common thread between their actions. As children integrate the numerous instances of transgressions and the empathy and guilt aroused by induction, the disciplinary practices become less necessary. Accustomed to noticing other's suffering and their own causal role, children no longer need parents to induce those observations and emotions. The mental scripts change from *Transgression* → *Induction* → *Empathic distress and Guilt* into *Transgression* → *Empathic distress and Guilt*. For moral development to occur, children must be able to anticipate the effect of their actions on

others. Through sufficient integration of the scripts, children are able to “pre-activate” the mental scripts and anticipate the effects of their action or inaction on others.

Other scholars theorize that induction works because it inculcates the value of being other-oriented instead of rule-oriented (Staub, 1986). In inductive practices a parent will communicate to a child that his action is wrong because it harms another. The child learns that the value expressed by the parent is “care for the other.” As mentioned previously, this is different than corporal punishment which may teach a child to be rule-oriented and to act to avoid detection and punishment. Finally, induction models respect for others, even when there is a clear difference in power. Through parental induction, a child may learn that he has a responsibility to treat marginalized groups with dignity, and he learns that there is value to those who do not possess power or status (Oliner & Oliner, 1988).

Induction has been found to be significantly associated with higher levels of empathy and moral development in children (Eisikovits & Sagi, 1982; Grusec & Goodnow, 1994; Hoffman, 2000; Lopez, Bonenberger & Schneider, 2001) A meta-review of moral development research found that induction was the primary mode of discipline in three quarters of studies that found a positive relationship between discipline and moral development (Brody & Shaffer, 1982). Induction focused on another’s wellbeing has been found to be more effective than other forms of reasoning. In one experiment by Maccoby and Martin (1983) children aged 9 and 10 were given a tedious task to complete. A group of fun toys were then placed near the children. Researchers told one group of children they were prohibited from playing with the toys without giving an explanation. To the second group, researchers informed them that they needed to

complete their work or they wouldn't be able to play with the toys later. The third group was told that if they didn't complete their task, it would create more work for the researchers who would need to complete it later. When the researchers left the room, the children in the third group were most responsive in completing the task.

The research about inductive discipline has not been uniform; some studies report that the role of inductive discipline is moderated by a child's temperament or their acceptance or rejection of the discipline (Grusec & Goodnow, 1994). Other research found that the frequency of other-oriented induction (e.g. "She is crying because she wants to play with your toys") was not related to children's prosocial behavior. Only induction coupled with statements of principle influenced children to help others (e.g. "She is crying because she wants to play with your toys and in this family we always share.") (Maccoby & Martin, 1983). Research on inductive discipline has also not examined the relationship with social responsibility or risk-taking, the two other components of moral courage.

## **Methodology**

### **Participants**

Two hundred and twenty-eight University of Massachusetts Lowell undergraduate and graduate students were surveyed. The respondent population was 69% female and 31% male. The ethnicity of the group was 63% Caucasian/White, 17% Asian, 9% Hispanic/Latino, 3% African-American/Black and 8% who indicated “Other.” The average age was 24 years old and the range was from 18 to 62 years old. The median family income was between \$50,000-\$74,999 with 14% of the respondents’ families earning less than \$24,999 and 15.4% of their families earning over \$100,000.

### **Measures**

To examine the relationship between childhood discipline and moral courage, a self-report survey was designed. Parental discipline methods and styles were measured using components of the Adult Recall version of the Dimensions of Discipline Inventory (DDI) (Straus & Fauchier, 2011). The DDI provides information both on specific discipline tactics and on the context of implementation. In the first part of the survey, respondents indicate the frequency with which they experienced 26 different childhood discipline methods when they were 10 years old. Items include “How often did your parents spank, slap, smack or swat you?” and “How often did your parents check on you so that they could tell you that you were doing a good job?” The DDI uses an 11-item scale for discipline frequency ranging from “never” to “two or more times a day.”

Participants respond on each question both for their mother and father.<sup>3</sup> The 26 discipline methods can be organized into nine method scales such as corporal punishment, deprivation of privileges, and rewarding and into four factors of aggressive discipline, positive discipline, penalty and supervision.

The second part of the DDI measures the modes and context of the discipline. This 25-question section uses a 5-point Likert-type scale from “never” to “almost always or always.” Questions include “Your parents seem to ‘lose it’ when you misbehave,” “When your parents correct misbehavior, you know they still love you,” and “Your parents make the consequences of misbehavior clear to you.” These questions can be organized into four measures of context in which discipline occurs such as confidence and perceived ineffectiveness of discipline and six measures of modes of implementing discipline such as consistency, cognitive framing and warmth/support.

The moral courage scale is comprised of four separate scales of empathy, social responsibility, risk-taking and moral reasoning. The moral courage scale is based on research by Midlarsky and Fagin-Jones (2007) which found that scores on those four personality traits accounted for 74% of the variance between a group of rescuers and non-rescuers and correctly predicted group membership for 96% of rescuers and non-rescuers. For the moral courage scale in this research to closely mirror the moral courage of the rescuers, this study uses the same scales used by Midlarsky and Fagin-Jones (2007) to measure empathy, social responsibility and risk-taking. In regards to the moral reasoning scale, Midlarsky reported that the qualitative codebook was so hard to use that it took her

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<sup>3</sup> Participants who were not disciplined by a mother and father at age 10 were instructed to use a “mother-figure” and “father-figure” if possible. For instance, children with parents of the same sex use one parent as the “mother,” the other as the “father” and indicate as such on the survey. Children who were raised by only one parent were instructed to skip the questions for the other parent.

six months to achieve a high-level of inter-rater reliability. She therefore advised the author that it should not be used for this research. An alternative scale for moral reasoning is used.

Empathy was measured using the Interpersonal Reactivity Index's (IRI; Davis, 1983) empathic concern subscale. This subscale is a 7-question measure that uses a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "does not describe me well" to "describes me very well." Questions include, "When I see someone taken advantage of, I feel kind of protective towards them" and "Other people's misfortunes do not usually disturb me a great deal." Cronbach's alpha for empathic concern in this study was 0.75.

Social Responsibility was measured using Berkowitz and Lutterman's Social Responsibility Scale (SRS; 1968). It is an 8-item measure with a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." Questions include, "It is the duty of every person to do his job the very best he can" and "It is no use to worry about current events or public affairs; I can't do anything about them anyway." One of the original questions on the scale did not seem particularly applicable. Therefore, "At school, I usually volunteered for special projects" was changed to "I usually volunteer to help." Cronbach's alpha in this study was 0.64.

Risk-taking was measured using a seven-item scale developed by Midlarsky and Fagin-Jones (2007). The questions, which were rated on a 5-point Likert scale, range from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." Questions include "Some of the most meaningful activities are those that I went into despite the costs or risks" and "I stay away

from challenges, especially if they seem dangerous.” Cronbach’s alpha for this study was 0.53.

A further examination of the risk-taking measure, due to its low alpha, found that the measure contained two distinct factors: There were four questions related to being courageous and willing to take risks and there were two questions related to being methodical and tending to take a cautious and measured approach. One question contributed comparably to each factor. The factors of courageous and methodical are not contradictory. In fact, a successful rescuer in the Holocaust needed to be both courageous by risking his life for another and methodical in order to hide the fact that he was illegally sheltering one or more person(s). A courageous but unmethodical rescuer would be at higher risk of being exposed. A methodical but fearful person would be hesitant to engage in rescuing. Therefore, both attributes were necessary for being a successful rescuer. Rescuers possessed high tendencies towards being both courageous and methodical. This is likely the reason that the risk-taking alpha score in Fagin-Jones and Midlarsky’s (2007) research was 0.82. These tendencies were not comparably high in the group of college student respondents which led to the low alpha in this study.

Moral reasoning was measured using a six-item subscale of the Prosocial Personality Battery (PSB; Penner, 2002). The questions were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” They included, “My decisions are usually based on concern for the welfare of others” and “My decisions are usually based on what is the most fair and just way to act.” Cronbach’s alpha for this study was 0.80.

## Procedures

The survey was placed online through the Qualtrics system. Emails were sent to all students in the Department of Criminal Justice and Criminology, Graduate School of Education, and the Peace and Conflict Studies Program notifying them of the survey. The survey was also advertised in *UML Today*, a daily campus email publication, for undergraduate and graduate students for a two-week period from September 14 to October 1. Students completed the survey anonymously online at the time of their convenience. Students were incentivized to take the survey by a random drawing of ten \$10 gift cards for those who completed the survey. To maintain confidentiality, students who completed the survey had the opportunity to send an email requesting entry into the drawing. In total, 347 students began the survey and 228 completed it.

Upon beginning the survey, students were presented with a question regarding whether they were over 18 years of age. If they answered that they were under 18, the survey ended. This was designed to avoid mandatory reporting requirements for potential child abuse. Students who were over 18 continued with the survey which was estimated to take between 20 and 30 minutes. At the beginning and end of the survey, students were presented with a consent form along with contact information for the researchers and counseling services, in case the questions prompted any emotional or psychological discomfort.

## Results

### Comparative Scores

As mentioned previously, the moral courage scores are derived from research on rescuers that found that four personality traits could successfully classify a rescuer or non-rescuer with 96% accuracy. For three of the four personality traits, the same questions were presented to the college student respondents in this research as were presented to the rescuers and non-rescuers in Fagin-Jones and Midlarsky's study (2007).<sup>4</sup> This allows for a comparison of mean scores for these three measures between rescuers, non-rescuers and the college students in this research. It is necessary to note that the samples are distinct and the comparison is only to provide a general indication of the accuracy of the self-reported moral courage scores by the college students. For instance, if the college students reported significantly higher scores than rescuers on moral courage, the self-report results would be highly questionable.

Table I <i>Mean Scores of Empathy, Social Responsibility and Risk-Taking for College Students, Rescuers and Non-Rescuers (on a 5 point scale)</i>				
	N	Empathy	Social Responsibility	Risk-Taking
Rescuers	79	4.66	4.30	3.64
College Students	228	4.02	4.14	3.20
Non-Rescuers	73	3.35	3.17	2.54

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<sup>4</sup> As discussed in the methodology section, an alternative survey was used for moral reasoning. Therefore, no comparisons can be made. Also note that one question was changed in the social responsibility scale.

## **Demographic Variables**

Gender was significantly correlated with moral courage, with women reporting a higher level of moral courage compared with men ( $M=3.85$  vs.  $M=3.70$ ,  $p<.05$ ). Paternal education had a positive relationship with social responsibility ( $p<.01$ ) and moral courage ( $p<.05$ ). Political orientation was significantly correlated to moral courage; those who defined themselves as liberal (opposed to moderate or conservative) had higher levels of empathy ( $p<.01$ ), social responsibility ( $p<.05$ ) and moral courage ( $p<.01$ ). Ethnic differences were significant ( $p<.05$ ) between Caucasians/Whites ( $M=3.83$ ) and Asians ( $M=3.61$ ) and respondents who chose "Other" ( $M=3.97$ ) and Asians. The remaining demographic variables - age, family income, maternal education, and parental marital status - were not significantly related to moral courage or its four personality components.

## **Corporal Punishment**

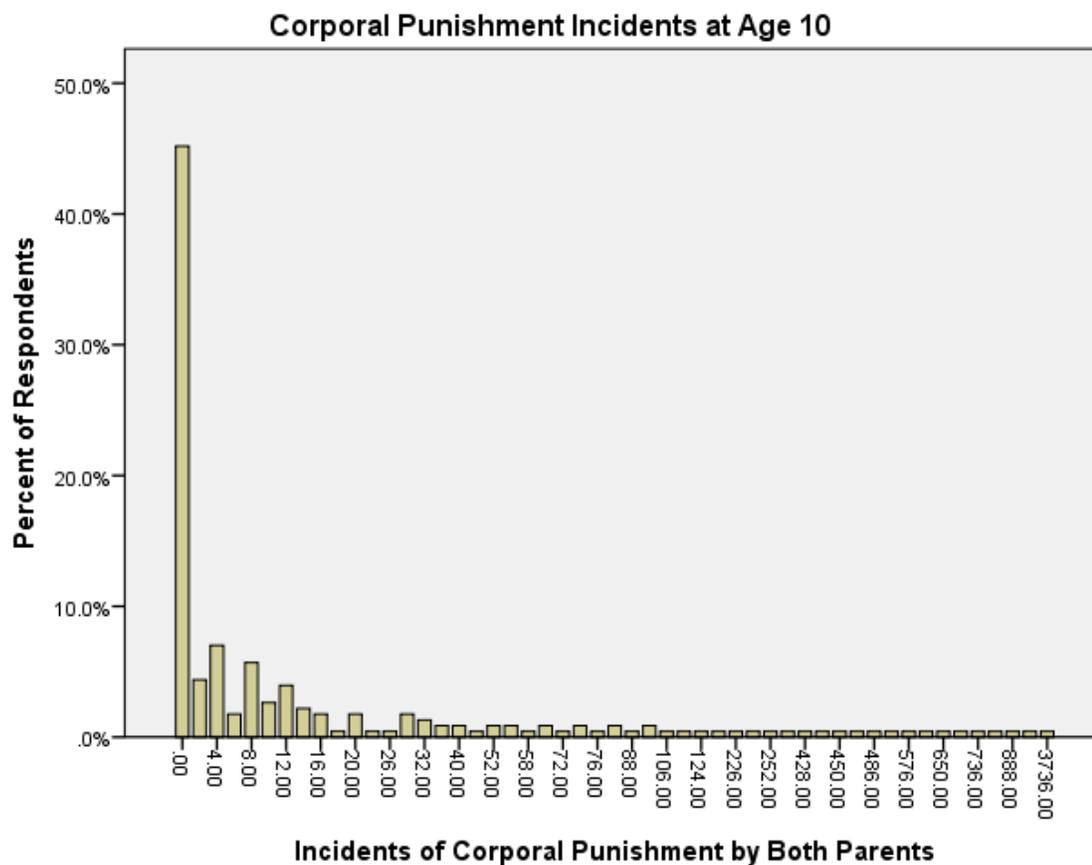
One hypothesis of this research was that increased recall of experiencing corporal punishment would be negatively related to moral courage scores. The results of the research do not support this hypothesis. In the survey, respondents reported the frequency of corporal punishment experienced at the age of 10. They reported on incidents of being grabbed or shaken; spanked, slapped, smacked or swatted; beaten with an object such as a paddle, hairbrush or belt; and having their mouths washed out with soap or having hot sauce put on their tongue. These forms of corporal punishment cover the common methods surveyed in this research area (Straus & Fauchier, 2011).

Respondents were given a choice of 11 frequencies for each question from never or not in that year (0) to twice a day or more (700). The theoretical maximum corporal punishment score for each individual parent was 2800 (700 for four corporal punishment questions) and the theoretical maximum corporal punishment score for both parents was 5600.

Respondents reported experiencing some form of corporal punishment from their father an average of 31.7 times ( $SD=163.7$ ) and 40.3 times ( $SD=144.9$ ) from their mother at the age of ten years old. A majority of respondents did not experience any corporal punishment from one of their parents at the age of 10 (59.6% for fathers and 50.9% for mothers). 45% of respondents did not experience any corporal punishment from either of their parents at age 10. There were only two respondents who indicated they experienced over 1000 incidents of corporal punishment per year. One of them reported 1058 incidents while the other reported 3736 incidents. [Figure I]

For paternal corporal punishment, only 7.5% of respondents reported that they experienced more than 50 incidents per year. For maternal corporal punishment, only 13% experienced more than 50 incidents per year. 75% of respondents reported 18 or less incidents of corporal punishment by both parents.

Figure I



No evidence was found to support the hypothesis that higher recollection of corporal punishment was negatively related to measures of moral courage. [Table II]

Corporal punishment also did not significantly relate to any of the measures that comprised moral courage.

Table II <i>Bivariate Correlations between Corporal Punishment and Moral Courage</i>		
		Moral Courage
Corporal Punishment (Both Parents)	Pearson Correlation	.028
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.676
	N	228
Corporal Punishment (Father)	Pearson Correlation	.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.998
	N	228
Corporal Punishment (Mother)	Pearson Correlation	.056
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.399
	N	228

To address the possibility that the outlier in the corporal punishment score (3736) was influencing the results, a similar correlation was performed by removing the top frequency (3736) and a single bottom frequency (0). While the correlations changed, none of the results were significant.

To further account for potential high score outliers, the frequencies of both parents' use of corporal punishment were collapsed into three categories: None, sometimes, and often. Responses of "never" or "not during the age of 10" in response to experiencing corporal punishment were collapsed into "none." Responses of "1-2 times during the year" to "6-9 times during the year" were collapsed into "sometimes." Responses of "10 to 14 times during the year" to "two or more times a day" were collapsed into "often." Only 6% of respondents fit into the "often" category for experiencing corporal punishment. [Table III]

		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Categories	None	103	45.2	45.2
	Sometimes	111	48.7	93.9
	Often	14	6.1	100.0
	Total	228	100.0	

An Analysis of Variance run on the three categories did not find a significant difference between the groups on moral courage scores. [Table IV]

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	.010	2	.005	.038	.963
Within Groups	30.048	225	.134		
Total	30.058	227			

Finally, the corporal punishment data were collapsed further into two categories: yes (indicating that the respondent experienced some form of corporal punishment at the age of 10) and no (indicating that no corporal punishment was experienced). [Table V] This two-group distinction was not significant in a One-Way Analysis of Variance in regards to moral courage. [Table VI] The corporal punishment questions were also analyzed individually to see if any particular form of corporal punishment correlated with a change in moral courage. No significant results were found.

		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Experience of Corporal Punishment at Age 10?	No	103	45.2	45.2
	Yes	125	54.8	100.0
	Total	228	100.0	
Total		228		

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	.007	1	.007	.050	.823
Within Groups	30.051	226	.133		
Total	30.058	227			

## Induction

A second hypothesis of this research was that increased recalled experience of inductive discipline would be positively associated with moral courage scores. The results of the research support this hypothesis. In the survey, respondents reported on the frequency of having received inductive discipline at the age of 10. Inductive discipline practices focus on helping children understand right and wrong and how their actions impact others. The forms of inductive discipline included how often parents explained the rules; offered praise for stopping bad behavior or doing good behavior; told the child they were watching or checking to see if he or she did something; demonstrated proper behavior; told a child he or she was doing a good job; and made him or her apologize for misbehavior. These six items formed the inductive discipline measure.

Respondents were given a choice of 11 frequencies for each question from “never” (0) to “twice a day or more” (700). The theoretical maximum inductive discipline score for each individual parent was 4200 (700 for six inductive discipline questions) and the theoretical maximum inductive discipline score for both parents was 8400.

Respondents reported experiencing some form of inductive discipline from their father an average of 239.8 times (SD=426.5) and 401.6 times (SD=610.4) from their mother at the age of ten years old. The mean total inductive discipline from both parents was 641.5 (SD=974.5) Only 3.5% of respondents did not report experiencing inductive discipline from either parent at the age of 10. The median induction frequency for both parents was 206. The actual maximum score for both parents was 5772. [Table VII]

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Father	228	.00	2886.00	239.8947	426.50691
Mother	228	.00	3502.00	401.6316	610.45993
Both Parents	228	.00	5772.00	641.5263	974.52202

Inductive discipline was significantly correlated with moral courage scores for the father ( $p < .01$ ) mother ( $p < .01$ ) and both parents ( $p < .01$ ). [Table VIII]

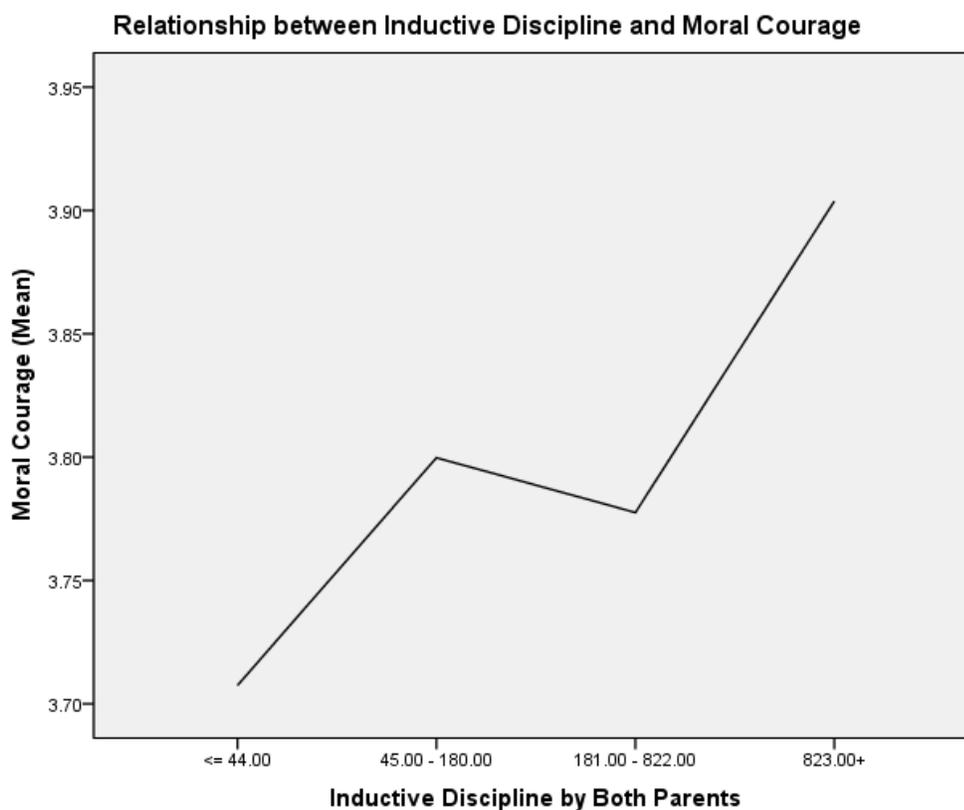
Table VIII		
<i>Bivariate Correlations between Inductive Discipline and Moral Courage</i>		
		Moral Courage
Induction (Father)	Pearson Correlation	.220**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001
	N	228
Induction (Mother)	Pearson Correlation	.200**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002
	N	228
Induction (Both Parents)	Pearson Correlation	.221**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001
	N	228
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)		

In fact, five of the six questions comprising the inductive discipline measure were significant for either the father, mother or both parents. [Table IX]

Table IX	
<i>Inductive Discipline Practice Significantly Correlated to Moral Courage</i>	
How often did your parents check on you so they could tell you that you were doing a good job	Mother $r=.208^{**}$ Father $r=.198^{**}$
How often did your parents show or demonstrate to you the right thing to do?	Mother $r=.156^{**}$ Father $r=.227^{**}$
How often did your parents make you apologize or say you were sorry for misbehavior?	Mother $r=.147^{*}$
How often did your parents tell you (s)he was watching or checking to see if you did something?	Mother $r=.143^{*}$
How often did your parents praise you for finally stopping bad behavior or for behaving well?	Father $r=.183^{**}$
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)	
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)	

An analysis of variance, breaking respondents into four groups based on their frequency of experiencing inductive reasoning yielded a significant result between the groups on moral courage scores ( $p < .05$ ). The variation was greatest ( $p < .05$ ) between the lowest group - those who experienced inductive reasoning less than or equal to 44 times during the age of 10 - and the highest group - those who experienced inductive reasoning at least 823 times during the age of 10. [Figure II]

Figure II

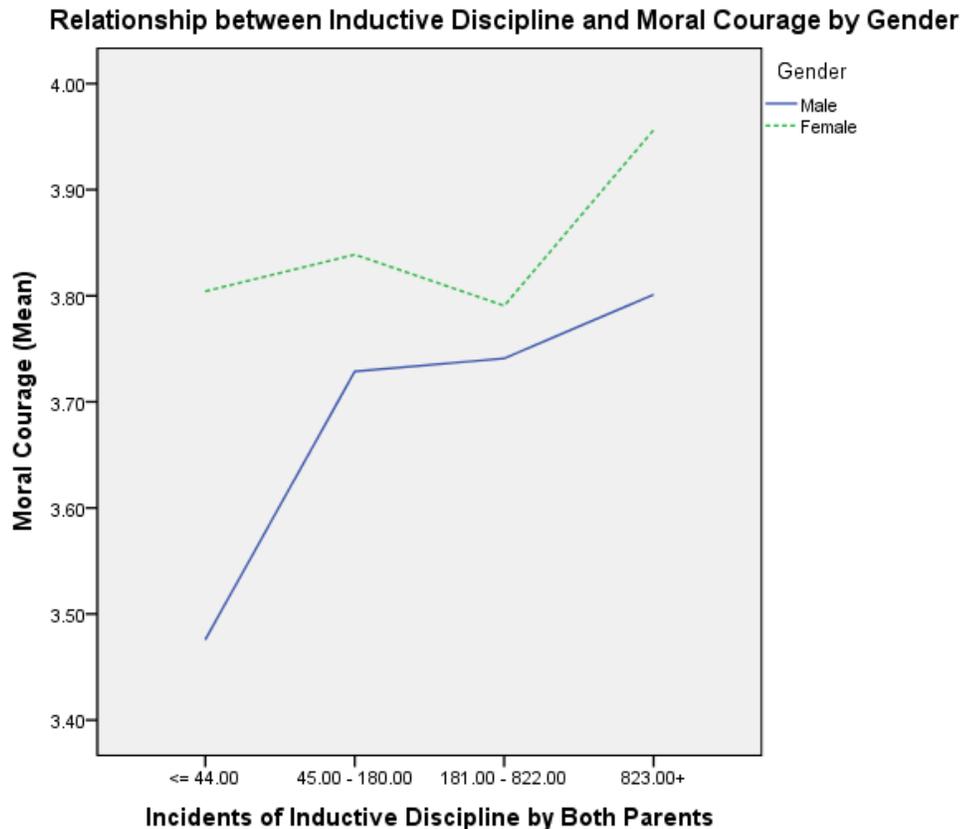


While induction was significant for the composite moral courage score, it was not significantly correlated for all the measures. Parental induction was significantly correlated with empathy ( $p < .05$ ), social responsibility ( $p < .01$ ) and the courageous factor

of risk-taking ( $p < .01$ ). No significant correlations were found for moral reasoning and the methodical factor of risk-taking.

Males whose parents used low inductive discipline ( $\leq 44$  times) had an average moral courage score of 3.47. Females with similar inductive discipline experiences had an average moral courage score of 3.80. The males who experienced high inductive discipline ( $\geq 823$  times) had an average moral courage score of 3.80, while comparable females had an average score of 3.96. [Figure III]

Figure III

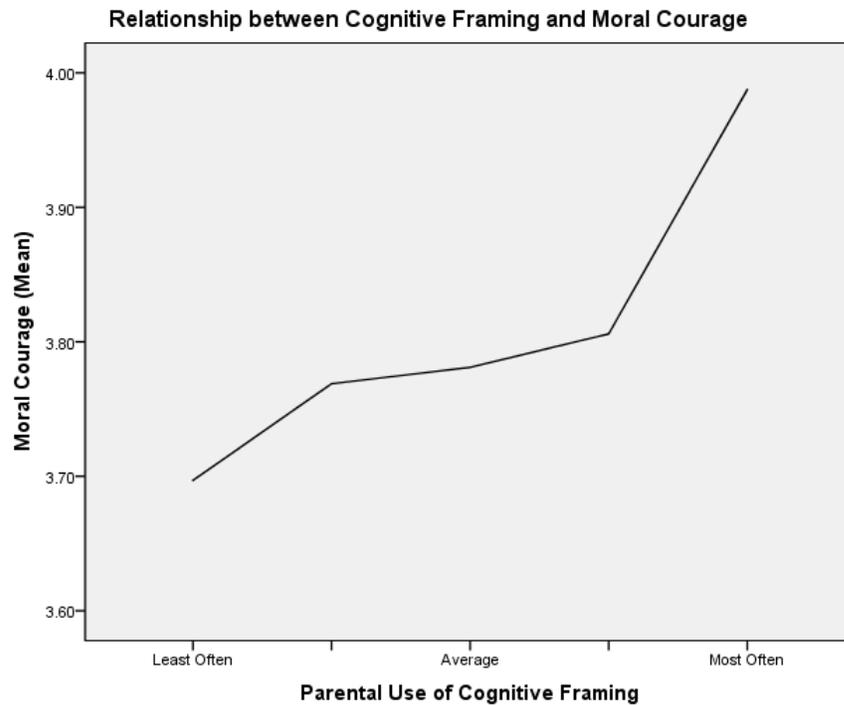


### **Context and Mode of Discipline**

In addition to measuring specific practices that comprise corporal punishment and inductive discipline measures, this study also examined the context and mode of discipline. Research suggests that the context and mode in which a discipline is implemented may have a significant impact on its reception (Straus & Fauchier, 2011). Respondents answered 25 questions on a 5 point scale “never” to “always or almost always” on how often a particular context of discipline was used. The contexts surveyed were confidence in appropriateness of discipline, conflict between parents regarding discipline, perceived ineffectiveness of discipline, and stress level of discipliner. The modes surveyed were consistency, cognitive framing, impulsiveness, responsiveness, warmth/support and warning.

Out of all 25 questions, only 3 had a significant positive relationship with moral courage. These included the two questions comprising the mode of cognitive framing (“You knew what behaviors your parents expected of you” and “Your parents explained why they did what they did to correct you”) and one question from the consistency mode (“Your parents corrected you again if you repeated misbehavior.”) Cognitive framing is the primary mode of implementing inductive reasoning – it is using explanation and clear rules to tell children what behavior is expected. An analysis of variance on cognitive framing scores, collapsed into five groups, and moral courage was significant ( $p < .01$ ). The difference between the highest and lowest group was significant ( $p < .05$ ). [Figure IV]

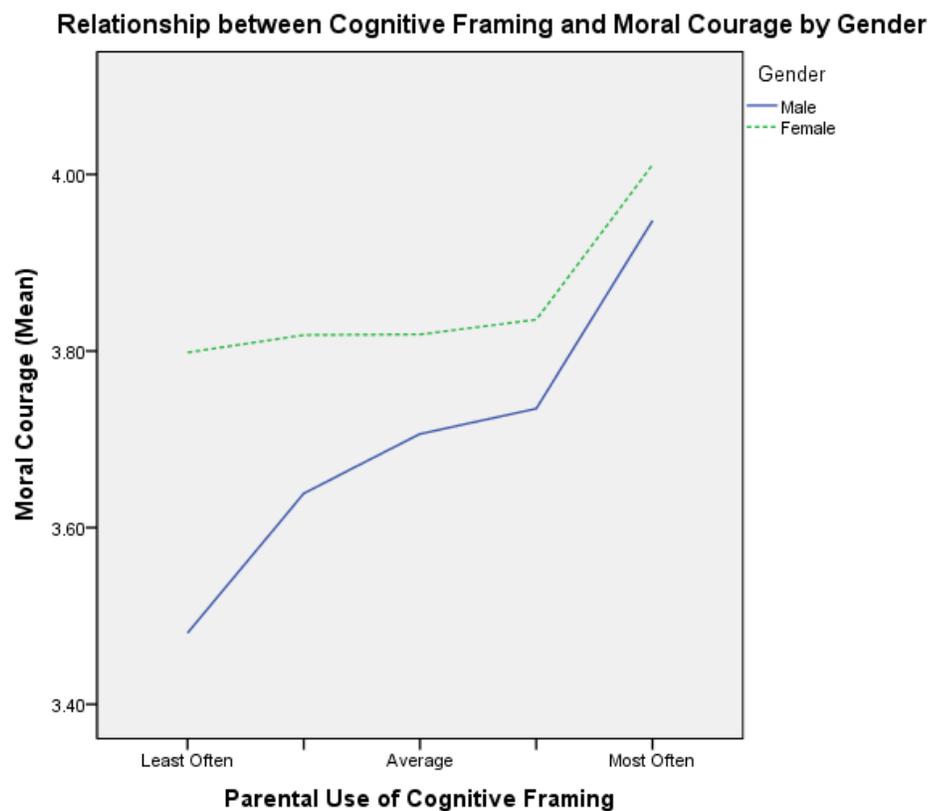
Figure IV



Cognitive framing was significantly related to the measures comprising moral courage: empathy ( $p < .01$ ), social responsibility ( $p < .01$ ), moral reasoning ( $p < .05$ ), and the courageous factor of risk-taking ( $p < .05$ ).

Similarly with inductive discipline and gender, males who experienced the lowest cognitive framing had significantly lower average moral courage scores (3.48) than females (3.79). With the most frequent use of cognitive framing by parents, males' average moral courage scores (3.95) came close to females (4.01). [Figure V]

Figure V



Contrary to expectation, parental warmth/support and children's confidence in the appropriateness of the discipline were not significantly correlated with moral courage. A multiple regression was run with mean scores for both parents for induction, cognitive framing, corporal punishment and parental warmth/support. As indicated in correlational models and the ANOVA, only induction and cognitive framing were significant related to moral courage scores. [Table X] Combined, these factors predicted 9.3% of the variation in moral courage. [Table XI] Of that 9.3% variance, the cognitive framing measure accounted for 40% of the variance and the inductive discipline measure accounted for 25% of the variance.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Numbers do not add to 100% because part correlation values represent only the unique contribution of the variable, with overlap and shared variance removed. (Pallant, 2005)

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	3.455	.123		28.016	.000
	Cognitive Framing	.120	.038	.263	3.150	.002**
	Inductive Discipline	.001	.000	.173	2.557	.011*
	Corporal Punishment	-1.966E-005	.001	-.002	-.030	.976
	Warmth/Support	-.041	.033	-.101	-1.229	.220

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)  
 \*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.305 <sup>a</sup>	.093	.077	.34896

## Discussions

### **Corporal Punishment and Moral Courage**

Contrary to expectation, no significant correlation was found between recall of corporal punishment and moral courage. This is in line with other studies that also failed to find a relationship. While Lopez (2001) found a correlation between corporal punishment and lower empathy and moral development for *minor* corporal punishment, that correlation did not exist for *severe* corporal punishment. Smith, Lindsey, and Hansen (2006) examined the relationship between harshness of corporal punishment and empathy and found no significant correlation.

Results from a study by Simons, Johnson and Conger (1994) suggest that corporal punishment is a spurious variable for adolescent maladjustment once parental involvement is taken into account. Parental involvement is a composite measure of inductive reasoning, warmth and affection, consistent discipline, and monitoring and supervision.

Still, there are several limitations to this study which may have failed to produce a correlation between corporal punishment and moral courage. It is an adult recall survey which relies on the memory of respondents for incidents that occurred at least 8 years ago. In the pilot survey for the DDI, 41% of respondents reported that they only “generally remembered” while 16% either had a “hard time remembering” or “forgot some things” (Straus & Fauchier, 2011).

While adult recall surveys about childhood are likely to be less accurate than recall about a recent period, the DDI’s use of anchor points for frequencies (e.g. once a

day, twice a month) produce more accurate results than general ratings (e.g. sometimes or always) (Straus & Fauchier, 2011). In assessing their own ability to recall their early adolescence, 83% of university students in Straus and Fauchier's pilot study reported that they generally remembered or remembered very clearly (Straus & Fauchier, 2010). It is important to note, however, that certainty of recall is not necessarily related to recall accuracy. However, the authors of the DDI also found strong temporal consistency in a test-retest study (Straus & Fauchier, 2010).

This survey asked respondents to respond about discipline encounters when they were aged 10. Some research (e.g. Eisenberg, 1999) suggests that this is not the most formative age for the development of moral courage. Younger children may be more influenced by discipline types and it is possible that older children are less affected. Eisenberg's (1999) research on the longitudinal consistency of prosocial development found that preschool behavior can predict prosocial behavior and empathy-related responses in adulthood. If this is correct, a more effective study would identify the discipline experienced by young children. On the other hand, adult recall of preschool age is more fraught with memory issues than recall about the age of 10.

Parental discipline practices also change with age so discipline at age 10 is not necessarily a reflection of discipline practices at age 3 or 4. In fact, 71% of respondents in this survey said their parents usually or always changed their discipline practices as the respondent got older. A longitudinal study of children's personality traits and experiences of discipline would alleviate some limitations of this research.

This research was also limited by the respondent pool of university students, which was comprised of relatively few minorities. For example, only 6 African-American

students completed the survey. Ethnic diversity is important as the ethnicities reported significantly different experiences of corporal punishment in this survey. As such, there are limitations to the generalizability of this data.

A high percentage (45%) of respondents did not report experiencing any corporal punishment at the age of 10. This is not necessarily a limitation on the research as the goal was to measure the correlation between corporal punishment and moral courage. It was important to have a pool of respondents who experienced no corporal punishment to compare their responses with those who did experience corporal punishment.

The Oliners' (1988) research on rescuers and non-rescuers found a significant difference in the level of gratuitous discipline experienced. This research failed to clearly examine that relationship. Respondents were asked two questions regarding whether they thought their parents did the right thing in correcting their misbehavior and whether they wished their parents had done things differently in correcting the misbehavior. These questions do not adequately address the relationship around gratuitous discipline because it is not a form of correction. Rather, the Oliners' defined gratuitous discipline as discipline seen as unrelated to the respondent's behavior. Gratuitous discipline would fit into the category of abuse more than corporal punishment.

Indeed, one of the challenges facing research on corporal punishment is that it is often confounded with child abuse. This occurs because many scholars understand corporal punishment and child abuse to be different points on a continuum of physical behavior towards children (Gershoff, 2002). Many state laws reflect the unclear distinction between corporal punishment and child abuse with two dozen states defining corporal punishment as child maltreatment when it is "excessive," "cruel" or

“unreasonable” (Gershoff, 2002). As such, corporal punishment is child abuse when it becomes excessive, even if the parent had not intended to cause injury. While sometimes corporal punishment becomes child abuse, due to the lack of specific questions in the survey around severity of abuse, no conclusions can be drawn regarding the connection between the practice of gratuitous discipline/child abuse and the development of moral courage.

### **Inductive Discipline and Moral Courage**

This research found a significant positive relationship between recall of parental use of inductive discipline and a respondent’s moral courage scores. The finding of a positive correlation between induction and moral courage does not indicate that induction leads to moral courage. For instance, it is possible that moral courage is passed down genetically and that morally courageous parents simply use more induction. If that were the case, induction would be a spurious variable that was not involved in the development of moral courage.

It is also possible that people who self report high levels of moral courage remember their childhood experiences differently than other people. These morally courageous people may remember experiencing more induction simply because of their current state. This would be in line with other research that found that mood affects memory and recall (e.g. Burt, Zembar, & Niederehe, 1995).

Still, the positive relationship between recall of induction and reported empathy and social responsibility supports Hoffman’s (2000) theory that induction helps children develop empathy and focus on treating others well. This finding is comparable to many

studies relating induction to empathy (e.g. Krevans & Gibbs, 1996; Lopez, Bonenberger & Schneider, 2001).

Inductive discipline had a positive relationship with the courageous factor of risk-taking. One possible explanation, if a causal relationship could be established, is that children learn through induction that they are not bad but that their actions were wrong. This encourages children to take more risks, knowing that they will continue to be valued by their parents. These children thrive because they know the rules that exist and understand their rationales. This provides children the freedom to act without fear of arbitrary punishment.

Induction did not have a significant relationship with the methodical factor of risk-taking. This is not surprising because the traits of taking precautions and avoiding danger were not hypothesized to be related to inductive discipline. It is noteworthy that the sample of college students tended to either score high in the risk-taking factors of courage *or* methodicalness unlike the rescuers who scored high on both factors. This suggests that there are other determinants besides discipline, perhaps genetic ones, of whether a person is methodical.

This study used four personality traits to create a composite measure of moral courage and asked college students to answer questions to assess their own levels of empathy, social responsibility, risk-taking and moral reasoning. While the accuracy of the results relies on the honesty of the respondents, there are reasons to assume that they did answer honestly. First, the survey was completely confidential so there was no face-saving reason to answer untruthfully. Second, one would expect that the college students would have lower mean scores than rescuers because it was so rare to be a rescuer (1 in

400 Europeans is a conservative estimate) (Oliner & Oliner, 1988). One would also assume that the college students would have higher scores than the non-rescuers, given common Western social norms about making a difference and helping others. In fact, on the three personality traits in which respondents in this survey received the same questions as the rescuers and non-rescuers in Fagin-Jones and Midlarsky's (2007) study, the college students' mean scores were in-between the non-rescuers and rescuers for all three traits. It is important to note that these were different populations, surveyed at different times. The comparison of mean scores is only used to suggest that the self-reported scores of the college students logically make sense compared with the scores of the rescuers and non-rescuers.

The variance in moral courage scores caused by discipline, while statistically significant, must not be overstated. Two of the strongest correlating independent measures combined (inductive discipline and cognitive framing) only accounted for 9.3% of the variance in moral courage. This is not unexpected as the Oliners' study found significant but relatively small differences between childhood discipline experienced by rescuers and non-rescuers. There are many other factors that shape a person's personality, including genetics, peers, other adult role-models, education, religion and community. It would be far too simplistic to attribute parental discipline as the primary factor.

## Conclusions

The primary finding from the demographic variables is that women had significantly higher levels of moral courage than men, regardless of childhood discipline practices. The difference in moral courage scores were due primarily to women's high scores on empathy ( $p < .001$ ) and social responsibility ( $p < .01$ ). These findings replicate many studies that have found women to be more empathetic (e.g. Davis, 1983). Such a fundamental difference in moral orientation between men and women was proposed by Carol Gilligan (1985); she theorized that women are more attuned to ethical considerations borne out of compassion, sensitivity and care while men derive ethics from abstract principles of justice. The results of this research, with the findings of higher base levels of moral courage, empathy and social responsibility for women, support Gilligan's theory.

This study found, contrary to expectation, that corporal punishment was not significantly correlated with moral courage. The lack of a significant negative correlation between corporal punishment and moral courage is unexpectedly good news because corporal punishment is widespread. As mentioned previously, 94% of American parents reported spanking their children by the time they are 3 or 4 years old and around half continue to use corporal punishment as their children enter adolescence (Gershoff, 2002; Turner & Finkelhor, 1996). It must be noted that even if a significant negative correlation was found, that would not indicate that corporal punishment led to lower moral courage.

In retrospect, some of the theories for why corporal punishment would decrease moral courage are dubious. One theory was that corporal punishment would teach children that “adherence to the rule” instead of “caring for others” was the primary value. However, it is possible that the “rule” could be caring for others. For instance, if a child kicks his sibling and gets spanked, he may learn the rule “not to hurt others.” If he acts in a way to avoid punishment, as theorized by Hoffman (2000), he would still be acting in a prosocial manner. In other words, the motivation for not hurting another person may be different for a child who is afraid of the physical consequences as opposed to a child who is concerned about another’s wellbeing but the former could still internalize the moral reasoning and social responsibility.

Another study cited in this paper found that children of parents who used corporal punishment valued those who were high on the social scale and de-valued those low on the social scale (Adorno, et. al., 1950). It was theorized that this occurred because corporal punishment models behavior that “might makes right” and that the stronger party can do as they see fit (Greven, 1991). However, that assumes that the punishment is seen as arbitrary by the child. This research did not clearly delineate between corporal punishment that was perceived as reasonable and punishment that was seen as gratuitous.

The theory cited about corporal punishment that is most in line with the results of this research comes from Hoffman (2000). He warned that corporal punishment will fail to promote empathy because it focuses a child’s attention on the consequences of the action on himself or herself, instead of on the person who was harmed. In this way, an opportunity to promote empathy is lost when corporal punishment is used. As such, one

would expect that corporal punishment would not be significantly related to empathy, which is what this study found.

Nevertheless, the lack of a correlation between corporal punishment and moral courage is not meant to condone physical harm to children. There is voluminous research on other deleterious effects of corporal punishment. For instance, children who experience corporal punishment are more likely to be aggressive and to take out their aggression on peers (Gershoff, 2002). Furthermore there is a strong association between corporal punishment and physical abuse. Physical abuse often begins as corporal punishment that spirals out of control (Gershoff, 2002). As mentioned previously, this study did not clearly differentiate between corporal punishment and physical abuse. Therefore, the results should only be understood to apply to limited corporal punishment and not gratuitous or physical abuse.

The Oliners' (1988) research on rescuers helped prompt this study into childhood discipline and moral courage. While the Oliners proposed that both corporal punishment and reasoning differentiated rescuers from non-rescuers, they wrote that it was reasoning that was the primary variable. They concluded, "Thus, it is in their reliance on reasoning, explanation, suggestions of ways to remedy the harm done, persuasion and advice that the parents of rescuers differed most from non-rescuers" (Oliner & Oliner, 1988, p.181). This research found a significant relationship between recall of induction and reported moral courage but not a significant relationship between recall of corporal punishment and reported moral courage. To that extent, the results of this research support the Oliners' conclusions.

## **Raising a Morally Courageous Child**

In this study, respondents answered questions about discipline practices and contexts of discipline that they experienced. If a causal link could be established, this might suggest the following overview of effective parenting for raising a morally courageous child. The following overview is derived from all the questions that were significantly related to moral courage.

Parents who are successful at raising a morally courageous child will ensure the child knows which behaviors are expected. They will explain to the child why they are correcting him or her, will check on the child to see if he or she is misbehaving and will continue to correct the child if the behavior is repeated. Following misbehavior, the parents will make the child apologize and may withhold toys or other privileges until proper behavior occurs. The parents may also give the child something else to do or put the child in time-out to get him or her to stop the bad behavior. Often, the parents will check on the child in order to praise him or her for doing a good job. These parents are eager to show or demonstrate the right thing to do. The parents will adapt the discipline as the child grows and follow through on what they say they will do.

These parents are careful to be attentive to the misbehavior; they will not deliberately ignore the child after misbehavior or let the child disregard the correction. They generally do not have problems managing the child's behavior. Parents who raise morally courageous children may or may not use corporal punishment in order to emphasize the importance of proper behavior.

### **Recommendations**

First and foremost, future research needs to establish a causal, prospective link between childhood discipline and moral courage. This research only established a correlation between recalled experiences of discipline and current reported states of the personality traits comprising moral courage. As mentioned previously, there are several explanations for why the correlation between variables may not be causal. These include the inaccuracy of recall and the possibility that moral courage is passed down genetically and that induction is spurious.

Research focused on finding a causal link should avoid using recall surveys and instead observe actual instances of childhood discipline. The research should be longitudinal to track changes in moral courage. The moral courage measures should not be self-reported but should be based on actual behavior, to the extent possible, or reasoning on moral dilemmas.

If a causal link could be found between induction and moral courage, additional research should examine how to improve the effectiveness of induction. One study found that a mother's use of moralizing and statements of principles (e.g. "You should never hurt anyone because it is wrong") was positively related to a child's prosocial behavior more than affectively neutral explanations (e.g. "She is crying because you took her toy") (Maccoby & Martin, 1983). Hoffman (2000) further notes that if parents do not express themselves strongly enough with induction, the child may not be aware that the action was unacceptable.

Limited power assertion such as time-out or denial of privileges has been correlated with higher effectiveness of induction. Sufficient power assertion is needed for the child to pay attention to the inductive discipline, but discipline that is too severe will cause the child to focus on avoiding punishment instead of learning about caring for others (Hoffman, 2000). If a causal link between induction and moral courage is found, research should focus on finding the optimal amount of power assertion that will focus children's attention without inhibiting the arousal of empathy and guilt. This may depend on the situation and on the personality of the child (Kochanska, 1995).

As noted previously, inductive discipline practices and methods only accounted for a relatively small amount of variance on moral courage scores. More research needs to be done on other socialization factors that contribute to the development of this important set of personality traits. Research on rescuers offers some alternative directions besides childhood discipline.

Role-modeling might be an influential means of socializing children to act with moral courage. London (1970) found that rescuers tended to identify strongly with a parent who held very strong moral beliefs and served as a model for moral behavior. Many rescuers in Fogelman's (1994) study mentioned that they had a parent who behaved altruistically. Block and Drucker (1992) presented anecdotal evidence of rescuers learning from their parents to act morally. Gushee (1993) summarized several studies of rescuers and concluded, "Parents who consistently responded to others' needs in a caring and giving fashion tend to show their children the way to altruism" (p.375). While Hoffman's (2000) theory of inductive discipline discounted the importance of role-modeling because it is unlikely to produce empathy and guilt necessary for moral

development, the evidence from research on rescuers suggests that future research should include role-modeling as a possible variable.

The content of moral instruction is another socialization factor to examine further. Parents of rescuers were more likely to teach that moral values applied universally than parents of non-rescuers (Oliner & Oliner, 1988). The rescuers' parents also avoided negative stereotypes of Jews and other minorities. These parents emphasized values of generosity, independence and care-giving (Gushee, 1993). Future research on the development of moral courage should include moral instruction as a possible factor.

Research on the rescuers found that a high percentage of them encountered a close relative's death or experienced great personal loss or illness as a child (Gushee, 1993). This direct experience of loss may have given them a greater capacity to understand another's suffering as well. It may also have decreased the fear that they felt in regards to their own mortality, especially for rescuers who overcame serious illness. Gandhi believed that one needed to overcome fear in order to act with moral courage. Only one who was fearless would be willing to risk "his land, his wealth, his life" (Barash, 2010, p. 207). Martin Luther King Jr. voiced the freedom from fear that he felt in the speech on the night before his assassination: "Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now... I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man!" (King Jr., 1968) Early childhood encounters with death and illness may have given the rescuers courage to act in the face of great risk like the luminaries of moral courage, Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr.

Parental practices that encourage children to understand, be comfortable with, and express negative emotions have been correlated with pro-social behavior and empathy (Eisenberg & Morris, 2001). Gottman (1997) found that children whose parents help them explore and feel negative emotions (sadness, anger, distress, fear) had more developed parasympathetic nervous systems. While the sympathetic branch accelerates bodily functions such as breathing and heart rate, the parasympathetic branch is responsible for calming down those functions. Children whose parents respond sufficiently to their emotional distress learn to deal with negative feelings, thus developing their internal capacities of self-regulation. On the other hand, children whose parents fail to respond to the emotional distress (e.g. by ignoring the child or telling the child to suppress the feelings) do not develop self-control mechanisms. This has implications for the development of moral courage because children with more developed parasympathetic systems are quicker to notice other's distress and better at controlling their emotions in high conflict situations (Gottman, 1997). This might make them more willing to take risks to help others. They are also more apt to take on the role of comforter or hero in play situations, perhaps foreshadowing actual behavior (Gottman, 1997).

Overall this research found that recalled inductive childhood discipline is significantly related to self-reported higher levels of the personality traits most associated with moral courage. Provided a causal link could be found, childhood discipline would be seen as an opportunity not only to prevent misbehavior but to foster moral courage. If moral courage truly is, in the words of Robert Kennedy, "a rarer commodity than bravery in battle or great intelligence" and the "one essential, vital quality for those who seek to

change a world that yields most painfully to change” then any research that deepens the understanding of moral courage is important. (Kennedy, 1966) Hopefully this research has provided additional insight into the development of moral courage and will make a contribution towards helping create a generation with the conviction and courage to stand up for what is right.

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### **Biographical Sketch of Author**

Seth Izen graduated from Brown University in 2008 with a Bachelor of Arts double major in Political Science and Contemplative Studies. He works as project manager for the Peace and Conflict Studies program and Middle East Center for Peace, Development and Culture at University of Massachusetts Lowell. He also serves in the Lowell District Court as a mediator, helping opposing sides reach greater levels of understanding and communication. Previously, Seth served as a mediation trainer for North Shore Community Mediation Center's youth program. He has interned for Congressman Edward Markey, Governor Deval Patrick and State Senator Jarrett Barrios.

He has presented his academic research at the Fetzer Institute Conference on the Heart of Higher Education and the Notre Dame Student Peace Conference. He received the *Future Leader of the Year Award* from Williams College, which he attended from 2004-2006, the *Joslin Award* for student leadership and involvement from Brown University, and he was named an *Outstanding Graduate Student* for 2012 by University of Massachusetts Lowell.