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## CONSERVATIVE PROTESTANT CHILDREARING: AUTHORITARIAN OR AUTHORITATIVE?\*

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*Recent research on conservative Protestantism suggests that religion has re-emerged as an important predictor of childrearing attitudes and practices. This research has focused on the distinctive approach toward discipline among conservative Protestant parents. No study, however, has explored the links between conservative Protestantism and positive parental emotion work (physical and verbal expressions of affection). I suggest, paradoxically, that this subculture is characterized both by strict discipline and an unusually warm and expressive style of parent-child interaction. I review parenting advice offered by conservative Protestant leaders, which encourages parents to engage in positive emotion work with their children. I then analyze data from the 1987–1988 National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH) to determine if religious affiliation and theological conservatism are related to positive parental emotion work. I find that parents with conservative theological beliefs are more likely to praise and hug their children than are parents with less conservative theological views. Modest positive net effects of conservative Protestant affiliation are also found.*

**T**he empirical literature on parenting generally has focused on macro- and micro-structural determinants of childrearing practices—especially poverty (Duncan and Brooks-Gunn 1997), occupations (Parcel and Menaghan 1994), and family structure (McLanahan and Sandefur 1994). This structural research focus has largely obscured the independent role that culture can take in shaping parental behavior and, as a consequence, child and adolescent development. This oversight is surprising, given the extent to which culture-producing sectors like the

media, the medical professions, and religion produce proscriptive discourse on parenting (Bartkowski and Ellison 1995; Hays 1996).

The principal exception to this structural focus is the reemergence of the “religious factor” (Lanski 1961) in recent studies of disciplinary norms and practices among conservative Protestants (Ellison, Bartkowski, and Segal 1996; Ellison and Sherkat 1993a; Ellison and Sherkat 1993b).<sup>1</sup> The literature on the subject indicates that conservative Protestants value child obedience and approve of corporal punishment more than do other parents. Not surprisingly, they also are more likely to use corporal punishment with their children than are parents in the population at large. Moreover, according to this research, the connection between conservative Protestant affiliation and this disciplinary style is largely a product of the theological

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<sup>1</sup> While the differences that Lanski (1961) documented between Protestant and Catholic parental childrearing orientations disappeared in the wake of post-1960s Catholic cultural assimilation (Alwin 1986), the research on conservative Protestantism suggests that a distinctive disciplinary culture has taken hold in this religious group.

and cultural conservatism associated with this subculture.

Although these findings suggest that the culture of conservative Protestantism remains puritanical—that is, ascetic, strict, and restrained—recent overviews of conservative Protestantism and of American religion paint a different portrait (Hunter 1987; Miller 1997; Roof 1993; Shibley 1996). First, for at least two centuries the conservative Protestant subculture has been influenced by a pietistic strain that places a great deal of emphasis on the emotional experience of faith. Second, the culture of this group has taken an expressive, therapeutic turn since the 1970s—particularly those sectors influenced by the evangelical and charismatic movements. The result, according to Hunter (1987), is that the sober Protestant ethic once associated with this subculture is giving way to an intensely psychological ethos where joy is to be found in this world through “meaningful relationships and a creative and expressive style of living” (p. 74).

This expressive strain in contemporary conservative Protestantism suggests that the subculture may combine its strict discipline style, paradoxically, with an approach to relationships that is otherwise distinctively warm and expressive. Until now, however, research has not examined the relationship between conservative Protestantism and an expressive parenting style. This constitutes a critical gap in the literature because the presence or absence of an affirmative parenting style may dramatically alter the consequences of a strict disciplinary style.

An “authoritarian” parenting style characterized by harsh or very strict discipline, minimal expressions of affection, and low levels of responsiveness to children has been linked to negative child and adolescent outcomes (Baumrind 1971; Elder, Nguyen, and Caspi 1985; Maccoby and Martin 1983; McLeod, Kruttschnitt, and Dornfeld 1994; McLeod and Shanahan 1993). By contrast, an “authoritative” parenting style, characterized by consistent and firm discipline and high levels of warmth and parental responsiveness, has been linked to positive outcomes among children and adolescents (Amato and Booth 1997; Baumrind 1971; Maccoby and Martin 1983; McLeod et al. 1994; Thomson, Hanson, and McLanahan

1994).<sup>2</sup> Thus, the warmth of conservative Protestant parenting determines whether or not this subculture’s childrearing approach falls closer to the authoritarian or authoritative styles. In turn, the position of conservative Protestants along this continuum is, in all likelihood, linked to negative or positive outcomes for the children raised in this subculture.

Accordingly, I explore the possible links between conservative Protestantism and warm, expressive parenting in two ways. First, I provide a theoretical rationale for exploring the connections between this subculture and expressive parenting. By surveying key parenting books by popular conservative Protestant authors, I suggest how the ideology produced by this subculture—theological beliefs, social values, and parenting norms—may be associated with unusually expressive “emotion work”<sup>3</sup> (Hochschild 1979:561) among conservative Protestant parents. Second, I explore the empirical relationships between conservative Protestant affiliation, theological conservatism, and warm and expressive parental emotion work. I use data from the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH), which provides measures of hugging and praising by parents.

### CONSERVATIVE PROTESTANT FAMILY IDEOLOGY

In the 1970s, just as a more expressive style of faith overtook large sectors of conservative Protestant life, the conservative Protestant subculture also began devoting a great deal of attention to what it saw as the seedbed of emotional life: the family. The public dimensions of its cultural crusade to save the “traditional family” (e.g., the public protests of the Moral Majority in the 1980s) have been well-documented elsewhere (Hunter 1991; Wuthnow 1988), but conservative

<sup>2</sup> Although in my use of the terms “authoritarian” and “authoritative” I am obviously indebted to Baumrind (1971), I use these terms more expansively than Baumrind. Following Maccoby and Martin (1983), I refer not just to disciplinary style and parental responsiveness, but also to the affective character of parent-child interaction.

<sup>3</sup> “Emotion work” refers here to physical and verbal expressions of affection (i.e., hugging and praising) by parents toward their children.

Protestant concern about the family also has had a very substantial internal focus. Since the early 1970s, large family-focused organizations (e.g., Focus on the Family) and conservative Protestant churches have produced a great deal of family discourse in an effort to help conservative Protestants raise their children. Specifically, this subculture has relied on countless books and radio spots, as well as a significant percentage of its Sunday sermons and regular small group sessions, to cultivate a distinctive set of family values and behaviors (Hunter 1987). As a result, the family has been endowed with tremendous symbolic power.

A review of best-selling parenting books by conservative Protestant leaders such as James Dobson (1970, 1978, 1992), founder of Focus on the Family, Beverly LaHaye (1977), head of Concerned Women for America, minister Charles Swindoll (1977), psychologists Gary Smalley and John Trent (1986), and others (Christenson 1970; Fugate 1980; Walton 1987) illuminates the sources of this symbolic power.<sup>4</sup> The family is afforded enormous social utility, both as an “enclave of loving authority” amidst the discontents of modern life (Walton 1987:48) and as an institution where children learn the virtues required to become good citizens, parents, and workers (Dobson 1970; Swindoll 1977; Walton 1987). The family’s symbolic power also is derived from its biblically mandated role in bringing children to faith in Jesus Christ (Christenson 1970;

<sup>4</sup> James Dobson and Beverly LaHaye head two of the largest conservative Protestant membership organizations dedicated to family-related issues, Focus on the Family and Concerned Women for America, respectively. According to its own promotional material ([www.family.org](http://www.family.org)), Dobson’s Focus on the Family offers advice on parenting and marriage for more than 2.3 million people each month through its daily radio show (broadcast on 4,000 radio stations worldwide), magazines, books, and videos. LaHaye’s Concerned Women for America (CWA), according to its own promotional material ([www.cwfa.org](http://www.cwfa.org)), is the largest women’s organization in the country, with more than 500,000 members. It focuses on offering family advice and promoting conservative family-related public policies at the federal, state, and local levels. Most of the other writers noted here direct family ministries or evangelical ministries.

LaHaye 1977; Swindoll 1977) and its status as a fount of psychological well-being for parents and children alike (Smalley and Trent 1986; Walton 1987).

Accordingly, conservative Protestant parents are exhorted to treat family life with great care. Conservative Protestant writers generally advocate a bourgeois approach to family life—alternately sober and sentimental—where parents, especially mothers, devote a great deal of time to family life, and where “emotional considerations are elevated to a level equal to or above other immediate considerations” (Hunter 1987:90). More specifically, the family discourse produced by conservative Protestantism supplies parents with a range of “framing rules” (Hochschild 1979:566)—some strict and others expressive—to direct the emotional work associated with parent-child interactions.

The emphasis on warm, expressive parenting found in this conservative Protestant parenting literature is largely passed over in the recent research on conservative Protestant parents’ disciplinary values and practices (Lienesch 1991; Ellison and Sherkat 1993a; Ellison and Sherkat 1993b; Bartkowski and Ellison 1995; Ellison et al. 1996). For the most part, this research interprets these parenting books as primers for a strict, sober disciplinary style based on a literal interpretation of the Bible by pointing out the ways such books highlight the belief that human nature is sinful and the attendant teaching that sinful children need to learn obedience—and when disobedient, to experience the sting of the rod.<sup>5</sup>

Yet these books do much more than harness the symbolic power afforded to the family to a strict disciplinary style. A close reading reveals that conservative Protestants also have positive childrearing beliefs and norms: (1) the belief that children are created in the image of God; (2) the belief that the psychological well-being of children depends on positive parent-child interaction; and consequently, (3) the norm that children must be treated with love and dignity. Thus, while

<sup>5</sup> This research acknowledges, however, that conservative Protestant parenting books generally urge parents to use corporal punishment sparingly, to avoid hitting a child in anger, and in many cases, to rely on nonphysical disciplinary strategies (e.g., Ellison 1996).

some conservative Protestant experts stress the sinful nature of children and the need for discipline to the exclusion of anything else (e.g., Fugate 1970), most balance this approach with one that highlights the child's God-given potential and the need for positive parental emotion work.

For instance, Swindoll (1977:28) argues that every child has a "bent to evil and good," citing biblical verses that suggest children are created in the image of God and at the same time are wounded by Original Sin (Psalms 51:5, 58:3, 139:13–16). Dobson (1978), striking a typically psychological note, is explicit about the importance of a balanced approach to parenting:

Healthy parenthood can be boiled down to those two essential ingredients, love and control, operating in a system of checks and balances. Any concentration on love to the exclusion of control usually breeds disrespect and contempt. Conversely, an authoritarian and oppressive home atmosphere is deeply resented by the child who feels unloved or even hated. To repeat, the objective for the toddler years is to strike a balance between mercy and justice, affection and authority, love and control. (P. 52)

Theological tenets, as well as the pietistic ethos associated with much of American evangelicalism, provide some of the impetus for the warm, expressive parenting style advocated by conservative Protestant parenting experts. Drawing on varied themes, these writers suggest that expressive parenting communicates God's love for His children: "Be sure you are giving him [the child] an honest picture of what he can expect from his own Heavenly Father" (LaHaye 1977:69; also see Christenson 1970). This love is demonstrated by the emotion work parents do while interacting with their children: "The tone of your voice, the look of your eye, or the way you touch or stroke the child will speak more loudly than what you actually say" (LaHaye 1977:158). Smalley and Trent (1986), the most explicit advocates of an intentional expressive style, use an emotive language that seems heavily indebted to the pietistic ethos. Arguing that children need "words of encouragement, love, and acceptance from their parents" (Smalley and Trent 1986:15) to thrive and to keep the faith, they propose regular family blessings:

A family blessing begins with *meaningful touching*. It continues with a *spoken message of high value*, a message that pictures a *special future* for the individual being blessed, and one that is based on an *active commitment* to see the blessing come to pass. (P. 24)

Thus, this expressive emotion work, justified in part by theological assumptions and related to a pietistic ethos, is framed as one way to communicate God's love to children and to create a positive climate that encourages children to embrace the Christian faith.

A utilitarian-psychological theme also figures prominently in the arguments these writers offer for an expressive parenting style. This theme, which also is found in the secular parenting literature (Brazelton 1987; Leach 1994; Spock 1992), stresses the importance of children's emotional well-being and assumes that an expressive approach to parenting is the best way to secure that well-being. The language of pragmatism, "principles that work" (Swindoll 1977:11), informs much of this literature as parents are assured that their children will turn out well-behaved and self-confident if they follow the advice offered in these books (Dobson 1970; LaHaye 1977; Swindoll 1977).

So what is practical according to these experts? Besides strict discipline, a great deal of physical affection and praise. Invoking a "child's need for self-esteem and acceptance," Dobson (1992:94) and others encourage parents to praise their children if they want them to become well-adjusted adults (also see LaHaye 1977; Smalley and Trent 1986; Swindoll 1977). Praise is also portrayed as a valuable tool to get children to learn manners, do their homework, and be responsible around the house (Dobson 1970; LaHaye 1977; Swindoll 1977). Praise is most effective when it is accompanied by physical expressions of affection. Swindoll (1977) argues that even boys should experience this physical affection:

[Y]our boy must be very aware that *you love him*. . . . When is the last time you took him in your arms and held him close so no one else could hear, and you whispered to him how happy you are to have him as your son? (P. 114)

These experts lend additional power to their pragmatic arguments by cloaking their claims in the mantle of social science. For

instance, Smalley and Trent (1986) and Dobson (1978; 1992) cite studies from Harvard, Princeton, Purdue, and UCLA indicating the value of hugging and praising children.

This literature review indicates that the conservative Protestant subculture supplements its strict disciplinary orientation with a stress on a warm, expressive emotion work for most parent-child interaction. Clearly, the conservative Protestant subculture is distinctive in its stress on authority, obedience, and corporal punishment with respect to child-rearing (Bartkowski and Ellison 1995). But is its discourse distinctive in stressing a warm, expressive parenting style?

In comparison to the parenting advice from leading secular experts (Brazelton 1987; Leach 1994; Spock 1992), evangelical parenting advice stresses not just the psychological and pragmatic benefits of warm and expressive parenting but also the theological and evangelical imperatives of this type of parenting. In this way, positive parental emotion work is closely linked to the religious ideology of this subculture. Accordingly, conservative Protestants have additional normative and emotional incentives to engage in this style of parenting. Moreover, the emphasis on positive parental emotion work is reinforced by an institutional context offering social support and sanctions regarding childrearing; secular parenting discourse provides no equivalent institutional context.<sup>6</sup>

Accordingly, I propose the following hypotheses:

*Hypothesis 1:* Members of conservative Protestant churches are more likely to praise and hug their children, given the intense support for warm, expressive parenting among these religious communities.

<sup>6</sup>I do not compare conservative Protestant family discourse with that found in the other two large religious communities in the United States—mainline Protestantism and Roman Catholicism—because these communities have not focused significant attention, at the pastoral level, on family life since the 1960s (for a more thorough discussion of this issue see Browning [1995] and Wilcox [1997]). For example, no mainline Protestant or Catholic family ministry comes close to exercising the kind of influence wielded by Dobson's Focus on the Family.

*Hypothesis 2:* Theological conservatism, which is the best indicator of respondent identification with conservative Protestant religious ideology, is positively related to this warm, expressive style of parenting.<sup>7</sup>

*Hypothesis 3:* Theological conservatism is a stronger predictor than conservative Protestant affiliation of expressive parenting because conservatism taps the extent of respondent identification with the core religious values of this subculture, while affiliation indicates only whether the respondent categorizes himself or herself as a member of the subculture.

In addition, I test three competing hypotheses that may account for any relationships found between conservative Protestantism, theological conservatism, and positive parental emotion work. Female labor force participation among conservative Protestants is distinctively low, and may account for any positive parental emotion work found in this subculture. That is, because conservative Protestant mothers are more likely to stay at home (Ammerman and Roof 1995), they may have more frequent opportunities to hug and praise their children. Thus, I test the following hypotheses:

*Hypothesis 4:* Low female labor force participation among conservative Protestant women accounts for most of any distinctive parenting patterns found among conservative Protestants.

Given the valorization of motherhood in this subculture, I explore the related hypothesis:

<sup>7</sup>I chose theological conservatism as my independent variable for three reasons. First, theological conservatism, which I define by respondent attitudes to the Bible, is the best measure of identification with conservative Protestant religious ideology because this ideology is centered on the Bible. Second, since the NSFH has no measures specifically related to the family discourse produced by this subculture, a measure that taps identification with its core religious ideology serves as the best available substitute. Finally, by focusing on theological conservatism, I can compare my findings with the work of Ellison et al. (1996), who developed this measure in their study of corporal punishment among conservative Protestant parents.



*Hypothesis 5:* Any effects of theological conservatism or conservative Protestantism on positive parental emotion work are attributed to distinctive conservative Protestant mothering.

I also explore the contribution that generic religiosity may make to positive parental emotion work. Alwin (1986) has argued that variations in religiosity—church attendance, frequency of prayer, and so on—are better predictors of family attitudes and practices than religious affiliation or theological beliefs. This thesis is particularly relevant because conservative Protestants generally attend church more often than members of other religious communities (Stark and Bainbridge 1985).

*Hypothesis 6:* Church attendance accounts for most of any relationships found between conservative Protestantism, theological conservatism, and positive parental emotion work.

#### DATA AND METHODS

I analyze data drawn from the 1987–1988 National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH), which randomly sampled 13,017 U.S. adults (Sweet, Bumpass, and Call 1988). Relying on reports from primary respondents to the survey, my analyses focus on two subsets in the data: 1,280 respondents who were parents of preschool children only (ages 0 to 4), and 3,178 respondents who were parents of school-age children (ages 5 to 18). All of these respondents had children residing with them. The statistics and analyses used for this study are based on weighted data, adjusted for oversamples of blacks, Puerto Ricans, Mexican Americans, single-parent families, and families with stepchildren.

Reports of hugging and praising serve as measures of the dependent variable, *positive parental emotion work*. Parents were asked how frequently they *praised* their children and *hugged* their children (never, seldom, sometimes, and very often; coded from 1 to 4). I created a two-item scale from these measures (coded from 1 to 4) by summing the responses to these two items and then dividing them by two. Cronbach's alpha for the two-item scale for parents of preschoolers only is .47; for the two-item scale

for parents of school-aged children, alpha is .62. These estimated reliabilities are reasonable for two-item scales, but are quite low, probably because the response scales for the original items were not interval scales. More than 80 percent of the parents of preschoolers reported both praising and hugging their children very often. To reduce severe skewness, I measured expressiveness for these parents as a dichotomy—both praising and hugging the child very often versus not—and I relied on logistic regression models to test my hypotheses for this subset.

Parents of school-age children were somewhat less likely than parents of preschoolers to report high levels of positive parental emotion work—just over 50 percent reported both praising and hugging the child very often. Since the dependent variable is based on ordinal measures, I first estimated models using ordered logistic regression. I then estimated models using ordinary least squares (OLS) regression (which are easier to interpret) to see if the results were similar. Because the results were similar, I report results derived from OLS models.

Relying largely on Roof and McKinney's (1987) classification scheme, I assigned the following religious groups to the dummy variable used to identify *conservative Protestants*: Southern Baptist, Assembly of God, Pentecostal, Missionary Alliance, Christian Reformed, and a number of other fundamentalist and evangelical churches.<sup>8</sup> Due to the lack of NSFH specificity in coding Baptist and Presbyterian denominations, I anticipate some measurement error in my results as I include some Baptists who do not belong in this category and exclude some Presbyterians who do. Nevertheless, given the fact that the vast majority of Baptist churches are conservative and Presbyterian churches are mainline, I think this measure provides an adequate representation of conservative Protestant churches.

To construct a measure of *theological conservatism*, I used a two-item scale (Cronbach's alpha = .86) (see Ellison et al. 1996:1010) based on respondents' agreement

<sup>8</sup> I rely on Kellstedt and Green (1993) in deciding which smaller, sectarian religious groups should be classified as conservative Protestant.

with the following statements: (1) "The Bible is God's word and everything happened or will happen exactly as it says," and (2) "The Bible is the answer to all important human problems." Responses to these two statements were coded from 1 to 5—from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The two-item scale is based on the mean response to these two items and was coded from 1 to 5.

To measure *frequency of church attendance*, the primary measure of religious involvement available in the NSFH, I constructed a scale similar to the one used in the General Social Surveys. Church attendance was coded from never to several times a week (coded 0 to 8).

I created two dummy variables to measure *mothers' labor force participation*. Female respondents working 35 hours or more per week were coded as full-time working women. Female respondents working 1 to 34 hours per week were coded as part-time working women.

Finally, I controlled for the following variables, which might otherwise confound the effect that religious affiliation and theological conservatism have on the dependent variable: *age* (in years) and *gender* (1 = female) of the respondent; the respondent's *marital status* (1 = single parent); *race/ethnicity* of the respondent (1 = black, 1 = Hispanic, 0 = white/Anglo); the *household income* (\$10,000s, 1986, logged); respondent's *education* (from high school to graduate school, coded from 1 to 6); and the *number of preschool and school-age children* in the family. I also controlled for whether or not the children were *all biological*, a *blend* of biological and step or adopted children, or *all step and/or adopted* children (the omitted variable); and whether children in the family were of both genders (*mixed gender*), *all male*, or *all female* (the omitted variable).

## RESULTS

Table 1 presents the means and standard deviations for parenting behaviors, religious factors, mothers' labor force participation, parent and household characteristics, and family characteristics. The data are weighted to adjust for sampling probabilities; the number of cases reflect actual sample sizes.

**Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations for Variables Used in the Analysis, by Age of Children: NSFH, 1987–1988**

Variable	Preschool Children (Ages 0 to 4)	School-Age Children (Ages 5 to 18)
<i>Dependent Variables</i>		
Very frequent hugging and praising (dichotomous)	.82 (.38)	—
Frequency of hugging and praising (continuous)	—	3.60 (.53)
<i>Religious Factors</i>		
Conservative Protestant	.18 (.39)	.21 (.41)
Theological conservatism	2.82 (1.12)	2.91 (1.09)
Church attendance	3.79 (2.80)	4.26 (2.87)
<i>Mother's Employment</i>		
Mother works full-time	.20 (.40)	.25 (.43)
Mother works part-time	.09 (.29)	.10 (.30)
<i>Parental and Household Characteristics</i>		
Age of respondent	28.16 (5.79)	39.99 (7.96)
Female	.59 (.49)	.57 (.50)
Single parent	.18 (.38)	.17 (.37)
Black	.10 (.31)	.13 (.33)
Hispanic	.08 (.27)	.09 (.28)
Household income (in \$10,000s, logged)	.82 (1.48)	.91 (1.73)
Education of respondent (coded 1 to 6)	2.54 (1.24)	2.36 (1.20)
Number of preschool children	1.39 (.58)	.18 (.46)
Number of school-age children	—	1.85 (.96)
<i>Family Characteristics</i>		
All biological children	.96 (.19)	.83 (.38)
Blend	.03 (.06)	.03 (.17)
Mixed gender	.21 (.41)	.47 (.50)
All male	.42 (.49)	.27 (.44)
Number of cases	1,280	3,178

Note: Numbers in parentheses are standard deviations.

**Table 2. Log Odds Ratios from the Logistic Regression of Parent's Expressive Emotion Work (Praising and Hugging) on Selected Independent Variables: Parents with Preschool Children (only), NSFH, 1987–1988**

Independent Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
<i>Religious Factors</i>					
Conservative Protestant	.232 (.233)	.108 (.241)	.107 (.241)	.107 (.241)	.109 (.241)
Theological conservatism	—	.226** (.087)	.226** (.087)	.225* (.095)	.254* (.115)
Church attendance	—	—	—	.000 (.036)	—
Theological conservative × female	—	—	—	—	-.062 (.162)
<i>Mother's Employment</i>					
Mother works full-time	—	—	.021 (.281)	—	—
Mother works part-time	—	—	.071 (.393)	—	—
<i>Parental and Household Characteristics</i>					
Age of respondent	.078*** (.020)	.081*** (.020)	.081*** (.020)	.081*** (.020)	.081*** (.020)
Female	.918*** (.198)	.905*** (.198)	.886*** (.237)	.904*** (.199)	1.077* (.496)
Single parent	-.174 (.249)	-.195 (.250)	-.197 (.251)	-.195 (.252)	-.197 (.251)
Black	-1.129*** (.258)	-1.227*** (.264)	-1.230*** (.266)	-1.227*** (.266)	-1.223*** (.264)
Hispanic	-1.091*** (.258)	-1.202*** (.263)	-1.199*** (.265)	-1.203*** (.268)	-1.199*** (.263)
Household income (in \$10,000s, logged)	.050 (.035)	.046 (.035)	.045 (.037)	.046 (.035)	.045 (.035)
Education of respondent (coded 1 to 6)	.138 (.095)	.166 (.095)	.165 (.095)	.166 (.098)	.168 (.095)
Number of preschool children	-.465* (.182)	-.489* (.182)	-.487* (.184)	-.490* (.183)	-.489* (.183)
<i>Family Characteristics</i>					
All biological children	.691 (.404)	.719 (.404)	.716 (.405)	.719 (.405)	.734 (.406)
Blend	2.087 (1.594)	2.152 (1.579)	2.145 (1.579)	2.153 (1.580)	2.167 (1.574)
Mixed gender	.202 (.290)	.186 (.292)	.184 (.292)	.186 (.292)	.180 (.292)
All male	-.017 (.196)	-.032 (.197)	-.033 (.197)	-.032 (.197)	-.035 (.197)
Intercept	-1.213	-1.917	-1.909	-1.916	-2.017
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	.098	.103	.103	.103	.104
Model chi-Square	108	114	114	114	115
Degrees of freedom	13	14	16	15	15

Note: Numbers in parentheses are standard errors; N = 1,280.

\*p < .05    \*\*p < .01    \*\*\*p < .001 (two-tailed tests)



To test the six hypotheses, I ran five regression models for both subsets of parents. Table 2 reports, for parents who have only preschool children, five logistic regressions that explore the net effects of conservative Protestant affiliation, theological conservatism, church attendance, and female labor force participation, on expressive parenting. While Table 2 provides no support for Hypotheses 1, 4, 5, and 6, it does lend support to Hypotheses 2 and 3. Model 1 indicates that conservative Protestant parents who have preschool children only are *not* significantly more likely to hug and praise their children very often than are other parents. However, as Model 2 indicates, theological conservatism is associated with a greater propensity to praise and hug one's preschool children very often. In fact, each incremental rise in theological conservatism (which ranges from 1 to 5) is associated with a .226 increase in the log odds of hugging and praising one's child very often. Moreover, Model 3 shows that the positive effect of theological conservatism is not related to a distinctive labor force participation pattern among conservative Protestant mothers. Model 4 offers a similar result: Church attendance is unrelated to positive parental emotion work and does not affect the positive coefficient of theological conservatism. Model 5, which tests an interaction effect for theological conservatism and female, indicates that the influence of theological conservatism does not differ by gender for parents of preschool children.

Thus, according to Table 2, the odds of praising and hugging one's child very often are 2.47 ( $e^{.226 \times [5-1]}$ ) or 147 percent higher for a parent with the maximum score of 5 (a strong theological conservative) than for a parent with similar sociodemographic characteristics and the minimum score of 1 (a strong theological liberal). These results suggest, at least for parents of preschoolers, that respondents' identification with the religious ideology of conservative Protestantism has a greater impact on their expressive emotion work as parents than simply being associated with the subculture through church attendance or membership.

Table 3 depicts results from five OLS regression models, and shows support for Hypotheses 1, 2, 3, and 6, but not for Hypoth-

eses 4 and 5. Model 1 indicates that for parents of school-age children, conservative Protestant affiliation is associated with higher rates of positive emotion work. Model 2 indicates that theological conservatism also is associated with higher rates of praising and hugging among parents of school-age children. The decrease in the conservative Protestant coefficient from Model 1 to Model 2 also indicates that theological conservatism accounts for much of the effect of the conservative Protestant affiliation. So once again, it appears that identification with the conservative Protestant ideology is more important to parenting style than simply being affiliated with a conservative Protestant church.

Model 3 indicates that full-time work among mothers is negatively related to positive emotion work among parents of school-age children. However, this negative relationship clearly does not account for the positive relationship between theological conservatism and positive parental emotion work for these parents, since the coefficients for the religious variables remain essentially the same. Likewise, Model 5 indicates that the positive effect of theological conservatism does not differ by gender. By contrast, Model 4 indicates that church attendance (1) is positively related to positive parental emotion work for parents of school-age children, and (2) accounts for about one-third of the positive relationship between theological conservatism and positive parental emotion work. Thus, for parents of school-age children, *both* generic religiosity and theological conservatism appear to be related to positive parental emotion work.

## DISCUSSION

Members of conservative Protestant denominations make up 20 to 25 percent of the U.S. population (Hunter 1987). Yet, as with many other religious traditions, there is a measure of heterogeneity in the extent to which members identify with the core values and theological tenets generally associated with this subculture (Roof 1993). The present study indicates that, when it comes to the expressive emotion work associated with parenting, membership in a conservative Protestant church is not as important as is personally

**Table 3. Coefficients from the OLS Regression of Parents' Expressive Emotion Work (Praising and Hugging) on Selected Independent Variables: Parents with School-Age Children, NSFH, 1987–1988**

Independent Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
<i>Religious Factors</i>					
Conservative Protestant	.047* (.023)	.025 (.024)	.026 (.024)	.017 (.024)	.023 (.024)
Theological conservatism	—	.031** (.009)	.030** (.009)	.019* (.009)	.035** (.013)
Church attendance	—	—	—	.012** (.003)	—
Theological conservatism × female	—	—	—	—	-.009 (.016)
<i>Mother's Employment</i>					
Mother works full-time	—	—	-.063* (.026)	—	—
Mother works part-time	—	—	-.059 (.034)	—	—
<i>Parental and Household Characteristics</i>					
Age of respondent	-.007*** (.001)	-.007*** (.001)	-.007*** (.001)	-.007*** (.001)	-.007*** (.001)
Female	.245*** (.019)	.239*** (.019)	.278*** (.024)	.230*** (.019)	.267*** (.050)
Single parent	-.033 (.025)	-.030 (.025)	-.029 (.025)	-.021 (.025)	-.007 (.027)
Black	-.105*** (.028)	-.113*** (.029)	-.111*** (.029)	-.117*** (.028)	-.111*** (.029)
Hispanic	-.016 (.033)	-.025 (.033)	-.026 (.033)	-.037 (.033)	-.025 (.033)
Household income (in \$10,000s, logged)	.011* (.005)	.012* (.005)	.013* (.005)	.010* (.005)	.009* (.004)
Education of respondent (coded 1 to 6)	.064*** (.008)	.070*** (.008)	.071*** (.008)	.063*** (.008)	.070*** (.008)
Number of preschool children	.077*** (.021)	.075*** (.021)	.068** (.021)	.072** (.021)	.076*** (.021)
Number of school-age children	-.010 (.010)	-.012 (.010)	-.014 (.010)	-.015 (.010)	-.012 (.010)
<i>Family Characteristics</i>					
All biological children	.169*** (.026)	.168*** (.026)	.168*** (.026)	.167*** (.026)	.169*** (.026)
Blend	.159** (.057)	.164** (.057)	.166** (.057)	.171** (.057)	.160** (.057)
Mixed gender	-.059* (.023)	-.060* (.023)	-.059* (.023)	-.060** (.023)	-.059* (.023)
All Male	-.109*** (.024)	-.111*** (.024)	-.110*** (.024)	-.109*** (.024)	-.112*** (.024)
Intercept	3.486	3.403	3.407	3.435	3.390
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.119	.122	.123	.125	.122

Note: Numbers in parentheses are standard errors; N = 3,178.

\*p < .05    \*\*p < .01    \*\*\*p < .001 (two-tailed tests)

identifying with the core religious ideology of these churches. In particular, I found that theological conservatism accounted for some of the effect of conservative Protestant affiliation and also was a more consistent and significant predictor of positive parental emotion work than was affiliation.

This study also indicates that the positive relationship between theological conservatism and positive parental emotion work is not simply an artifact of distinctively low labor force participation rates among conservative Protestant women or of higher church attendance rates among conservative Protestants. Including variables tapping female labor force participation in the analyses had no effect on the positive effect of theological conservatism. And while church attendance accounted for some of the positive effect of theological conservatism on the parenting style of parents of school-age children, theological conservatism still had a net positive effect on positive emotion work for parents in this subgroup. Furthermore, attendance did not influence the net positive effect of theological conservatism for parents of preschool children. Thus, the consistent and significant net effects of theological conservatism, over and above conservative Protestant affiliation, hold even after controlling for female labor force participation and church attendance.

This conclusion is buttressed by Ellison et al.'s (1996) parallel findings regarding conservative Protestantism and corporal punishment. They found that theological conservatism mediates much of the effect on corporal punishment of conservative Protestant affiliation. Their findings also indicate that theological conservatism has a net effect on corporal punishment that is larger than the effect associated with affiliation. In other words, conservative Protestants are more likely to engage in positive emotion work and corporal punishment than are other parents; however, this distinctive parenting style is associated more with theological conservatism, or identification with the values of this subculture, than with conservative Protestant affiliation per se.

This study suggests a number of avenues of further inquiry. First, the connections documented here and elsewhere between theological conservatism and a distinctive

parenting style are not entirely clear. It could be, as I suggest, that theological conservatism is a marker of identification with the core values of the subculture, which include a strong orientation toward family, and that this parenting style flows from these familial values. Or perhaps those conservative Protestants who are most emotionally invested in their faith—and are therefore more theologically conservative—are the same parents who exhibit the distinctive parental emotion work found in this study. Another possibility is that unusually expressive parents could be attracted to conservative Protestant churches that legitimate and lend social support to their parenting style.

Second, this study and previous research (Ellison et al. 1996; Ellison and Sherkat 1993b) indicate that a distinctive parenting style has emerged among conservative Protestant parents that manifests characteristics of both the authoritative and authoritarian typologies outlined by Baumrind (1971). This style's heavy stress on obedience and ready reliance on corporal punishment is more typical of an authoritarian approach;<sup>9</sup> however, its emphasis on warm, expressive interaction is more typical of an authoritative approach.

Accordingly, future research should determine if this distinctive style is associated with positive or negative child outcomes. As noted earlier, a large body of literature suggests that warm and expressive parent-child relations are associated with healthy child development (Amato and Booth 1997; Baumrind 1971; Maccoby and Martin 1983; McLeod et al. 1994). However, the positive effects of the conservative Protestant subculture's warm, expressive style may be undercut by its parallel emphasis on obedience and corporal punishment (Greven 1990; Straus, Sugarman, and Giles-Sims 1997). Nonetheless, other studies suggest that corporal punishment is not necessarily associ-

<sup>9</sup>Note, however, that Baumrind (1997) recently reported that virtually all of the respondents she classified as "authoritative" in her earlier work on parenting used corporal punishment. Thus, the conservative Protestant parenting style may fall closer to the authoritative end of her parenting continuum, depending upon the frequency, context, and method of corporal punishment among this subculture (Baumrind 1997).

ated with negative outcomes as long as the parent-child relationship also is characterized by high parental involvement and/or expressions of parental warmth (Baumrind 1997; Larzelere 1996; Simons, Johnson, and Conger 1994).<sup>10</sup>

Ellison et al. (1996:1023) point out that a number of studies indicate that youths from conservative religious backgrounds are less likely to experience academic failure, teen pregnancy, and substance abuse. One possibility is that the conservative Protestant parenting style lends itself to both positive outcomes (e.g., social responsibility) and negative outcomes (e.g., lack of independence) on the part of children and adolescents. Determining the possibly varied effects of conservative Protestant parenting should be a priority for researchers in the near future.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study suggests that the portrait that has recently emerged of a strict parenting style among conservative Protestants should be modified. While it is true that conservative Protestant parents are more likely to rely on corporal punishment, it is also true that they are more likely than other parents to practice warm and expressive emotion work with their children. In fact, as this study indicates, the most expressive parents are those who hold the most theologically conservative views. The findings presented in this study and elsewhere (Ellison et al. 1996; Ellison and Sherkat 1993b) indicate that a distinctive neotraditional parenting style has emerged among the most culturally-committed conservative Protestants. This style is traditional in that it maintains the classical Protestant emphasis on the sinfulness of human nature and the attendant need for strict framing rules to address child misbehavior. However, it may be viewed as innovative in that it harnesses theological and psychological values to framing rules that dictate a warm, expressive style of parenting for most parent-child interaction. Thus, the parenting style of con-

servative Protestants must be judged neither as authoritative nor authoritarian; rather, this neotraditional style falls somewhere between the authoritative and authoritarian modes of parenting described by Baumrind (1971).

Undoubtedly, the positive parental emotion work documented here among conservative Protestants is partly a consequence of socio-economic advances that have recently brought conservative Protestants—much like Catholic parents after World War II (Alwin 1986)—closer to the mainstream of American life (Wuthnow and Lawson 1994). Nevertheless, it is curious that conservative Protestants, especially the most theologically conservative ones, have surpassed other Americans in their expressiveness in parenting, particularly given the secular parenting literature's long-standing emphasis on expressive parenting. In all likelihood, conservative Protestantism's intense symbolic focus on family life since the 1970s, its increasingly expressive, psychologically focused ethos, and the strength of its family ministries account for the increased importance of parental emotion work found in the subculture.

Of course, the direction of causality also may run in the opposite direction: That is, it is also possible that conservative Protestantism, which has grown in recent years (Finke and Stark 1992), has attracted parents who are more emotionally engaged in the lives of their children.<sup>11</sup> As Stolzenberg, Blair-Loy, and Waite (1995) point out, there is a "conventional family" effect associated with church attendance such that the most conventional families have the highest participation rates. By affirming family-focused lifestyles and by providing practical parenting advice, conservative Protestant churches and organizations may be doing particularly well at attracting men and women who place a premium on their identities as parents. This hypothesis is especially compelling in light of the comparative weakness of family ministries and messages in mainline Protestant and Catholic churches (Browning 1995; Wilcox 1997). Given the recent emergence of movements like Promise Keepers, which stresses

<sup>10</sup> For a thorough discussion of the issues related to conservative Protestantism, corporal punishment, and child outcomes, see Ellison *et al.* (1996) and Ellison (1996).

<sup>11</sup> See, for instance, Thornton's (1985) discussion of the reciprocal causal interrelationships of family and religion.

intense paternal involvement in childrearing, it will be interesting to see whether the growth of conservative Protestantism is linked to its family orientation and how children are influenced by a neotraditional parenting style that spares neither the rod *nor* the hug.

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