Parents' Understanding of Siblings' Conflict Goals in Early and Middle Childhood

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ABSTRACT

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This study examined parents' understanding of their children's conflict goals by interviewing 62 sibling dyads with their primary caregiver. Parents (*M* age = 40.54), older siblings (*M* age = 8.39), and younger siblings (*M* age = 6.06), from each family were individually interviewed and asked to describe the goals of each of the siblings during a recent episode of two recurring conflicts. Overall, findings revealed that when parents described their children's conflict goals, they most frequently referenced instrumental goals (the concrete goals that appear at the surface level of the conflict), in addition to autonomy/ respect, control/ competitiveness, and conciliation/ connectedness types of goals (more abstract goals that at the root of the conflict). Within-family comparisons revealed that parents ascribed more autonomy/ respect and avoiding punishment goals to older siblings and more relative competence and conciliation/ connectedness goals to younger siblings; additional between-family comparisons were used to disambiguate the effects of chronological age and birth order position in accounting for these findings. Furthermore, results revealed that parents' descriptions aligned with those of their children's approximately half of the time, although both parents and children also described additional elements over 80% of the time. Results of this study provide insight into parents' perspectives on their children's conflict goals. Such understandings may be crucial in helping them to intervene effectively into children's conflicts. Findings also illuminate areas where parents might need support in improving their understanding of their children's conflict perspectives.

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Introduction

Conflict with brothers and/or sisters is experienced worldwide by all siblings, regardless of their race, culture, or socioeconomic status, and is a significant feature of their relationship (McGuire, Manke, Eftekhari, & Dunn, 2000). Being in conflict with one another suggests facing incompatible goals (Shantz, 1987). Understanding sibling conflict issues is important to the field of child studies because sibling conflict is related to the development of later social skills (Ross & Lazinski, 2014). Specifically, sibling conflicts can provide children with opportunities to learn conflict resolution skills, while also teaching them perspective-taking and allowing them to deepen their understandings of each other's goals, beliefs, and emotions. Meanwhile, to support these potential developmental benefits of conflict, it is important to recognize the role that parents play in helping siblings understand each other's viewpoints (Recchia, Wainryb, & Howe, 2013). In order for parents to play this role effectively, they need to be able to identify their children's specific conflict goals accurately. In this sense, when parents understand the motives that underlie their children's conflicts, it allows them to gain insight into why their children fought, how they felt during the conflict (Levine, Stein, & Liwag, 1999), and how to best intervene (Martin & Ross, 1996).

Unfortunately, to date, we know little about the kinds of conflict goals that parents attribute to their children, and the extent to which their descriptions are concordant with those of their children (i.e., the extent to which they align with children's own descriptions of their goals). Therefore, the main goal of this study was to explore the perspectives of parents about their children's goals during sibling conflicts. Specifically, we aimed to answer two sets of questions. First, what types of goals do parents attribute to their children? Do parents see their older and younger children as motivated by the same types of goals (e.g., control, attention, etc.)? And second, how concordant are parents' descriptions with those of their children, in identifying their older and younger siblings' conflict goals?

In the following sections, relevant research literature pertaining to sibling conflict issues is reviewed. More specifically, general characteristics of the sibling relationship are described. Following this, features of sibling conflicts are discussed in relation to the literature regarding the positive and negative dimensions of such experiences, and predominant types of sibling conflict goals are outlined. Then, research findings regarding parental intervention is discussed, underscoring the role of parents during sibling conflicts, and emphasizing the importance of their

understanding of their children's conflict goals. Finally, this section ends with a description of the goals and hypotheses of the current study based on the reviewed literature.

Characteristics of the Sibling Relationship

Howe, Ross, and Recchia (2011) described sibling relationships as a combination of hierarchical (imbalance of knowledge and power) and reciprocal (mutual and equal) interactions. More specifically, the age difference between older and younger siblings is linked to an unequal distribution of power, due to their difference in physical strength (e.g., the older sibling is stronger, therefore may cause more harm to the younger sibling in physical altercations) and in their cognitive abilities (e.g., older siblings are better at scaffolding when teaching their younger siblings). Meanwhile, siblings also enjoy a shared history of reciprocal interactions due to their engagement in play, support, and conflict situations.

Moreover, in early and middle childhood, sibling relationships may include combinations of positive, negative, and ambivalent affect, as siblings may not necessarily get along together consistently. However, siblings learn to live together as their shared experiences bring them closer together and lead them to mutually understand one another (Howe et al., 2011). Related to this, Buist and Vermande (2014) characterized sibling relationships as a combination of two main elements, warmth and conflict. They reported four types of relationships between siblings, the "harmonious" (high in warmth, low in conflict), the "conflictual" (high in conflict, low in warmth), the "affect-intense" (high in both), and the "uninvolved" (low in both) sibling types (Buist & Vermande, 2014; Howe et al., 2011).

Evidently, these features of sibling relationships may influence siblings' approaches to resolving their conflicts (Recchia & Howe, 2009b; Rinaldi & Howe, 1998; Ross, Ross, Stein, & Trabasso, 2006). Children in relationships characterized by low warmth may care more about their own gain in conflict (e.g., object, toy, etc.) and may thus be more likely to risk their relationship (Ross et al., 2006) by seeking instrumental benefit and disregarding their sibling's feelings. Moreover, as the quality of the sibling relationship increases, destructive strategies, such as unsatisfying resolutions between the siblings, decrease. Positive sibling relationships encourage siblings to be more concerned about each other and about not damaging their relationship (Recchia & Howe, 2009a). In support of this notion, Rinaldi and Howe (1998) illustrated that frequent sibling conflicts were related to the use of fewer constructive negotiation strategies and more destructive strategies.

Overall, the literature suggests that sibling relationships are characterized by both hierarchical and reciprocal interactions, and include a combination of warmth and conflict. Also, research findings reveal that the degree to which the sibling relationship is positive or negative is related to the use of constructive/ destructive conflict negotiation strategies. In the next section, we elaborate more on these destructive and constructive facets of sibling conflict processes.

Sibling Conflict and the Positive and Negative Dimensions of such Experiences

Shantz (1987) defines conflict as the state of coming into disagreement, or opposition between two parties. Shantz (1987) also adds that conflict suggests that individuals are confronted with each other's incompatible behaviors/ goals, subsequently leading to an opposition of actions or words. Therefore, the concept of conflict implies that children come into opposition as a result of their incompatible goals, which may lead them to resist each other in varied ways (e.g., verbally or physically). Ross, Siddiqui, Ram, and Ward (2004) examined children's understanding of this goal-based nature of their own conflicts with their siblings, and found that even 4-year-olds understood that their conflicts were due to opposition between their own and their siblings' goals.

Early conflict between siblings seems to play a role in children's social, cognitive, and moral development, such as promoting children's conflict resolution skills (Wilson, Smith, Ross, & Ross, 2004) and their ability to perspective-take (Lockwood, Kitzmann, & Cohen, 2001). Conflicts between siblings are considered significant to children's lives, as they teach them to maintain their close relationships (Piotrowski, 1999). Furthermore, sibling conflicts may allow children to acknowledge their differences and promote individuation (Volling, Youngblade, & Belsky, 1997), as well as help them to express their personal boundaries and clarify family rules (Raffaelli, 1997).

However, not all strategies for resolving conflicts are conducive to supporting these developmental ends. Constructive conflict strategies are those that involve negotiating and compromising to resolve conflict in mutually satisfying ways (Rinaldi & Howe, 1998). By contrast, destructive conflict strategies involve the use of verbal or physical threats or aggression, or leaving problems unresolved, and consequently ending up unsatisfied (Rinaldi & Howe, 1998). Those types of strategies weaken the relationship quality between the siblings (Ross et al., 2006) and are associated with a higher frequency of conflict (Rinaldi & Howe, 1998). Frequent hostile conflicts between siblings may lead to feelings of hopelessness and depression (Buist &

Vermande, 2014). Also, previous research has suggested that sibling conflict is what causes most physical harm between siblings, which may increase parents' concern about their children's conflicts (Raffaelli, 1997). Thus, inasmuch as siblings do not always use constructive strategies to resolve their conflicts, conflicts are not always beneficial. For this reason, parents play an important role in supporting siblings' use of constructive strategies (Recchia & Howe, 2009a).

In sum, it appears that sibling conflicts can be both beneficial and harmful. As the literature suggests, they can be beneficial when the siblings' negotiation involves constructive strategies to resolve conflict. On the other hand, they can be harmful when the siblings' negotiation includes destructive strategies. The literature also suggests that the parents' role is crucial in guiding siblings towards more constructive conflict processes; this role will be elaborated further in a subsequent section. However, first, the following section will expand on the types of goals that undergird sibling conflict.

Types of Sibling Conflict Issues and Goals

Different types of goal oppositions are posited to be at the root of sibling conflict. However, the literature does not make a clear distinction between goals that characterize the surface level of the conflict and their explanations at a deeper level. For instance, based on psychoanalytic perspectives positioning siblings as rivals, Howe et al. (2011) explain that the motives behind sibling conflicts can be issues of rivalry over parents' love and attention; conversely, views of conflicts as realistic suggest that siblings fight over concrete issues such as property and space. Yet these theoretical explanations are not incompatible; it is undeniable that siblings fight over property/ space issues, but such issues may not necessarily be the deeper motive of their conflicts. In other words, sibling conflicts may seem to be over actual objects, space, or other tangible issues at the surface level, but digging deeper, they may result from more abstract motives such as rivalry or autonomy. For instance, when children only become interested in certain toys after seeing their siblings grab them, and express a goal of desiring to play with the specific object (the surface level), it may arguably be their desire for control/ competitiveness over shared resources that leads them to have this specific goal. In light of this, the following paragraphs discuss some of the conflict goals that have been posited to underlie sibling conflicts.

Property and entitlement. Often, siblings fight over issues of preserving their rights, properties, and personal space. Such conflicts are the most common between siblings, even in the

early preschool years. For instance, Howe et al. (2011) noted that children as young as 30 months of age defend their property rights by describing their possessions as "mine". Moreover, while chronologically younger siblings seem to fight mostly over sharing possessions and defending their rights (e.g., the right to watch television) (Shantz, 1987), older siblings were more concerned with privacy issues (McGuire et al., 2000). McGuire et al. (2000) claimed that as children get older, they start protecting their properties and recognize their "personal boundaries". Privacy issues also pertain to seeking control over things within one's own personal jurisdiction. Raffaelli (1992) examined conflict issues of early adolescent siblings and also categorized conflict goals of personal property and possessions as a common conflict matter. Additionally, she claimed that most conflict issues between siblings tended not to be recurrent; however, when recurrent issues arose, they tended to concern property (Raffaelli, 1992).

Considering the underlying sources of those conflicts, sibling conflicts over rights and personal boundaries may be related to issues of autonomy. More specifically, children may wish for others to respect their rights and personal boundaries, or to respect the fact that they want to spend time on their own. As stated by Nucci and Weber (1995), when it comes to personal issues, based on the social domain theory, children are less accepting even of adults' authority, although they accept it over moral or conventional issues. Children need some freedom of choice over their personal matters in order to enhance their development of autonomy (Nucci & Weber, 1995). Moreover, conflicts over entitlements that raise issues of fairness are also common problems between siblings (Recchia & Howe, 2010). Such conflicts may also relate to siblings' desire to obtain fair access to shared resources.

Taken together, although siblings' conflicts often concern property and entitlements, there may be a number of motives that underlie these disputes, including desires for respect and autonomy.

Warmth and closeness. As stated earlier, sibling relationships are characterized by warmth in addition to conflict (Buist & Vermande, 2014). McGuire et al. (2000) reported that while earlierborns were more concerned with privacy issues, laterborns were more concerned with the physical aggression present in their interactions with their siblings. This suggests that younger siblings are motivated to achieve peace in their relationships with their older siblings. In support of this interpretation, Buhrmester and Furman (1990) reported that while older siblings seem bothered by their younger siblings (e.g., finding them immature), younger siblings seem to

value and desire their interaction with their older counterparts. Such conflict issues seem to be related to the desire of feeling recognized by, and connected to, one's sibling, as well as having a peaceful relationship with one's sibling. This may also explain why sometimes younger siblings seek their older siblings' attention by annoying them.

Raffaelli (1992) also reported similar issues between early adolescent siblings. Specifically, they reported that some conflict instances between siblings in their sample were about their relationship betrayal. According to Raffaelli (1992), such instances included talking negatively about one's sibling to a friend (i.e., gossiping), or wanting a sibling to play with him/her while the sibling wants to go out (i.e., exclusion), which also relate to issues of connectedness. Likewise, Shantz (1987) claimed that as children get older, their sibling conflict goals become more about the social environment (e.g., receiving attention).

Overall, as warmth is a salient dimension of siblings' relationships, it seems that instances when children bother their siblings or fight over wanting to play with them may stem from desires for connectedness. Therefore, when considering the deep structure of a conflict, it may be that in some instances, siblings are seeking out feelings of connectedness with their sibling, rather than insisting that they want to spend time with them just for the sake of being annoying, for example.

Hostility. Although sibling relationships include warmth and intimate interactions, they may include intense or hostile interactions as well (Recchia, Wainryb, & Pasupathi, 2013). Conflict issues that are referred to as hostile or retaliatory are those that involve intentionally provoking, disturbing, or hurting one's sibling. Such conflict issues are often reported between siblings. For example, McGuire et al. (2000) reported instances of these types of conflicts, such as teasing and physical and verbal aggression, and Raffaelli (1992) reported issues of hurting, bugging, and roughhousing, as well as intentional and unintentional physical abuse. Interestingly, Recchia, Wainryb, and Pasupathi (2013) found that siblings described harming each other in relatively ruthless ways, suggesting a lack of concern for the other. Retaliatory motives were also found between siblings; Recchia, Wainryb, and Pasupathi found that children describe instances of aggression occurring in reaction to being teased or provoked by their sibling. Therefore, when considering the deep structure of the conflict, instances where children aggressively respond to their siblings' provoking acts may be undergirded by their conflict goals of retaliation.

In sum, children do sometimes use hostile behaviors towards their siblings, such as teasing or disturbing them. In response, their siblings might also behave with them in similar ways.

Rivalry. Rivalry over parents' love and attention is also reported as an issue of sibling conflict. Previous theorists, such as Freud (1916/1917) (as cited by McGuire et al., 2000) and Adler (1964) (as cited by Howe et al., 2011) have claimed that siblings fight over their parents' love and attention. Such instances of conflict issues are sometimes apparent when children tattle to their parents on their siblings' wrongdoings, in order to give the impression that they are good in comparison (Howe et al., 2011). Yet when McGuire et al. (2000) examined the content of school-aged siblings' conflicts, they reported a very small portion of siblings mentioning their parent's love and attention as their conflict goal. Similarly, Raffaelli (1992) seemed to not have found rivalry disputes among early adolescent siblings. Therefore, previous studies have claimed that children deny rivalry as being their source of conflict (Howe et al., 2011); even so, this does not illuminate whether parents perceive instances of rivalry in conflicts between their children.

Rivalry between siblings is not limited to children's direct competition over parents' attention or positive regard. Rather, it can also be conceptualized as encompassing broader issues involving other types of siblings' inherent competition relating to power/ control, such as wanting things their own way. For instance, Howe, Rinaldi, Jennings, and Petrakos (2002) explained that siblings sometimes fight when planning for fantasy play. When children impose roles for their siblings for pretend play, in some cases, it may be simply because they want things their way and to control the interaction. Further, other types of conflicts are more specifically related to power issues based on Raffaelli (1992). Such conflicts are very common between early adolescent siblings. An example of such a disagreement is children giving orders to their siblings (Raffaelli, 1992). Related to this, Adler's view of social comparison may particularly explain this dimension of sibling rivalry. Social comparison motivates siblings to overcome their sense of inferiority (Whiteman, McHale, & Soli, 2011). Hence, children compare themselves to others who they admire, and who have higher status and greater capabilities (Whiteman et al., 2011), which might justify why younger children envy their siblings, imitate and attempt to perform skills as competently as their older siblings. Such instances are apparent when children claim they want to become capable of achieving certain skills like their siblings (e.g., wanting to reach

sibling's level at reading). These kinds of rivalry issues imply children's desire for competence, relative to their sibling.

In sum, rivalry over parents' attention is evident in siblings' interactions, although they do not commonly describe their conflicts as driven by these motives. Otherwise, children would not tattle on their siblings to give the impression of being right (Howe et al., 2011). Other forms of rivalry between siblings are also apparent, such as those related to power/ control issues, as well as those related to their desires of relative competence. Nonetheless, as there are different explanations behind sibling rivalry, it may suggest that rivalry requires deeper explanations of sibling conflicts that do not appear at the surface level and are more difficult for young children to articulate.

Overall, siblings fight over different issues to attain varied goals, some of which are more concrete and specific to particular types of events, and others that reflect the broader motives that underlie sibling disputes. In cases when underlying motives are more abstract, children may not be capable of pinpointing their own and others' motives that are at the root of their conflicts. Instead, they are more likely to identify simply the event-specific goals of their dispute. Parents on the other hand, are more capable of describing the deep structure of their children's conflicts. As discussed further in subsequent sections, this is one important reason for parents to intervene, and also suggests that parents' unique perspectives on sibling conflict goals are worthy of further study.

Parents' Role in Sibling Conflict

Parents play a significant role is fostering constructive approaches to resolving conflict between siblings (Recchia, Wainryb, & Howe, 2013). In certain circumstances, parents' assistance is necessary as siblings may behave destructively (e.g., causing harm or being unfair), and thus parents' presence during siblings' conflicts allows them to impose rules and promote perspective-taking, which may limit the siblings' hurtful behaviors during their disagreements (Recchia, Wainryb, & Howe, 2013). Moreover, as age differences may result in a power imbalance between the older and younger sibling, parental intervention may also reduce this discrepancy. For instance, in early and middle childhood, older siblings may be more skilled at speaking for themselves, whereas younger siblings may have a harder time expressing themselves (Recchia & Howe, 2009b). Therefore, in such cases and in other cases of power

imbalance due to a large age difference, parents play a role of compensating for this disparity (Recchia, Wainryb, & Howe, 2013).

On the other hand, though parents may play a positive role in helping children to resolve conflict by promoting constructive negotiation strategies between siblings, their intervention may not always be required. Sometimes parents are encouraged not to get involved in their children's conflicts, in order to provide children with opportunities to learn how to resolve conflicts on their own (Howe et al., 2011). Also, parents may not necessarily always intervene into their children's conflicts in ways that teach children to use constructive strategies in later conflicts. For example, Kramer, Perozynski, and Chung (1999) found that for young children, controlling parental interventions led to further conflicts. Overall, parental interventions involving authoritarian approaches tend to be discouraged, as they are associated with a decrease in siblings' engagement with one another, or to additional conflicts (Kramer et al., 1999). Further, Brody, Stoneman, and McCoy (1992) confirmed that parental interventions including differential treatment are associated with further conflicts between the siblings. Likewise, Rinaldi and Howe (1998) found that how parents treated their children relative to one another was a predictor of conflict. They claimed that when children sense differential treatment and feel that their parents are not fair to them, they may not deal with their parents, and instead, they may "take it out" on their sibling (Rinaldi & Howe, 1998). Such effects can happen unintentionally, and therefore parents should be careful when intervening in sibling conflicts and should ensure to provide both siblings the opportunity to express their side of the conflict. Particularly germane to the current study, it is possible that if parents understand one sibling's goals better than the other sibling, children may feel their parents are favoring their siblings over them. In the next section, we elaborate on the importance of parents' understanding of their children's conflict goals.

Parents' Understanding of their Children's Conflict Goals

Theories of disagreement suggest that children express what matters to them through conflicts, by defying others' resistance and trying to attain their goals. Even if others might view the children's goals as unimportant or trivial, their goals are still very meaningful to them (Raffaelli, 1992). Therefore, one crucial reason for parents to understand their children's goals could be to gain insight into what is important to their children. For instance, as older siblings fight over their right to spend some time alone in their room, they may be expressing their desire for autonomy and respect and delineating their individual boundaries. Conflictingly, younger

siblings may not understand their older siblings' point of view. They may look up to their older siblings (Buhrmester & Furman, 1990) and use different tactics to seek their attention. This might include insisting on playing with them, and thus expressing their desire for connectedness. Therefore, for parents to intervene effectively, they need to first understand each child's competing perspective in a given conflict. That is, to be able to facilitate perspective-taking between siblings, parents must have a good understanding of what is important to their children and of their conflict goals. Furthermore, because children during early and middle childhood have relatively limited social-cognitive understandings, they have not reached the same level of perspective-taking as adults. Therefore, adults (parents) may be instrumental in helping them understand each other's viewpoint, in order to promote their perspective-taking (Recchia, Wainryb, & Howe, 2013).

Also, related to this, when parental intervention into sibling conflict becomes necessary, parents need to understand their children's conflict goals in order to effectively assist them in constructively resolving their conflicts. Identifying children's goals when assisting them is paramount because, for instance, the way a mother views and interprets her children's conflicts, influences how she manages to help her children resolve their conflicts. That is, the way parents view and interpret events influences how they respond to them (Martin & Ross, 1996). A mother might react differently to a situation in which her daughter hits her younger brother intentionally with a toy than to a situation where her daughter hits her brother accidentally. If the mother believes that her daughter committed the act accidentally, she might be less frustrated about it than if she interprets that her daughter committed it on purpose for retaliatory reasons. Indeed, mothers worldwide judge intentional harm to be more worthy of punishment than accidental harm (Henderson, Brody, Lane, & Parra, 1982). In general, then, parents react to their children's transgressions depending on their understanding of their children's goals and of why they behaved the way they did (Martin & Ross, 1996).

Similarly, goal-based theories of emotion have emphasized the importance of parental understanding of their children's goals during conflict, because parents interpret their children's emotions based on whether their goals have been attained (Levine et al., 1999). More specifically, if a child's goal was attained, parents would predict their child is happy, whereas if the child's goal was not attained, then parents would predict their child is sad. Thus, parents' perceptions of their children's emotions may also not be as accurate when parents cannot identify

their children's goals. In the context of their study on parent-child conflicts, Levine et al. (1999) found that both opponents agreed on how each other felt when both sides recognized the goals of the other.

In sum, it is important that parents are accurate in identifying their children's goals. If parents are not capable of correctly identifying them, this may also hinder their ability to correctly identify children's emotions. As a result, parents in such cases may not be able to help their children constructively resolve their conflicts.

The Current Study

Although the literature reviewed in this thesis has explored siblings' descriptions of their conflicts and the issues and motivations implicated in those conflicts (Howe et al., 2011; McGuire et al., 2000; Raffaelli, 1992; Ross et al., 2004; Shantz, 1987), the contribution of previous studies is limited in the area of how parents specifically describe their children's conflict goals. Specifically, we know little about how parents perceive sibling conflict goals, including how they describe the "deep structure" of the conflict in addition to event-specific or surface-level goals. More precisely, we operationalize the 'deep structure' of the conflict as referring to the abstract motives that are at the root of siblings' disputes. In contrast, 'event-specific' goals refer to the goals that are more apparent at the surface level of the conflict. To clarify, consider the following example. A younger sibling is trying to tell a story to her older sibling who is ignoring her, and then starts singing and bothering her brother until he listens to her. As a result, the older sibling gets mad and hits his younger sister so that she stops. In this case, if the mother specifies that the younger child is seeking attention from her older sibling, she would be describing the deep structure of this conflict, the motive that she perceives to be at the root of the conflict. On the other hand, if she claims that the younger sibling's goal was to tell the older sibling a story, she would be describing the event-specific goal, the motive that appeared at the surface level of the conflict.

With this in mind, although siblings may frequently fight over concrete objects or entitlements, the issues ultimately causing their conflicts can also be more abstract. As stated earlier, conflicts between siblings can reflect issues of older siblings' concern with privacy (McGuire et al., 2000), which may indicate their desire for autonomy. Conflicts in response to parental differential treatment also highlight the distinction between deep structure and event-specific goals, such that perceptions of inequality lead to disputes between siblings and siblings

react by taking it out on each other (Rinaldi & Howe, 1998). In such instances, siblings may be frequently fighting over trivial matters, while what is ultimately at issue is their feelings that their parents favor their sibling over them. Documenting parents' perspectives and understandings of these issues is important, because parents' interpretations of their children's goals influence how they react to them (Martin & Ross, 1996). Thus, if for instance a child is affected by her mother's differential treatment, and the mother is not able to accurately identify her daughter's goal of receiving equal treatment as her sibling, she will not be able to intervene effectively into her children's conflicts. Further, as alluded to above, other important reasons why parents should accurately identify their children's conflict goals are to be able to correctly identify their emotions (Levine et al., 1999), foster their perspective taking (Recchia, Wainryb, & Howe, 2013), and subsequently promote their use of constructive resolution strategies.

The main goal of this study was to explore the perspectives of parents on children's goals during sibling conflicts. The theoretical frameworks guiding this question are the psychoanalytic view, stressing that siblings having deeper motives that are driving conflict, in addition to the more realistic view emphasizing siblings fighting over more concrete issues (Howe et al., 2011). In order to investigate parents' descriptions, primary caregivers were asked about their 4- to 10-year-old children's conflict goals in two different recurring sibling conflicts. Although the main aim of the study was to investigate parents' perspectives, children's perspectives were also taken into consideration in order to make comparisons and assess the concordance of parents' descriptions with those of their children. Additionally, this study aimed to examine birth order and child age effects, in relation to the types of goals parents attribute to older and younger children. Therefore, the study was designed in a way that allowed us to disentangle birth order effects from age related differences. In the method section, further details are specified regarding how these effects were disentangled.

We hypothesized that parents would frequently refer to the deep structure of sibling conflicts, unlike children who may be more likely to describe immediate event-specific goals as they may not be as capable of identifying the root of their conflict (McGuire et al., 2000). In addition, as children seem more concerned with privacy issues with increasing age (McGuire et al., 2000), we expected parents to attribute autonomy-related goals (e.g., protecting their property or defending individual boundaries) to chronologically older children. Further, because younger children seem to show more admiration for their older sibling (Buhrmester & Furman, 1990),

which may be related to their developmental phase, we also expected parents to attribute connectedness-related goals (wanting to spend time/ play with siblings) more often to chronologically younger children. That is, as children get older and as they reach adolescence, they gradually become more inclined to want privacy as they start building outside relationships (Buhrmester & Furman, 1990). Therefore, when the younger sibling reaches the age associated with this increased desire of privacy, they may also no longer aim to spend as much time with their older siblings as they did in their early years. Meanwhile, birth order effects may also influence such autonomy and connectedness-related (deeper level) conflict goals. As laterborns admire their older counterparts, they sometimes imitate their behaviors or desire to participate in their activities. Firstborns might be bothered by such behaviors, and subsequently seek to uphold their privacy rights (McGuire et al., 2000). Therefore, in sum, we expected autonomy and connectedness-related conflict goals to be related to both chronological age and birth order effects.

Moreover, we had competing hypotheses about power-related and competitive goals. On the one hand, older siblings show signs of power related issues (Raffaelli, 1992), as they sometimes appear to cause conflict by giving orders to their siblings. They also display dominant roles in their instances of negotiating conflicts (Howe et al., 2002), which suggests they show some inclination to desire control in interactions with their siblings. Thus, one possibility is that parents may mostly attribute power-related goals to older siblings. Even so, younger siblings also show instances of competitiveness and desires for control, as they react to their older siblings' dominance over them. For example, they show early signs of tattling, which may be related to rivalry issues with their siblings (Howe et al., 2011). Hence, younger siblings also appear to desire control, which may lead to the alternative hypothesis that parents attribute power-related goals most frequently to younger siblings. Overall, then, as firstborns are naturally more dominant in power due to their status in the family of being the oldest sibling, secondborns would naturally have less power than the older siblings, due to their status of being younger. Regardless of which hypothesis was ultimately supported, these patterns suggested that power-related goals are most clearly related to the children's positions in the family. Thus, we expected that power-related issues would be related to children's birth order rather than their chronological age. Further, as firstborns are placed in a position of being older than secondborns, they often are better at performing certain skills and excelling at them (e.g., reading). Thus, in

comparison to firstborns, we anticipated parents to attribute mostly to secondborns goals such as seeking relative competence to their sibling.

With respect to issues of concordance, parents are often involved as third parties to children's disputes, which may imply accuracy in their descriptions of children's conflicts. More specifically, during instances when parents have witnessed the siblings' conflict, they may have some insight into each child's motivations. Parents might thus be able to predict each child's perspective, and would not need to rely on the children's descriptions to grasp the issues involved in the conflict. Therefore, we expected that, overall, parents' descriptions would include shared elements with their children's conflict perspectives. Nevertheless, we anticipated that parents and children would each report additional goals that might not necessarily align with one another. Although parents and children are referring to the same conflicts, they are different individuals, thus they are likely to express their varied perspectives on the goals underlying disputes. Conversely, we expected that parents' and children's descriptions would rarely explicitly contradict each other.

Even so, we hypothesized that parents' descriptions may be more concordant (i.e., be more likely to include shared elements) with older siblings' descriptions as compared to those of younger siblings. Older siblings are better than younger siblings at verbalizing their goals to their parents (Recchia, Wainryb, & Howe, 2013), and thus may be more capable of providing parents with a clear description of their motives. Meanwhile, younger children may think about conflicts in ways that are more divergent from those of their parents, hence this might lead their parents to less precisely capture their perspectives in order to describe them concordantly.

Method

Participants

Participants in this study included 62 sibling dyads along with their primary caregivers. The families were recruited through participant databases, newspaper advertisements, and through word of mouth. The children participating in the study were between 3.50 to 10.75 years of age. The age range of older siblings was between 6.33 and 10.75 years (M = 8.39, SD = 1.21) and the age range of younger siblings was between 3.50 and 8.75 years (M = 6.06, SD = 1.14). The age difference between the siblings ranged from 0.92 to 4.33 years (M = 2.33, SD = 0.70).

Of the total sample of 62, 60 dyads included a six- to eight-year-old child (M age = 7.3); this feature of our sample composition allowed us to examine birth order effects while holding

age effects constant. That is, half of these 6- to 8-year-olds participated with their older sibling (n = 30), while the other half participated with their younger sibling (n = 30). Meanwhile, the two families that did not include a 6- to 8-year-old both had 5- and 9-year-old sibling dyads.

Moreover, 33 of the dyads were of same gender (15 girl dyads and 18 boy dyads), and 29 were mixed gender (16 older brother dyads and 13 older sister dyads). Older children in the study were mainly firstborns (n = 48), while 14 families had nonparticipating older siblings (between 9 and 19 years old); 15 families also had nonparticipating younger siblings (between 0 and 4 years old).

The primary caregivers in the study were mainly mothers (n = 54), with seven fathers, and one legal guardian. The age of the caregivers ranged between 28 to 58 years (M = 40.45, SD = 5.13). The families were mostly two-parent, while eight were one-parent, including six mothers, one father, and a legal guardian. The majority of the families were of European Canadian descent (75%), while the remaining 25% were of Middle Eastern (e.g., Armenian), African (e.g., Egyptian), South American (e.g., Guyanese), and Asian (e.g., Filipino) descent. The educational status of the caregivers varied between achieving a high school diploma to post-graduate studies, ranging between 0 to 12 years of post-secondary education (M = 3.3). Their occupations and socioeconomic status varied, but the majority were middle-income families. Two families dropped from the study after the first session due to medical issues. However, their conflict descriptions from their first session were still included in the analyses of this study. The parents gave written informed consent for their children's participation in the study, while children provided verbal assent. In order to thank families for their participation, parents received gift certificates and each of the siblings received a small toy.

Procedure

The families participated in a total of two sessions, at their home (n=55) or at a university laboratory (n=7). The same research assistants were assigned to each family across sessions so as to build rapport. After a warm up period, children were individually interviewed by a research assistant. They were asked to nominate at least three recurrent conflicts they had with their sibling. The conflict nomination script of the interview is available in Appendix A. Afterwards, both children and their parents were brought together to agree on and choose two conflicts to discuss during the study. The research assistants were present to guide them. The criteria for choosing the conflicts, in descending order, were: (a) the conflict was nominated by both

children, (b) culpability was unclear, (c) the conflict was recent, and (d) the conflict was affectively intense.

The children all agreed on the two conflicts they were going to discuss. One conflict was randomly selected to be discussed during the first session. After an average of 10 days (*SD*=7.3, range: 1-39 days), the participants were interviewed again to discuss the second conflict.
In each individual conflict interview, parents and children were first asked to recall precisely the last time the specific conflict had occurred, and to describe the whole situation that took place. Subsequently, more specific questions were asked that formed the focus of the study. Parents and children were asked to describe each of the children's goals when the specific conflict occurred, as well as to explain the reasons behind the goals. Precisely, parents were asked *"When they are having this fight, what does {older sibling} want? Why?"* and *"what does {younger sibling} want? Why?"* Children were asked the same questions, but with slightly different wording ("*When you are having this fight, what do you want? Why?*" and "*what does {sibling} want? Why?*"). Further, since emotions are fundamentally related to goals, and considering emotions may be predicted through goal attainment (Levine et al., 1999), we also analyzed parents and children's responses to a series of questions about each child's emotions. Parents were specifically asked, "*When they are having this fight, how does {older sibling} feel? Why?*" and "*how does {younger sibling} feel? Why*?" Children were also asked the same questions with slightly different wording (i.e., "…*what do you/does your sibling feel? … Why?")*. The scripts used for interviewing parents and children are both available in Appendix B. We particularly focused on parents' and children's justifications for emotions, as they often included references to motivations (e.g., "He felt angry that his brother was invading his space"). Thus, responses to this question provided additional information about children's motives. The interviews were all audiotaped and transcribed verbatim.

Coding

The coding that was used in this study was based on the parents' descriptions of the siblings' conflicts. The coding scheme was partly adapted from previous coding conducted by Recchia, Peccia, and Rajput (2015), which focused exclusively on children's descriptions of goals. This adapted coding scheme is available in Appendix C, with examples pertaining to each code. Parents' descriptions of each child's goal(s) were coded, based on responses to questions about both motivations and emotions. Although categories were mutually exclusive and

exhaustive, it was possible for parents to reference more than one goal: in these cases, a particular response was double-coded. Presence/absence of each type of goal was recorded dichotomously for each child in each conflict. The codes included *autonomy/respect*, *control/competitiveness*, *relative competence*, *rivalry over parents*, *avoiding punishment hostile/retaliatory*, *conciliation/connectedness, self-defense, instrumental shared*, and *instrumental distinct* (see Appendix C for more details). Further, the children's descriptions were coded using the same coding scheme, in order to compare them to parents' descriptions (see also Recchia & Witwit, 2016, for comparative analyses of the types of goals described by parents and children).

Moreover, a second coding scheme was used to assess the concordance of the parents' descriptions with those of their children. The details of this coding scheme are available in Appendix D, with relevant examples. Specifically, for a particular child's perspective in a given conflict, the parents' descriptions of children's conflict goals were compared to the children's descriptions. Thus, four aspects of each conflict were coded: (1) the parent and the older child's concordance on the older child's goal(s), (2) the parent and the older child's concordance on the younger child's goal(s), (3) the parent and the younger child's concordance on the older child's goal(s), and (4) the parent and the younger child's concordance on the younger child's goal(s). Each of these four aspects was initially coded for whether it was *not possible to distinguish* (*NPD*), in order to identify whether the responses could be compared and assessed for concordance. *NPD* was coded when it was not possible to determine whether the parent's description and the child's description referred to the same conflict goals. This could occur for two reasons: (1) due to the difference instances of conflict they described (each described a distinct episode of a recurring conflict), or (2) when one of the actors (parent/ child) responded they did not know what was the goal underlying a specific conflict.

Following this initial pass, the instances that were not coded as *NPD* were coded dichotomously for the presence or absence of *shared elements*, *parent additional elements*, *child additional elements, and true disagreement.* It is important to recall that parents and/or children could describe multiple goals for the same conflict. A *shared element* was coded when at least one of the goals described by the parent matched one of the goals described by the child. Meanwhile, the remaining goals described by the parents that did not match, yet did not oppose, the ones stated by the child, were coded as parent additional elements. Likewise, the remaining

goals described by the child, not matching nor opposing the ones stated by the parent, were coded as child additional elements. Finally, *true disagreement* was coded when at least one of the goals referred by the parent was in direct opposition/contradiction to one of the goals referenced by the child.

Interrater Reliability

Interrater reliability was established for all coding. Two independent raters coded 20% of the interview data. One of the raters was blind to the study's hypotheses. Cohen's *kappas* were calculated for all codes individually and reported in Appendix E. Disagreements were resolved via discussion and consensus.

Results

Plan of Analysis

Data were analyzed by proportionalizing parents' attributions of goals to each child by the number of conflicts described by that parent (i.e., scores for each type of goal attributed to each child ranged from 0 to 1). Subsequently, a repeated measures MANOVA was used to analyze the types of goals parents attributed to each child. This analysis also provided descriptive information about the extent to which parents described conflict goals by referring to their deep structure, compared to the extent to which they referred to the event-specific goals. To investigate birth order effects while holding age effects constant, independent samples *t*-tests were also conducted to examine parents' attributions as a function of whether they were describing a 6- to 8-year-old child with either an older or a younger sibling. Conversely, to examine age effects while holding birth order constant, correlations were also examined between chronological age and parents' goal attributions, separately for older and younger siblings. Finally, a series of repeated measures ANOVAs was used to assess parents' concordance with children in their goal attributions to older and younger siblings.

Types of Goals

First, we conducted a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) with the types of goals attributed to older and younger siblings as dependent variables and birth order as a repeated measures independent variable (older sibling vs. younger sibling). This analysis revealed a multivariate effect of birth order, Wilk's $\lambda = .612$, $\eta^2 = .388$, $p < .01$.

Follow-up ANOVAs revealed effects of birth order for autonomy/ respect: $F(1,61) = 4.286$, $p = .043$, $\eta^2 = .066$; relative competence: $F(1,61) = 11.428$, $p = .001$, $\eta^2 = .158$; avoiding

punishment: $F(1,61) = 5.872$, $p = .018$, $\eta^2 = .088$; and conciliation/ connectedness: $F(1,61) = 15.100$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .198$. Means and standard errors for each measure are reported in Table 1. Pairwise comparisons revealed that parents attributed more autonomy/ respect and avoiding punishment types of goals to older siblings than to younger siblings. On the other hand, parents attributed more relative competence and conciliation/ connectedness types of goals to younger siblings than to older siblings.

Table 1
Types of Goals Parents Attribute to Older and Younger Siblings During Siblings Conflict

	Older Sibling *M (SE)*	Younger Sibling *M (SE)*
Autonomy/ respect	.379 (.047)*	.242 (.043)*
Control/ competitiveness	.395 (.048)	.371 (.050)
Relative competence	.008 (.008)*	.129 (.0.34)*
Rivalry over parents	.105 (.033)	.048 (.022)
Avoiding punishment	.073 (.025)*	.016 (.011)*
Hostile/ retaliatory	.065 (.024)	.073 (.025)
Conciliation/ connectedness	.121 (.034)*	.306 (.044)*
Self-defense	.040 (.021)	.008 (.008)
Instrumental shared	.323 (.038)	.339 (.043)
Instrumental distinct	.218 (.037)	.210 (.034)

Note. Means are reported as proportions of conflicts, ranging from 0 to 1. * denotes significant pairwise comparison at $p < .05$.

Birth order effects. To examine role effects with age held constant, we also used *t*-tests to compare parents' attributions of goals to 6- to 8-year-olds as a function of whether they were describing conflicts with older siblings vs. younger siblings. There was a significant effect for relative competence, $t(29) = 2.804$, $p = .009$, and a trend for control/competitiveness, $t(58) = -1.764$, $p = .083$. Pairwise comparisons showed that parents attribute relative competence-related goals to 6- to 8-year olds only in conflicts with older siblings ($M = .133$, $SE = .048$), whereas these goals were never ascribed to 6- to 8-year olds in conflict with younger siblings ($M = .000$). On the other hand, parents ascribed more control-related goals to 6- to 8-year olds who were in conflict with younger siblings ($M = .467$, $SE = .068$) than with older siblings ($M = .300$, $SE = .066$).

Chronological age effects. We also examined correlations between goal attributions and children's ages, separately for older and younger siblings (i.e., secondborns ranged in age from 4- to 8-years, and firstborns from 6- to 10-years). There were no significant associations between

older siblings' ages and parents' attributions of goals to older siblings. Similarly, there were no significant associations between younger siblings' age and parents' attributions of goals to younger siblings.

Concordance

Some instances could not be assessed for concordance as they were coded as not possible to distinguish (11.9%). Approximately half of the instances coded as *NPD* (48.3%) were due to the parent and child describing different episodes of the specific conflict. The other half (51.7%) were due to the children claiming they could not identify (i.e., didn't know) a particular goal.

For instances that were not coded as *NPD*, we assessed three aspects of concordance: shared elements, parent additional elements, and child additional elements. The fourth aspect, true disagreement, was very rare (appeared < 2% of the time), thus it was not analyzed further. We conducted ANOVAs examining each of these measures of concordance as a function of child (i.e., which child the parent was concordant with: older vs. younger sibling) and perspective (i.e., whose perspective was being discussed: older vs. younger sibling). There were no significant effects. Overall, parents' descriptions of siblings' conflict goals were concordant with each child's descriptions about 50% of the time (M = .531 for shared elements, SE = .036). Meanwhile, these descriptions included frequent references to additional elements by both parents (M = .950, SE = .015) and children (M = .849, SE = .020).

It is important to point out that we considered the possibility that families would discuss the conflicts between the two sessions, potentially leading to increased concordance in the descriptions of session 2. However, we found no clear evidence of parents' and children's descriptions being more concordant in the second session; the concordance rates were similar across sessions (and in fact, very slightly higher in session 1).

Discussion

This study aimed to examine parents' descriptions of their children's conflict goals. We focused on capturing parents' perspectives on the goals at the root of the siblings' conflicts, alongside their descriptions of the problems at the surface level. The findings provide new information about the goals that parents attribute to older and younger siblings, and about the extent to which these attributions are concordant with their children's descriptions of their own conflict goals. The following section provides detailed descriptions of each set of findings, and limitations of this study are reviewed, as well as some implications of this research.

Parents' Attribution of Goals to Older and Younger Siblings

Firstly, results revealed that parents frequently made reference to instrumental types of goals that are at the surface level of the conflict. However, along with instrumental goals, and as anticipated, parents also frequently referred to other motives reflecting the deep structure underlying apparently instrumental conflicts. That is, parents' responses often combined both types of issues, as in the example: "He doesn't want her in his room, he needs space. He wants to be able to keep his things in a place where nobody touches them". In this instance, the mother was portraying her son's instrumental goal that he wants to place his objects where no one touches them, in addition to the underlying autonomy/ respect goal of protecting his personal space and possessions. Indeed, besides instrumental goals, autonomy/ respect, control/ competitiveness, and conciliation/ connectedness-related goals were the types of motives most often ascribed by parents to children. Other goals, such as relative competence, rivalry over parents, avoiding punishment, hostile/ retaliatory, and self-defense, were infrequently attributed by parents.

Our study is the first to focus on parents' unique descriptions of the sources of sibling conflict. With respect to rivalry, the findings are consistent with past research focused on children's perceptions of sibling conflict, which claimed that children refer infrequently to rivalry over parents as a conflict motive (e.g., McGuire et al., 2000). In contrast, parents' focus was on autonomy/ respect related goals (personal property and possession issues), which is also what children also often perceive as a source of their fights (e.g., McGuire et al., 2000). Accordingly, Raffaelli (1992) has emphasized that most early adolescent sibling conflicts are not recurrent, but when there were, they were related to autonomy/ respect related goals (personal property and possession issues). As our study was based on recurrent conflicts, this can possibly explain why parents also frequently viewed children to have issues over autonomy/ respect related matters. Nevertheless, by contrast to other studies indicating that children perceive hostile/ retaliatory issues as relatively common conflict concerns (McGuire et al., 2000), our study did not illustrate similar results for parents. Additionally, our study revealed that parents viewed control/ competitiveness and conciliation/ connectedness as a common source of sibling conflicts, which is not viewed as frequently by children as a common issue compared to property and possession issues. However, early adolescents do perceive power-related issues as a regular conflict issue with their siblings (Rafaelli, 1992).

Moreover, our results revealed that parents showed different patterns when ascribing goals to each of their children. Some goals were more often attributed to their older or younger children. This distinction might be due to children's chronological age or children's birth order position, and past studies have often confounded these two dimensions (e.g., McGuire et al., 2000). Therefore, the results of this study helped us delineate the goals that parents particularly attributed to older and younger siblings, depending on their chronological age, and the goals parents specifically ascribed to earlierborn and laterborn children, depending on their birth order.

In repeated measures analyses based on the whole sample of parents and children, results confirmed that parents attributed more autonomy/ respect types of goals to older siblings than to younger siblings. This is consistent with past research emphasizing older siblings' desire to have their privacy respected (McGuire et al., 2000). For example, one mother describing her older son's goal by stating, "He wants his privacy, he just wants her to take three giant steps and close the door. He's in the middle of something, and something that isn't a social thing, something that's an alone thing". Nonetheless, when the subsample of 6- to 8-years old participating with an older vs. younger sibling was examined, in order to disentangle birth order from age effects, no link was found between autonomy-related goals and birth order. In other words, regardless of whether they were reporting on 6- to 8-year olds' conflicts with earlierborns or laterborn siblings, parents ascribed autonomy/ respect goals to the same extent. On the other hand, there was a modest correlation between parents' ascription of autonomy-related goals and younger siblings' chronological age (r = .20). Although this association did not reach statistical significance, this provides some evidence that the observed distinction between older and younger siblings in the complete sample may be due more to chronological age than to birth order effects. However, it is somewhat surprising that this correlation was limited to younger siblings (i.e., 4- to 8-year-olds) rather than older siblings (i.e., 6- to 10-year-olds); based on past research, when children begin to enter early adolescence, their interactions with their siblings decrease while their focus on outside relationships increases (Buhrmester & Furman, 1990) as does their concern with privacy (McGuire et al., 2000). For this reason, we would have expected autonomy/ respect-related goals to be more closely associated with older siblings' chronological age. However, since this study focuses on parents' perceptions of siblings conflict goals, perhaps parents view a change in their chronologically younger children's interactions when they enter school, which accounts for why they described younger siblings as more often driven by

autonomy/ respect related goals with age. For instance, parents' attributions of autonomy goals to younger siblings included descriptions of them wanting to be left on their own in order to "do whatever [they are] doing", as well as their desires to preserve their rights (e.g., having their turn on the computer).

Additionally, as predicted, parents ascribed conciliation/connectedness-related goals more frequently to younger siblings than to older siblings. Consistent with Buhrmester and Furman (1990) who emphasized that laterborns cherish their interactions with their older counterparts, our findings reflect parents' perceptions that younger siblings desire to interact with their older siblings more than vice versa. For instance, in describing her younger son's goal, a mother noted: "I don't know if he wants anything other than to just be doing stuff with his older brother. He very much looks up to him". Because younger children's first close-in-age relationships are those with their earlierborn siblings, this can explain why parents perceive younger siblings to enjoy spending time with their older counterparts; in contrast, older siblings increasingly develop relationships outside of the family and desire spending time with their friends (Buhrmester & Furman, 1990). In addition, it is also possible that parents view older siblings as less interested in and less likely to admire their younger siblings due to the power difference between them. However, although we initially anticipated that parents' attributions of such goals would be associated with both children's chronological age and their birth order, this study suggests that parents' references to these goals are more clearly linked uniquely to role effects rather than chronological age effects. The fact that the correlation between chronological age and parents' reference to connectedness-related goals was very weakly positive (r = .03 with the age of the younger sibling) or even negative (r = -.14 with the age of the older sibling) indicates for both children that there is no solid link with chronological age. On the other hand, while the association between birth order and parents' ascription of connectedness-related goals also did not reach statistical significance when the subgroup of 6- to 8-year-olds was examined, the means were quite distinct (32% for younger siblings and 18% for older siblings). Therefore, since the sample was divided into halves in order to identify unique birth order effects, this lack of significance is perhaps explained by the fact that the sample size was smaller and thus we lacked power to detect moderately-sized effects.

Initially, we had competing hypotheses regarding whether parents would attribute power-related goals to older or to younger siblings. Older siblings' behaviors imply some power-related

desires, as they are known to be capable of nurturing their younger siblings, as well as dominating them (Buhrmester & Furman, 1990). This led us to think parents might attribute more of such goals to older siblings. Meanwhile, younger siblings may also wish for power due to their older counterparts' dominant behavior over them, which may lead parents to attribute such goals to younger siblings. Nonetheless, our findings provided some evidence that parents described more earlierborns than laterborns to desire control/ competitiveness goals. Specifically, there was a trend for parents' ascription of control/ competitiveness-related goals to be related to birth order in the subsample of 6- to 8-year-olds, whereas there was no distinction between older and younger siblings within the family in the complete sample. We expected such goals to be related to children's position in the family, rather than their chronological age, and the trend that emerged in our findings was consistent with this interpretation. For example, a mother who described her older son's power-related goal said, "He will often want to get his own way, or he may want his younger brother to do what he is doing. He thinks he's right and his way is the right way".

Likewise, this study also demonstrated that parents attributed goals of seeking relative competence more often to laterborns than to earlierborns. For instance, one parent claimed, "He wants to be as good as his older sibling, to feel good about himself", and another parent said, "He's practicing his reading skills, he thinks it's kind of neat that he can finally do what his brother's doing". This finding can be explicated by the fact that laterborns are known to hold their older siblings in high regard, and attempt to be "'grown up'" (Buhrmester & Furman, 1990). In this sense, it is important to note that relative competence and conciliation/ connectedness types of goals have some similar features, such that both types can be characterized by laterborns admiring or "looking up to" their older siblings. Nevertheless, it is important to distinguish carefully between these different motives. That is, seeking relative competence to one's sibling conveys a desire to be as capable as a sibling, while conciliation/ connectedness implies a desire to have a good relationship with and spend time with a sibling.

Finally, our findings indicated that parents described older siblings more than younger siblings as seeking to avoid punishment. Perhaps parents perceive older children as avoiding blame and punishment when they are in the wrong because they also recognize their desires for control/competitiveness (e.g., desiring to have things go their way, or desiring to be the righteous ones). For instance, a mother explaining her older son's goal mentioned "He gets finger-pointed

at, and he's not always innocent, so right away he worries that somebody's going to blame him". Regardless, when we attempted to distinguish age from birth order effects, neither analysis revealed significant effects, and thus these analyses were not conclusive.

On the other hand, analyses did not show any association between age/birth order and rivalry over parents, hostile/ retaliatory, self-defense, or instrumental types of goals. Nevertheless, other factors may lead to individual differences in the extent to which parents attribute these goals to their children that are not necessarily due to the children's age or birth order. For instance, a sibling's attempt to take a child's possession, depending on the child's temperament, may trigger a child to become hostile and hit his/ her sibling. Parents' temperament and parenting style may also influence the extent to which they attribute certain types of motives to their children (e.g., authoritarian parents who regularly punish their children, might perceive their children's goals to be to avoid punishment). Therefore, it is important to keep in mind that other factors may also play a role in parents' responses.

Concordance of Parents' Descriptions

Interestingly, parents' attributions of their children's conflict goals were concordant with those of their children approximately half of the time. This indicates that half of the time parents and children identified at least some of the same motives underlying children's disputes. Yet these findings also indicate that parents were still far from perfectly concordant with their children in describing the goals underlying sibling conflict.

Even so, it is important to note that parents almost never had any true disagreements with their children when describing their goals. More specifically, it almost never occurred that a parent described a motive while their child portrayed a contradictory goal. These issues are noteworthy as parents can act as mediators in supporting the resolution of sibling conflicts, and as they facilitate the process of siblings' understanding one another (Ross & Lazinski, 2014). To do so effectively, it is important that they do at least understand some of their children's motives and rather than holding contradictory understandings of the bases of children's disputes.

Nevertheless, parents and children also each described additional elements over 80% of the time, which involved different information, including additional types of motives. Thus, although parents' perspectives of their children's conflict goals are partially aligned with children's own descriptions, they appear not to have captured their children's perspectives in their entirety. In part, this may be due to adults' different and more sophisticated way of

thinking, leading them and their children to describe different information based on their different ways of perceiving events.

Finally, contrary to the hypothesis that parents' descriptions would be more concordant with those of their older children as they have better verbal skills, results revealed no significant differences. Indeed, parents were almost equally concordant with both older (M = .535, SE = .053) and younger (M = .482, SE = .053) siblings. Perhaps this can be explained by the fact that the study was focused specifically on recurrent conflicts, and thus parents may have greater insight into what each of their children want during that particular conflict regardless of their children's verbal skills, as they may have witnessed children's disputes on multiple occasions.

Limitations

This study has a number of limitations. When parents had witnessed their children's conflicts that were at the focus of the study, they may have had a clearer understanding of what was at issue. However when parents had not witnessed the conflicts, they had to rely on their children's descriptions in order to distinguish their children's goals. Therefore, some of the descriptions that lacked concordance may be due to fact that they had not directly witnessed the conflicts. Since this question was not posed to the parents, it is difficult to know precisely the extent to which this was an issue.

In addition, the sample size was also a limitation to this study. The sample was small, and was further divided into two in order to disentangle age from role effects. Consequently, we had limited power to detect some effects, particularly with respect to isolating the effects of birth order.

Another limitation was the difficulty in determining whether some descriptions aligned, with respect to concordance. There were cases in which the concordance of the parents' report was hard to distinguish due to parents' and children's descriptions of different episodes of the conflict or due to the child's response of not knowing what was their conflict goal. Clearly, results were only based on details that are stated explicitly by the participants.

A final limitation is the generalizability of the study. The majority of the participants in the study were well-educated, middle class, and of European Canadian descent, with the majority of the caregivers being mothers. Thus, the conclusions emerging from our study are limited to this group. Also, the children in the study were between 4 to 10 years old. Therefore, the results also may not generalize to older or younger children. For instance, parents might perceive

adolescent siblings as having different motives, such as being focused on romantic relationships and spending time with their friends outside of the family, and thus having less time to spend with siblings (Buhrmester & Furman, 1990). Conversely, parents might view siblings under the age of four more focused on instrumentality and concrete goals, such as wanting toys or spending their time playing, more than having abstract needs such as desiring privacy or control.

Implications

The results of this study reveal how parents describe the underlying issues of their children's conflicts. More broadly, the results of the study provide us with descriptive information about the types of goals that parents often expect their children to hold at times of conflict, during a specific age and being positioned at a specific birth order. Thus this provides information about parents' perspectives on the dynamics of sibling conflict, and foreshadows how they will be responding to their children's conflicts, regardless of whether their perspectives are consistent with those held by their children. For instance, since parents mostly viewed conciliation/ connectedness goals being desired by laterborns, this may illuminate how they may attempt to support this need when intervening into conflicts between their children.

Furthermore, results also document the concordance of the parents with their children when capturing their children's conflict goals. Thus, findings give insight into parents' understandings of their children's conflict perspectives. As children's emotions are related to the children's attainment of their goals (Levine et al., 1999), parents' concordant and deep understanding of their children's underlying goals may predict their likelihood of correctly identifying their children's emotions. Moreover, since parental intervention in sibling conflict places parents into positions of acting as mediators and facilitators of perspective taking to their children, the degree to which they are concordant with their children in understanding their conflict goals is important for promoting their efficacy in intervening.

Related to this, the study also underscored that parents and children each describe additional conflict goals not identified by the other party. This can potentially illuminate areas in which parents might need support in order to enhance their understanding of their children's perspectives and goals. For instance, parents more often described the deep structure of their children's conflict, whereas children tended to give detailed descriptions of their concrete goals (e.g., a mother might describe that her child "wants her way", while the child emphasizes that she wants to play the role of the baby during a role play scenario and why this specific role is

important to her). Children's goals, although concrete, may be very meaningful to them. Therefore, it would be advantageous to encourage parents to become more aware of the nuances of their children's conflict perspectives.

Overall, our results suggest that parents' perceptions of siblings' sources of conflicts might not necessarily be entirely consistent with those of children. It is important to examine such similarities and differences between parents' and children's perceptions, in case parents fail to identify some motives that might be significant to the siblings. Our findings regarding parents' perspectives on sibling conflict are noteworthy because they allow us to identify the areas in which parents may be less aware of children's points of view (e.g., becoming more aware of their children's concerns about the hostile/ retaliatory issues in their conflicts). Thus, in sum, having insight into parents' understanding of sibling conflicts helps us compare their perspectives to those of their children and identify information that may help parents more effectively deal with sibling conflicts (e.g., take the time to discuss their children's instrumental goals with them, to help their children feel that they acknowledge the importance that these goals hold for them).

There are a number of issues that could be further explored in future studies. One interesting avenue may be to examine parents' personal characteristics to determine whether they moderate the extent to which parents are able to identify each child's conflict perspective. For instance, the parent's own birth order (being the older/ younger sibling) may lead them to align more with the sibling holding the same birth position (earlierborn/ laterborn). Also, some characteristics of the siblings that had not been taken into account might have possibly also affected parents' attributions of siblings' conflict motives. Hence, future studies could also take into account children's personal characteristics and explore their effects on their parents' view of their motives. For instance, siblings' temperament and their relationship quality might have been related to parents' attributions of specific goals to certain children with particular characteristics.

To sum up, the findings from this study add to the existing literature by elucidating parents' attributions of conflict goals specifically to older and to younger siblings, in addition to the extent to which parents' reports align with each of the siblings' narratives. Furthermore, this study also uncovers the associations of some of these goals with children's chronological age or their birth order. This information is valuable as it reveals the types of goals parents expect their children to have at a specific age group or within a certain birth order position. Nonetheless,

these findings apply strictly to 4- to 10-years old children from well-educated middle-class European Canadian families.

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Appendix A: Conflict Nomination (Private interviews with each sibling)

Next I want to talk to you about some problems or fights that you have with your brother or sister. Remember, we're doing a school project about the fights that kids have with their brother or sister. You're not going to get in trouble for anything that you tell us.

Can you think of something that you and your (*brother/sister)* often have problems or fights about?

_____
_____

Alright! Good work. Can you think of something else you have fights with your (*brother/sister*) about?

_____
_____

This is the last one. Can you think of one more problem or fight that you sometimes have with your (*brother/sister*)?

_____
_____

Great job. Now we're going to go get your (*brother/sister*) to see which problems or fights (*he/she*) told (*Second Researcher's Name*) about. Then, all of us together will choose two problems for you and (*sibling name*) to talk about.

{*Prompts that are ok, if absolutely necessary, in this order:* Does your brother/sister ever do things you think are unfair? Is there anything your brother/sister says or does that makes you angry or sad? Is there anything you and your brother sometimes have trouble sharing?}

Appendix B: Interview Questions

A. (PARENT VERSION)

Ok, so your children decided to talk about _____. First, I want to ask you a few questions about this fight.

1. When was the last time they had this fight? How long ago? _____

2. Can you tell me about everything that happened the last time they had this fight, from the beginning to the end?

Appropriate prompts, in the following order:

a) How did it start?
b) Tell me more about that.
c) Yeah, what happened next?
d) So when he/she did that, what did your other child do?
e) Did anything else happen?
f) How did it end?

3. a. Whose fault does {*siblingA}* think this fight is?
b. Why?

4. a. Whose fault does {*siblingB}* think this fight is?

5. a. Whose fault is the fight *really and truly?*
b. Why?

6. a. When they are having this fight, what does {*siblingB}* want?
b. Why?
{If they name more than one goal, ask them which one the child wants *most*}

7. a. When they are having this fight, what does {*siblingA}* want?
b. Why?
{If they name more than one goal, ask them which one the child wants *most*}

8. a. When they are having this fight, how does {*siblingB}* feel?
b. Why?
{If they mention more than one feeling, ask them which one the child feels most)

9. a. When they are having this fight, how does {*siblingA*} feel?
b. Why?

B. (CHILD VERSION)

Ok, so you and (*sibling's name*) decided that you're going to talk about _____. Before you do, I want to ask you a few questions about this fight.

1. When was the last time you had this fight? How long ago? _____

2. Can you tell me about everything that happened the last time you had this fight, from the beginning to the end?

Appropriate prompts, in the following order:

a) How did it start?
b) Tell me more about that.
g) Yeah, what happened next?
h) So when you did that, what did he/she do? OR When he/she did that, what did you do?
i) Did anything else happen?
j) How did it end?

3. a. Whose fault do you think this fight is?
b. Why?

4. a. Whose fault does {*sibling name}* think this fight is?
b. Why?

5. a. Whose fault is the fight *really and truly?*
b. Why?

6. a. When you are having this fight, what do you want?
b. Why?

7. a. When you are having this fight, what does {*sibling name}* want?
b. Why?

8. a. When you are having this fight, how do you feel?
b. Why?
{If they mention more than one feeling, ask them which one they feel the most)

9. a. When you are having this fight, how does {*sibling name*} feel?
b. Why?

Note. Questions that formed the focus of this study in parent and child interviews are bolded.

Appendix C: Coding Scheme for Types of Goals

Abbreviations
M → Mother
O → Older Sibling
Y → Younger Sibling

Codes	Explanation of code	Examples
1. Autonomy/ respect	Seeking respect for one's property, privacy, personal space, boundaries, or rights (fairness). Includes seeking control over things within your own personal jurisdiction (e.g., your room).	• "He wants his personal space." • "to play, wants a turn, a fair turn." • "keep ownership of his toy because it's his." • "time alone."
2. Control/ competitiveness	Wanting things their way, seeking control over shared resources. Wanting to win, wanting to be better than other sibling (also wanting something just because the other sibling has it). Also, to take the lead and control over something, sometimes just for the sake of not letting other sibling control it.	• "Be in charge/ decide." • "to play and to be the lead character." • "she's a control freak." • "wants the status quo. Like she just wants it even if it's something that she doesn't really want to watch." • "It's a battle of wills."
3. Relative competence	Wanting to be as competent as other sibling.	• "to do what O is doing and doing it at the same level." • "Be as good as O, improve her computer skills." • "Y want to do what sister does." • "want to read to practice his reading skills, to finally do what his brother does." • "curious what O is doing… want to do the same thing… learning…"
4. Rivalry over parents	Wanting to seem the righteous one in front of parent.	• "O just wants to be a good boy and not ruffle by feathers." • "Y wants me to take her side." • "Want to take attention away

		from her brother maybe and have us listen to her."
5. Avoiding punishment	Wanting to avoid trouble, wanting to avoid blame.	• "not to be blamed." • "he doesn't like to see Y upset and cry. Because he knows he may get in trouble too." •
6. Hostile/ retaliatory	Wanting to provoke/ bother each other.	• "wants to provoke/ disturb." • "wants to be mean." • "hurt his feelings."
7. Conciliation/ connectedness	Wanting to be recognized by sibling, to join sibling in playing, or wanting peace (no fight) with sibling.	• "Wants attention (from sibling)." • "Wanting to play with sibling."
8. Self-defense	Wanting to protect oneself from harm.	• "wants to defend himself." • "she's getting hit you know, she wants to fight back."
9. Instrumental shared	Fighting over a specific thing because both siblings have the same goal.	• "Be the pink girl." • "time on the computer."
10. Instrumental distinct	One sibling wants to do one thing, meanwhile the other wants to do something else that is incompatible.	• "play on the piano while sibling wants to watch TV." • "O wants to play lego with Y, while Y wants to play outside with O." • "She wants help from sister so she can be done and Y wants to play."

Appendix D: Coding Scheme for Goal Concordance

Step 1: is it Not Possible to Distinguish (NPD) whether parents and children are describing the same goals?
Yes → Why?

Codes	**Examples**	
❖ Not possible to distinguish	Reference to different instance of conflict	▪ **Case 1:** Parent: "I think he just wanted to have time to clean up his mess before anybody moved." Child: "I want the chair."
	Actor responds he/she doesn't know	▪ **Case 2:** Parent: "She wants to provoke [younger *sibling*] to have a sense of power" Child: "I don't know."

No → Step 2: it is NOT NPD. Code the presence/absence of each of the following:

Codes	**Examples**	
❖ Shared elements: *Parents and children describing the same goals.*		➢ **Case 1:** Parent: "She wants her way. She wants to win. She'll hide and <u>he'll count.</u>" Child: "I want <u>him [*older sibling]* to count.</u>"
		➢ **Case 2:** Parent: "She <u>wants attention.</u>" Child: "I <u>want [*younger sibling*] to play with me.</u>"
❖ Additional elements: *Parents and children describing other goals that each other did not mention.*	Parent additional	➢ **Case 1:** Parent: "He wants attention, and the actual object. If [*younger sibling*] <u>is doing something by himself, he will try to get involve himself in it</u>." Child: "I want the thing he's holding"
	Child additional	➢ **Case 2:** Parent: "He wants respect. [*Younger*

		sibling] is touching his stuff. He's not respecting him". Child: "I'm older now, I want more privacy. He goes in my room without permission. <u>It feels good after I hit him and push him down</u>."
❖ True Disagreement: *Parents and children describing contradicting goals.*	▪ **Case 1:** Parent: " He wants to be left alone. He likes to play by himself." Child: "I want to play with [*a third sibling*]."	

Appendix E: Cohen's Kappas

Reliability for Types of Goals

Codes	***Cohen Kappas***
1. Autonomy/ respect	.838
2. Control/ competitiveness	.922
3. Relative competence	1.000
4. Rivalry over parents	.854
5. Avoiding punishment	1.000
6. Hostile/ retaliatory	1.000
7. Conciliation/ connectedness	.949
8. Self-defense	.920
9. Instrumental shared	.947
10. Instrumental distinct	.879
11. Don't know	1.000

Reliability for Concordance

Codes		***Cohen Kappas***
Step 1	Not Possible to Distinguish (*NPD*)	1.000
	Type of *NPD*	1.000
Step 2	True disagreements	-.010
	Shared elements	.930
	Additional elements	.850

Note. True disagreements were not analyzed further due to their rare frequency and also the consequent lack of interrater reliability.