Why Do Children Transgress Against Others? Mother's Attributions for Children's and

Adolescents' Harmful Behaviors with Friends and Siblings

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ABSTRACT

Why Do Children Transgress Against Others? Mother's Attributions for Children's and

Adolescents' Harmful Behaviors with Friends and Siblings

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This study investigated mothers' attributions for children's and adolescent's transgressions towards their friends and younger siblings. Specifically, we examined (1) the types of attributions mothers make for their child's harming behavior at different ages, (2) the types of attributions mothers make for children's harming behavior across two relationship contexts (sibling and friend), and (3) if age-related changes in attributions about hurting friends are similar to, or different from, age-related changes in attributions about hurting siblings. A total of 101 children and adolescents were privately asked to nominate a time when they hurt or upset their younger sibling and friend (order counterbalanced). After the mothers and children conversed about these specific events, the mothers were privately asked a series of follow-up questions about their interpretations of these harming instances. Results indicated that mothers made different attributions in response to their children's transgressions against their friends and siblings. Mothers more frequently made attributions of agent causality, intentional behavior, intentional harm, provocation (externality), stable relationship history, and consistent behavior when discussing conflicts with siblings. In contrast, when discussing conflicts with friends, mothers more frequently made attributions of externality (peer-related influences), event specificity, and unintentional harm. Unexpectedly, there were no significant main effects of the child's age on mothers' attributions. Overall, the findings elucidate how parents' interpretations are situated within children's distinctive relationship contexts (siblings and friends). Implications for parenting and child socialization are discussed.

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Introduction

When a child harms another child, his/her parent is required to make decisions about how to address the situation at hand, including how to talk to their child about his/her actions and address the behavior. In order to make these decisions, parents must establish what happened, if their child intended to harm the victim, and whether or not this was a one-time occurrence. These assessments are referred to as attributions. In general terms, an attribution is defined as the act of assigning the cause or source of a human behavior (Dix, 1993; Grusec & Danyliuk, 2014; Heider, 1958; Kelley, 1973; Mills & Rubin, 1990; Miller, 1995). As outlined below, research on parental attributions has focused on how parents perceive, interpret, and evaluate their children's harmful behavior (e.g., Coplan, Hastings, Lagacé-Séguin, & Moulton, 2002; Dix, Ruble, Grusec, & Nixon, 1986). There are some important developmental and contextual factors that may influence parental attributions (e.g., Dix et al., 1989; Nelson, Mitchell, & Yang, 2008). In addition to variations associated with age, which exhibit inconsistent patterns in previous research (e.g., Gretarsson & Gelfand, 1988; Scott & Dembo, 1993), attributions may arguably differ as a function of the relationship context in which the harm occurs. Yet to date, no studies have contrasted parents' attributions regarding children's harmful behaviour in the context of different close relationships (siblings and friends).

As elaborated in this thesis, children's close relationships with age-mates provide distinct contexts for children's development (Rubin, Bukowski, & Bowker, 2015). As children age, they will encounter and form many different types of relationships. Friendships and sibling relationships provide distinct contexts for maternal attributions because of their different features and the social milieu in which they occur. For example, friendships are outwardly oriented and occur in the peer group, and thus behaviors with friends provide an interesting context for

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parents to understand how their children will act out in the world (in school, their future workplace, and with other individuals in general). In contrast, sibling relationships are situated within a private family context. It is also known that children's experiences of conflict differ within these two types of relationships (Recchia, Wainryb, & Pasupathi, 2013). Thus, given these variations, parental attributions for harm in those contexts may also differ.

In sum, the purpose of this study was to examine mothers' attributions for their children's hurtful behaviour, and particularly how these attributions varied across relationship contexts (sibling, friend) and age groups (7-, 11-, and 16-year-olds). Prior research on this dataset explored children's' accounts of reasons for their transgressions towards their friends and siblings (Recchia et al., 2013), which fomented our interest in maternal attributions about those same transgressions. More specifically, Recchia and colleagues (2013) coded children's narrative accounts for types of harm and reasons for harm that included unintentional, internal and, external types. The current study looks at explanations for, and evaluations of, harmful behaviour from a parent's perspective, within the wider attributional context. By asking parents what they think about their children's behaviour we can better understand parent's responses to their children, and subsequent socialization practices.

In the following sections, the literature on the importance of parental beliefs, as well as theories of attribution and blame will be reviewed. Sibling relationships and friendships as context for eliciting distinct attributions will also be discussed, as will the body of research focusing on age and its potential impact on parental attributions. Finally, the hypotheses pertaining to age and relationship context effects on maternal attributions will be elaborated.

Why Is It Important to Examine Parental Beliefs About Children's Actions?

How parents perceive their children's behavior is integral to adult-child interaction (e.g., Nelson et al., 2008; Mills & Rubin, 1990). Some of the elements of these perceptions include parents' views of their children, parents' views of themselves as caretakers, and parents' thoughts about how their children act (Colalillo, Miller, & Johnston, 2015; Coplan et al., 2002; Miller, 1995). Managing children's harmful actions is an important and challenging subject for parents, and studying parental beliefs is fundamental to understanding how parents react to such transgressions (e.g., Bugental, Johnston, New, & Silvester, 1998; Miller, 1995). It has been observed that making attributions for children's behavior plays a large role in parents' socialization of children (e.g., Gretarsson & Gelfand, 1988; Park, Johnston, Colalillo, & Williamson, 2016). For example, the degree to which parents believe their children are "well-behaved" or are "trouble-makers" will fundamentally influence how they think about and respond to their children's misbehaviors. In this sense, attributions have noteworthy effects on parental strategies used for discipline and, above all, contribute to the expectations they have of their children (Jacobs, Marks Woolfson, & Hunter, 2017; Sturge-Apple, Suor, & Skibo, 2014). For instance, a parent may consider that their child was not cognitively aware of their harmful actions or behavior due to developmental constraints of age, and therefore deem their child's harmful actions to be less intentional because of these constraints (versus an older, more cognitively aware child; Dix & Grusec, 1985). In this respect, theories of attributions can provide us with frameworks for understanding how parents think about and evaluate their children's harmful actions towards others.

Theories of Attribution, Blame, and Their Relations to Parenting

A large body of scholarship has examined parents' perceptions and interpretations of their children's behavior in a social context (e.g., Bugental et al., 1998; Jones & Davis, 1965; Mills & Rubin, 1990). In large part, this literature relies on a number of theoretical frameworks about attribution that can be used to explain how parents perceive and evaluate their children's behavior. Subsequently, theories of blame can provide us with information on how descriptions of events (attributions) lead to evaluations of children's harmful behaviors (blame).

Theories of attribution. Fritz Heider (1958) developed one of the first theories of attribution. Most notably, Heider proposed a distinction between dispositional and situational causes of behavior (Dix & Grusec, 1985; Heider, 1958; Malle, 2011). Heider's discourse on inferences was later elaborated by Weiner's attribution theory (1986), which added several attributional dimensions to Heider's basic dispositional vs. situational model. These dimensions included locus (internal-external), stability (stable-unstable), and generality (general-specific); as applied to parental attributions, this suggests that parents' responses to their children's harmful actions are influenced by whether (a) the behavior is attributed to the child's internality, such as his/her goals or beliefs, or is a product of the external situation, such as provocation from another person or extenuating circumstances within which they perpetrated the harm (locus), (b) if it occurs repeatedly over many situations (generality), and (c) whether it is caused by permanent or changing factors (stability) (Dix & Grusec, 1985). As an example of an attribution positing an internal behavior, a parent might express "his goal was to get the ball". Further, as an example describing a stable behavior, a parent might say, "he's been like this since he was little". Lastly, a parent making a general attribution might claim that "he acts like this in all situations".

Research suggests that parents may respond more harshly to children's transgressions if they perceive their behavior to be more internal, stable, and generalized, as opposed to external, unstable, and localized (Dix et al., 1986; Weiner, 1979). This may be because these attributional dimensions allude to the recurrence of behavior and possibly something undesirable about the child's character, which is seen as more detrimental and problematic than a behavior that only occurs on occasion (Dix & Grusec,1985; Dix et al., 1986).

Jones and Davis' (1965) Correspondent Inference Theory provides an extension of Heider's model by introducing the concept of intentionality. The theory also hints at knowledge (knowing your actions will cause harm) as being connected to the attribution of intentionality (Dix & Grusec, 1985). It is important to note that this theory does not distinguish between intentional harm (i.e., the harm itself was intended) and intentional behavior (i.e., the action leading to the harm was an intentional behavior, albeit not necessarily intended to harm). This is problematic because everyday harm or conflict involves a combination of intentional and unintentional behaviors, as well as intentional and unintentional outcomes (Nadler, 2014). Put another way, although intentional harm indicates intentional behavior, intentional behavior does not necessarily imply intentional harm. It is important to make the distinction between these concepts because although a child may behave intentionally (e.g., "She grabbed the book from her because she wanted it"), she may not have wanted to cause the harm (e.g., "She really did not mean to hurt his feelings"). Arguably, linking this distinction to parenting and socialization may help to explain the difference between a parent's punitive response ("Time-out for taking his toy") or a recognized learning moment ("Could you think of a different way you could have done that, where you would both be happy?"). Considering the differences in their respective definitions and the parental responses that might be expected to ensue from each type of

attribution, both intentional harm and intentional behavior will be assessed in this study.

With regard to the concept of knowledge, parents' attributions and subsequent socialization may be affected by whether they perceive that the child knowingly and correctly anticipated that their behavior would cause harm. That is, parents may question whether or not their child knew that their actions would be hurtful. Subsequently, a parent may ask themselves: did my child know how the situation could have played out yet committed the harm despite being aware of the consequences? If a parent senses that the child knew that his/her actions would cause harm, a parent may be inclined to punish or chastise the child. The parent may also have a more intense emotional reaction because the child's behavior and actions are seen as intentionally produced versus a child who is understood as being unable to anticipate the consequences of his/her behavior (Dix & Grusec, 1985).

Similar to the discussion concerning dispositions in Heider's and Jones and Davis' model, Kelley's Co-variation Principle theory (1965) focuses on the covariance of internal and external attributions, and provides explanations for behavior using the criteria of distinctiveness (the act is particular to a specific stimulus) and consistency (the behavior in a particular situation with this person is unchanging over time). The attributions of distinctiveness and consistency can be particularly important for real-life parenting inasmuch as parents evaluate their child's behavior with specific people in particular types of situations. If a parent makes a judgment that the child's behavior is low in distinctiveness (i.e., the child's behavior is not unique to this particular relationship), they are more likely to infer something particular about the child as opposed to the relationship. For example, in a situation discussing harm against a sibling and a friend, a mother may say, "She thinks everything is unfair, it's reflected in both relationships". In turn, parents' attributions of consistency (i.e., whether the child habitually behaves the same

way across situations, with this person) may lead to inferences about whether this behavior is resistant to change (i.e., consistent) or whether something external such as another person is a catalyst in the demonstration of this particular behavior (i.e., inconsistent). For example, in a given situation, a mother may say, "He always acts this way with him".

Theories of blame. Building on the theoretical framework provided by Heider and other attribution theorists, Alicke (2000) and Malle, Guglielmo, and Monroe (2014) introduced a conceptual model for the study of attributions in the context of blame. Blame can be defined as a judgment that arises from the assessment of events (behaviors and outcomes) and agents (person involved in the event) (Malle et al., 2014). The blame model provides us with information on how descriptions of events and behaviors (attributions) for children's harm can contribute to evaluations of the offender (blame). While the blame models touch upon knowledge and intent to harm (as described above in the context of attributions frameworks), they also implicate three additional types of attributions (agent causality, obligation, and victim amplification) that are deemed to be related to parenting and socialization.

Heider (1958) was the first theorist to address agent causality in attributions, which is defined as the association between the actor and the outcome. Building on this, and the concepts of knowledge and intentionality previously defined, Malle and colleagues (2014) describe agent causality as the judgment of whether a person "*caused* a particular event", when that person carries the knowledge of how to act appropriately. This definition of causality of harm provides us clues about how parents may mitigate agency when their child is implicated in a harm event. That is, parents may mitigate agency by denying that the harm actually happened, or alternatively, by denying that the child was the cause of the harm. For example, in a possible scenario where a mother is asked about her child's role in a harming situation against a friend,

she may say, "It didn't sound like he did what made his friend upset". In this instance, the mother is mitigating agency by saying that her child did not cause the harm (i.e., the friend was upset about something besides her own child's behavior). This definition also provides us with information on how a parent can mitigate agency for a younger child who may not have the necessary cognitive range required to act appropriately (e.g., "He is young, and was just trying to be friendly, his friend took it the wrong way"). In this instance, the mother mitigates agency by minimizing her child's role in causing the harm, while also referring to her child's lack of ability to act differently due to the constraints of his age. Other ways in which age plays a role in attributions will be further discussed below.

Obligation is the second attribution highlighted by Malle and colleagues' (2014) model, referring to the prescriptive belief that a person should have acted differently due to role or relationship with the victim. For instance, in the context of parental response to a transgression against a younger sibling, a mother may say, "He should know better than to hit his sister. He is older and knows that it's not ok. He needs to set the example". In this example of role-related obligation, a mother not only references the child's age, but the fact that he is older than his sibling and therefore needs to set an example.

Lastly, adding to the attribution theory set forth by Kelley (1973), Alicke's (2000) attribution concept of constraining conditions provides us with information on how a mother may offer alternative explanations for the causes of her child's harmful behavior. This concept is directly related to Malle and colleagues' (2014) attribution of agent causality, in that a mother's alternative explanation for her child's harm can thereby effectively reduce her child's contributions to the harmful event. In other words, a mother can provide other reasons why the victim may have gotten hurt that served to enhance the negative effects of the child's harm.

Although this does not answer the question of why the perpetrating child engaged in the harmful behavior, it does offer an explanation for why the victim was upset as a result of said behavior. One type of constraining condition that may be particularly important in the context of children's interpersonal transgressions is the attribution of victim amplification (i.e., something about the victim resulted in greater harm than expected). For example, in a situation where a mother is asked about her child's harm against a friend, the mother may respond, "Sometimes his friend takes things way too personally". Victim amplification can be important for parents' socialization of children because parents can use this opportunity to speak to the child about others' feelings and help them understand that their peers may be more sensitive to harm than they previously anticipated.

Notwithstanding that this study will not address blame specifically, and that research on blame in relation to parenting is limited, inferences from the literature on attributions can provide guidance on how we can expect blame judgments to be made. As illustrated in the examples provided above, it is clear that mothers can indeed make reference to components relevant to judgments of blameworthiness, and that these considerations may play an important role in their evaluation of their child's harmful behavior.

How Have Parental Attributions Been Studied in the Past?

There is a large body of work addressing parental causal attributions for children's behaviors (e.g., Dix, 1993; Sturge-Apple et al., 2014; Wingate, 2002). While there are numerous facets to this research, this section will focus on the work that is most relevant to the current study; namely, research pertaining to parents' explanations for their children's social behavior in general (in contrast to cognitive attributions in an achievement context) and transgressive behavior (in contrast to prosocial behavior).

To date, research on parents' explanations for children's negative behavior has focused predominantly on three dimensions: situational, dispositional, and intentional attributions (e.g., Dix et al., 1986; Dix, 1993; Johnston, Hommersen, & Seipp, 2009; Slep & O'Leary,1998; Sturge-Apple et al., 2014). While parental attributions may possibly be influenced by several different factors, including atypical development or the cognitive reasoning skills of the child, age-related findings will be reviewed in detail, as it is the developmental factor that is most relevant to this study.

Explanations for age as a predictor of parental attributions. There are several reasons why parents may consider the child's age in making attributions for his/her behavior. Across development, children exhibit gains in their executive functioning, planning, and emotional regulation (Rueda & Paz-Alonso, 2013). As a result, younger children are not always capable of making complex decisions and understanding their own (and others') nuanced emotions (Carlson, Zelazo, & Faja, 2013; Piaget, 1964, Rueda & Paz-Alonso, 2013). Adolescents, on the other hand, exhibit relatively more mature reasoning and behavior (Luna, 2009). Theorists have postulated that since younger children are undergoing rapid growth, parents are likely to consider their children's behavior as less stable, because they are less capable of regulating their own behavior and more likely to be influenced by external factors when compared to older children (e.g., Dix & Grusec, 1985). This is argued to be the case because younger children are more easily influenced by external factors or individuals due to their lack of social experience and their resulting inability to handle social pressures (Dix & Grusec, 1985). Emphasis on these external influences is expected to reduce the likelihood of a parent identifying the source of their child's behavior as due to factors internal to the child (e.g., Dix & Grusec,1985; Jones & Davis, 1965; Kelley, 1973). Additionally, classical attribution theory postulates that a child's ability to

foresee and anticipate the effects/consequences of behavior increase with age (Dix & Grusec, 1985; Jones & Davis, 1965; Miller, 1995). Considering the research highlighting clear biological, behavioral, and cognitive differences between children and adolescents, theory thus suggests that mothers may consider the age of the child when making attributions.

Do parents actually make different attributions as children get older? Research by Dix and colleagues reveals some relevant age-related findings, albeit not all of the above hypotheses were supported (Dix et al., 1986; Dix, Ruble, & Zambarano, 1989). After conducting several studies using hypothetical vignettes with children, their results revealed that mothers did infer older children's misdeeds to be more guided and controlled. Additionally, as children increased in age, from 4 to 13 years, mothers were more likely to make dispositional attributions and less likely to make external attributions (Dix et al., 1986). Lastly, in a study analyzing child transgressions and its effect on parenting, mothers considered the child's age in relation to harm committed against a person or animal (e.g., making mean remarks to another child) and from this inference would proceed to discipline the child accordingly (Dix et al., 1989). Thus, it seems that mothers are sensitive to age when making an attribution about the child's locus, competence, and intentionality (Dix et al., 1989).

Yet evidence from past research also shows that parents do not always consider the age constraints of their child when making attributions. In their conclusions, Dix and colleagues (1986; 1985) reported that the parents in their study did not take into account the child's rule knowledge (understanding that the behavior is wrong) when making an attribution. There were no variations in the ways parents viewed younger and older children's awareness of their misconduct. The absence of expected age effects was also noted in a study conducted by Gretarsson and Gelfand (1988), examining mothers' attributions for children's behavior and

characteristics. Similar to the Dix and colleagues' study, the children observed were between the ages of 4- and 12-years. Results of this study showed mixed findings for age; mothers did not describe their child's behavior as more intentional or dispositional as the age of the child increased. A review by Miller (1995) also highlighted several other studies that failed to reveal significant age effects. These various studies examined different attributional dimensions, age groups, and measures and found no systematic age-related differences in the attributions parents made for their children's behaviors (e.g., Scott & Dembo, 1993; Himelstein, Graham, & Weiner, 1991).

In contrast to work on parents' attributions of dispositional or situational causes, very little attribution research on parental beliefs has surveyed other types of attributions such as consistency, and distinctiveness, amongst others. Therefore, more research is needed that combines attributions from all relevant theoretical models in order to document patterns of attribution in a more comprehensive way. Previous research has assessed parents' hostile attributions for children's noncompliance and oppositional behavior in the home (e.g., Fitzgerald, 2016; Scott & Dembo, 1993; Snyder, Cramer, Afrank, & Patterson, 2005) as well as attributions and its connection to parenting for child behavior problems (e.g., Colalillo et al., 2015; Park et al., 2016; MacBrayer, Milich, & Hundley, 2003). However, previous research has not assessed this wider combination of attributions within the context of transgressive behavior with others, a context that may be particularly important for parenting because it reflects how the child has integrated the parents' values and parenting practices into his/her behavior. Taken together, it is clear that there are conflicting findings regarding links between children's ages and parental attributions. In part, this may be due to the methodology utilized in these studies.

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Limitations of past research on attributions. In part, the presence of results that do not support theories of attribution may be related to the manner in which these attributions have been measured. To date, there has been a lack of research on families' actual experiences when studying parents' attributions for children's harming behavior (Harvey & Weary, 1984). Past studies have used hypothetical vignettes that describe the behavior of unknown children (e.g., Dix et al., 1985, 1986; Jacobs et al., 2017; Sturge-Apple et al., 2014), or have asked parents to imagine their own children in hypothetical scenarios (e.g., Miller, 1995; Mills & Rubin, 1990; Wingate, 2002). Asking parents about the attributions they would make about hypothetical children and/or scenarios may be removed from their actual lives, thus eliciting different attributions than when parents are asked about their own children in real situations (Bugental et al., 1998).

Additionally, assessment of how parents think and feel about their children are typically based on closed- rather than open-ended questions (Bugental et al., 1998; Miller, 1995). A study conducted by Johnston and colleagues (1998) used open-ended questions to understand parental attributions. Results of the study indicated that parents were more likely to mention several causes or reasons for acting (e.g., a combination of stable and general) as compared to rating scales that tended to elicit only one reason for acting. This provides evidence that, when given the opportunity to freely express themselves, parents make attributions that are spontaneous and more multidimensional than a rating scale measure can capture (Bugental et al., 1998). Thus, studies based on rating scales may be failing to capture pertinent information about what parents believe are the causes of their child's harmful behavior (Bugental et al., 1998).

In sum, although past research has provided insight into the causal attributions that parents make for their children's behavior, it has also neglected some important facets of this

phenomenon. In addition to the issues noted above, no studies have contrasted parents'

attributions regarding children's behaviour in the context of different real-world relationships,

such as sibling relationships and friendships. This context is important for parents to understand

how their children act in different social situations. In light of this gap, and given what we know

about variations in children's close relationships with age mates (Howe, Ross, & Recchia, 2011),

sibling relationships and friendships will be the focus of this next section.

Sibling Relationships and Friendships as Distinctive Contexts for Parental Attributions

It is well known that close relationships play a critical role in children's development

(e.g., Carpendale & Lewis 2006, 2015). Children's relationships with their parents, peers, and

siblings constitute some of their most significant connections (e.g., Howe et al., 2011;

Whiteman, McHale, & Soli, 2011). In middle childhood, children spend more time interacting

with their siblings than they do with their parents (Crouter & McHale, 1989). During the school

years, children also increasingly spend their time socializing with individuals outside of the

home, particularly with peers (Stocker & Dunn, 1990).

Interactions between parents and children are hierarchical or complementary in nature

(Hinde, 1979). Parents are understood to have more knowledge, power, and status when

compared to children. The focus of most research has addressed attributions regarding parent-

child conflict (e.g., Grusec, Adam, & Mammone, 1993; Nelson, O'Brien, Calkins, & Keane,

2013; Slep & O'Leary, 1998; Wingate, 2002). These attributions are distinct from those

examining parents' interpretations of children's conflicts with siblings and friends. For instance,

parents might interpret their conflicts with their children as stemming from compliance issues (at

least to some degree) (e.g., Scott & Dembo, 1993), whereas this is less likely to be the case vis-à-

vis siblings and friends. The topics of conflict are also different, because of the complementary

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versus reciprocal nature of the relationships (e.g., Komolova, Wainryb, & Recchia, 2017). Sibling relationships and peer friendships, by contrast, are typically characterized by more shared and equal exchanges (Hinde, 1979). While siblings and friends are similar in their reciprocal interactions with one another, the characteristics that define these relationships are also different (e.g., Howe et al., 2011; Recchia et al., 2013). We can contextualize these relationships by comparing and contrasting their significant features, and by recognizing the ways in which they elicit varying forms of interactions (Buhrmester, 1992; Howe et al., 2011; Whiteman et al., 2011).

Characteristics of friendships. Although there is no singular defining feature of friendship, it is often characterized as freely chosen (e.g., Buhrmester, 1992; Buhrmester & Furman, 1986; Rubin et al., 2015), and based on common interests (e.g., Hartup & Stevens, 1997; Hay, Payne, & Chadwick, 2004; Rubin et al., 2015). These characteristics echo Hartup's (1989) proposition that "the essentials of friendship are reciprocity and commitment between individuals who see themselves, more or less, as equals" (p.124). Due to the more intimate nature of friendships (as compared to non-friends), children and adolescents are provided with an outlet to improve their social skills and perspective-taking, making them more likely to cooperate, share, and help their friends (Buhrmester, 1992; Newcomb & Bagwell, 1995; Recchia et al., 2013; Rubin et al., 2015). Additionally, when compared to mothers, fathers and other relatives, children consider their friends as a more important source of social support and that friendships provide them with the opportunity to explore the consequences of their actions (Furman & Buhrmester, 1985; Rubin et al., 2015; Rubin, Bowker, McDonald, & Menzer, 2013).

Characteristics of sibling relationships. In contrast, sibling relationships are distinct from friendships in that hierarchical and reciprocal features are both defining characteristics; the

hierarchical structure arises from birth order and age differences, while the reciprocal nature of the relationship is characterized by mutual exchanges and support (Hinde, 1979; Howe & Recchia, 2008). Sibling interactions are more conflictual in nature, and it has been reported that siblings are not afraid of crossing boundaries in this relationship (they do not need to be polite or tolerant towards their sibling; Dunn, 1983). Children are often knowledgeable about their sibling's feelings and preferences; but this knowledge is not always used in positive ways, as they are consequently also aware of how to cause their sibling's distress or hurt. Siblings must learn how to live together long-term and maintain a relationship across the lifespan (Laursen, Hartup, & Koplas, 1996). Research confirms that the quality of sibling relationships is fairly consistent from childhood onward (e.g., Buhrmester & Furman, 1990; Volling, 2003; Volling & Blandon, 2003), making this type of relationship one of the most lasting (Howe & Recchia, 2014). Due to the shared close proximity, and the increased chances of holding different viewpoints, sibling relationships are often defined as encompassing an interplay of both positive and negative emotions (Howe & Recchia, 2014). Children are more likely to share their feelings and personal details with their brothers or sisters because of this close proximity and relationship endurance (Howe et al., 2011; Recchia et al., 2013).

Sibling and friendship conflict. Conflicts that occur amongst siblings and friends are more similar in nature than those that develop between parents and children (Howe et al., 2011). Nevertheless, in line with differences between these two relationships, different types of conflicts and transgressions arise with siblings and friends.

Compared to friendships, conflicts between siblings are described as more rough and internally driven, and are understood to be a common behaviour in the relationship (Punch, 2008; Raffaelli, 1992; Recchia et al., 2013). Several research studies on siblings and peer relationships

have shown that conflict between siblings is often due to an imbalance of power and more likely to prompt parental intervention (Furman & Buhrmester, 1985; Raffaelli, 1992). Additionally, conflict between siblings often arises due to mundane issues (possession of toys) and personality characteristics (Howe et al., 2011; Raffaelli, 1997; Whiteman et al., 2011), and can sometimes be aggressive (Howe, Rinaldi, Jennings, & Petrakos, 2002). According to narrative accounts of harming siblings, children describe how their transgressive actions are situated within their ongoing interactions with their siblings (i.e., routinely sharing much of the same space and invading each other's privacy; McGuire, Manke, Eftekhari, & Dunn, 2000; Punch, 2008).

Contrary to this, harm against friends is described by children as more circumstantial, and often a product of external constraints (Buhrmester, 1992; Recchia et al., 2013). The conflict literature has found that when children are asked about harming their friends, they describe these situations as "less foreseeable, as well as more ambiguous and unanticipated" (Recchia et al., 2013, p.11-12). Additionally, research has shown that conflicts are described as occurring infrequently among friends when compared to siblings in grades four through thirteen (Buhrmester, 1992). It has also been noted that some children may avoid the possibility of conflict with their friends altogether (Bugental et al., 1998). However, when conflict does arise among friends, its source is more often reported as a misunderstanding and often involves the child not being able to anticipate the victim's feelings (Recchia et al., 2013). Additionally, conflict amongst friends often arises due to disputes concerning rules, structure and relationship continuation (Hartup & Shantz, 1992; Smetana & Ball, 2017).

The outcome of conflict between friends often includes repair and reconciliation (Laursen, Finkelstein, & Townsend Betts, 2001), whereas the wake of conflict between siblings is less likely to involve resolution and more often entails aggressive retaliation and confrontation

(Raffaelli, 1992, 1997). This may be because children are particularly careful in conflict with their friends, since the consequences of fighting may result in the end of the relationships, whereas sibling relationships are unlikely to end (Punch, 2008; Howe et al., 2011). Another reason may be that children are more aware of how their siblings will react, whereas their friends may be more sensitive to their actions (Punch, 2008).

It is important to note that some prior research has shown that conflicts among siblings and friends also change across development, suggesting that conflicts in the two relationships may become more similar with increasing age (Recchia et al., 2013). For instance, narrative accounts of harm against friends and siblings converge across middle childhood and adolescence (Recchia et al., 2013). Research has also found that sibling conflict is less intense in adolescence, making these conflicts more similar to those with friends (Kim, McHale, Osgood, & Crouter, 2006). Additionally, relationships between younger and older siblings become less conflictual and more egalitarian with age, as siblings show more support and intimacy for one another during adolescence and begin to comprehend the consequences of their hurtful actions towards their siblings (Buhrmester, 1992; Buhrmester & Furman, 1990; Cole & Kerns, 2001). At the same time, children move away from exclusively prioritizing their friends' needs and begin to understand that conflicts with friends can be managed rather than avoided (Buhrmester, 1992; Komolova & Wainryb, 2011). However, research has also shown that some aspects of conflict in these two different contexts remain different across development (Recchia et al., 2013; Brody, Stoneman, & McCoy, 1994) in that sibling conflicts do not become less emotionally intense over time (Recchia et al., 2013). In fact, some longitudinal research has shown that conflict between siblings can become more intense as opposed to less intense when entering adolescence (Brody et al., 1994).

Considering these unique characteristics that define each relationship type, and the resulting differences in children's experiences of conflict in each relationship, it stands to reason that mothers may make different attributions for their children's harm towards their siblings versus their friends. However, this question has not been addressed in previous work, and thus was the main focus of the current study. Parents are arguably invested in children's relationships with both siblings and friends, but in different ways. In the case of siblings, parents are guardians and socialization agents to both children. With friends, children are engaging in interactions outside of the home and their parents' supervision; in this sense, children's actions can be seen as reflecting on the home environment and parents themselves as capable socializers.

The Current Study

The current study examined the different attributions that mothers made in explaining actual transgressions committed by their 7-, 11-, and 16-year-old children against friends and younger siblings. These age groups were selected because across the school-age years (early school-aged, later school-aged, mid-adolescence), children begin to define themselves more in terms of their social relationships outside of the family, thus also precipitating changes to their sibling relationships; indeed, this period is marked by an increase in children's social networks with peers (Levitt, Guacci-Franco, & Levitt, 1993). The reason this study focused on harm against younger siblings is that older siblings engage in more transgressions against younger siblings than vice versa (Ross, Filyer, Lollis, Perlman, & Martin, 1994). Analyses were based on a dataset in which mothers and children were given the opportunity to discuss events when the child hurt or upset a sibling and a friend. Subsequently, mothers were asked to describe the conversation they had with their children as well as provide reasons for their children's harming behavior. The reasons that mothers provided for their children's harmful actions were coded for

various types of attributions.

This study considered the distinct features of conflict that characterize children's relationships with their siblings and friends, as well as age-related changes in children's cognitive and emotional abilities and understandings. We expected that mothers would make different attributions for their children's hurtful actions depending on relationship context and age of the child.

Based on the literature described above, the current study had three research objectives. First, we examined *the types of attributions mothers made for their child's harming behavior at different ages*. We expected that our study would reveal age effects for mothers' attributions regarding intentionality of behavior, internality, externality, stability, generality, and presence of knowledge.

Consistent with past research, we expected that mothers would more often judge that older children's behavior was intentional. Considering that children's social, emotional, behavioral, and cognitive processes develop with age, developmental maturity may be considered when assessing intentional behavior (Dix & Grusec, 1985; Jones & Davis, 1965). Therefore, parents may consider their younger children's behavior to be less intentional when compared to that of an older child. When parents are asked to assess their children's behaviors, as the age of the child increases, children are more likely to be described as controlling and understanding their behavior (Dix & Grusec, 1985).

Consistent with the inferences made by attribution theory, we also expected mothers to make more frequent mention of dispositional causes for their child's behavior (characterized by internal, stable, and general attributions) when discussing harm perpetrated by older children. Young children's behavior changes more quickly during the early stages of development. Older

children's behaviors and personalities are more stable and fluctuate less, so their behavior is understood to be more consistent across different situations (Dix & Grusec, 1985; Jones & Davis, 1965; Miller, 1995). It was expected that mothers would make more external attributions for their younger children's harming behavior because, in the early school-aged years, children may be perceived to be more easily influenced by external factors. That is, due to their limited knowledge of social experiences, children may not be seen to be as capable of handling certain social pressures. We also expected that mothers would be more likely to make internal attributions for their older children's behavior because they may perceive their characters to be more fully developed, and thus expect them to be more socially aware of the consequences their attitudes or mental states can produce (Dix & Grusec, 1985). Generally, attribution theory infers that dispositional causes for negative behaviors will increase with age (Jones & Davis, 1965).

Lastly, it was expected that mothers would make more attributions of the presence of knowledge when discussing harm perpetrated by older children. As children get older, they are perceived to have increased knowledge and their cognitive capacities are expected to be more developed. Therefore, an older child may be understood by a mother to be more aware of the consequences of his/her harmful actions when compared to a younger child. Related to this, Heider's model and the Correspondence Inference Theory postulate that a child's ability to foresee and anticipate the effects/consequences of behavior will increase with age (Dix & Grusec, 1985; Jones & Davis, 1965; Heider, 1958; Miller, 1995).

Second, we examined, for the first time, *the types of attributions mothers made for children's harming behavior across two relationship contexts (sibling and friend).* We expected our study to reveal relationship effects for occurrence and/or causality of harm, intent of

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behavior, intent to harm, locus, stability (vis-à-vis relationship history), generality, consistency, distinctiveness, knowledge, victim amplification, and obligation attributions.

It was expected that mothers would make more attributions about occurrence and/or causality of harm, internal, external (specifically for provocation), intent to harm, stable (specifically for relationship history), consistent, high distinctiveness and obligation when discussing the harm perpetrated against a sibling as compared to a friend. Firstly, we expected that when harm is perpetrated against a sibling, mothers would be more likely to say that harm occurred and that their child was the one who caused the harm. The previous analyses of these data indicate that siblings are a source of great frustration for children, and children describe harm to be typical behavior in this relationship (Recchia et al., 2013). The present study builds on these findings to understand the parental perspective on this subject.

On the contrary, the nature of harm against friends is mostly based on misunderstandings and some children may avoid harm against friends in fear of terminating the relationship (Newcomb & Bagwell, 1995; Raffaelli, 1997). With respect to internality, intent of behavior, and intent to harm, research indicates that children describe their reason to harm a sibling as more internal (e.g., due to anger) and often insensitive, overt, and purposeful whereas harm against a friend is often described as a result of external factors (Buhrmester, 1992; Recchia et al., 2013). Although external attributions are expected to be mentioned more when discussing harm in friendships, certain forms of external pressures, such as provocation, may be mentioned more when discussing harm against siblings given the evidence that provocation is commonplace in the relationship and that siblings often wish to elicit certain negative reactions from their other sibling (Recchia et al., 2013). Furthermore, as described previously, sibling relationships are more stable and consistent due to shared history and the presence of a mutual understanding

(Howe et al., 2011). Thus, inasmuch as mothers are also aware of these facets of sibling relationships, they are likely to make attributions for harm consistent with these patterns.

Additionally, a mother is a parent to both children and is more likely to know more about the overall tenor and unique features of her children's relationship with each other (Whiteman et al., 2011), more than we would expect her to know about her children's relationships with friends. Because siblings share history and property, and siblings know more about each other than friends do (Howe et al., 2011), we expected that mothers would make more attributions of high distinctiveness for harm against siblings.

The attribution of obligation may also be more emphasized when discussing harm perpetrated against a sibling, given that this study involved harm perpetrated specifically against *younger* siblings. As compared to friends, sibling relationships are characterized by an asymmetry of power between older and younger children (Recchia et al., 2013). Thus, mothers may be inclined to say that the child "should know better" or have an obligation to act differently with their younger sibling because of their perceived advanced maturity, and to set an example accordingly.

In contrast, mothers were predicted to make different attributions when discussing harm perpetrated against a friend. It was expected that mothers would make more attributions regarding externality, event-specificity, unintentional harm, victim amplification, and lack of knowledge when discussing harm perpetrated against a friend as compared to a sibling. Research shows that children are not always able to fully comprehend their friends' feelings, resulting in harm that is unintended and often the result of external pressures (Buhrmester, 1992; Recchia et al., 2013). Because of this, mothers may be more inclined to say that their child's harm was the result of external demands (e.g., peer-related influences) and was an isolated incident (event-

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specific). In addition to this, conflict literature focusing on harm perpetration against siblings and friends indicates that harm against friends may more likely involve sensitivity violations when compared to harm perpetrated against a sibling (Recchia et al., 2013) as friends might be more likely to take things personally (Punch, 2008). Thus, with friends more than siblings, we expected mothers to make more attributions of victim amplification, inferring that something about the victim resulted in greater harm than expected.

Lack of knowledge was expected to be mentioned more frequently when discussing the harm perpetrated against a friend. This hypothesis is based on research demonstrating that when children are asked about harmful actions against friends, they describe being unable to anticipate the consequences of their behavior and how their friends will interpret their behaviors (Recchia et al., 2013). Subsequently, they are more likely to have misunderstandings with their friends and know less about their reactions (Punch, 2008).

Lastly, this study was the first to examine *whether age-related changes in attributions about hurting friends are similar or different than age-related changes in attributions about hurting siblings.* According to research based on narrative accounts using the same dataset as this study, harm against siblings and friends tend to be described as somewhat more similar as the age of the child increases (Recchia et al., 2013; Buhrmester, 1992). Specifically, children's contentiousness with their siblings decreases as they become more aware of their hurtful actions towards their siblings and subsequently, as children get older they are increasingly able to balance and consider both their own needs and their friend's needs. Due to these relationship convergences, we expected that maternal attributions for harmful acts perpetrated against friends and siblings would also become more similar with the child's increasing age.

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Method

Participants

Participants were recruited from a mid-sized American city using flyers distributed in schools/summer camps and through word-of-mouth. Parents provided written informed consent and children provided assent to complete all procedures. The initial sample included 103 participants; however, a total 101 participants were included in the study, with two mothers being excluded because their child could not recall an instance where they hurt or upset a friend.

Participating mothers were divided into three groups on the basis of their child's age: 34 seven-year-olds (M age = 7.28 years, range = 6.05 to 8.14), 33 eleven-year-olds (M age = 11.10 years, range = 9.98 to 12.11), and 34 sixteen-year-olds (M age = 16.10 years, range = 15.00 to 17.19). The ratio of boys to girls was approximately equal across all age groups (20:14, 16:17, and 16:18, respectively). The mean age gap between the children and their younger siblings was 2.37 years for 7-year olds (range = 1.00 to 4.42), 2.48 for 11-year-olds (range = 1.00 to 4.25), and 2.55 for 16-year-olds (range =1.00 to 4.5). Approximately 57.4% of the sample consisted of same-sex sibling dyads. The sample of families in this study often included more than one child (70.3%), and thus the closest-in-age younger sibling was always chosen as the target child.

Among the final sample of mothers, most were European American (91%), with the remaining mothers from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. Most mothers were married to the child's father (81%, compared to 10% who were divorced, 6% remarried and 3% single). Regarding religious affiliation, 51% of mothers reported their religious affiliation to be LDS (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, i.e., Mormonism), 18% practiced other forms of Christianity (i.e., Protestantism, Catholicism, or Episcopalian), 10% practiced another faith (e.g., Bahai, Judaism), and 21% were nonreligious. Lastly, most mothers had completed a college or

university degree (43%, compared to 32% who had completed some college or university, 20% who had a postgraduate degree, 5% who had a high school degree, and 1% who had some high school).

Procedure

The data for this study were drawn from a larger investigation of socialization and children's moral development. Only procedures applicable to the current study will be described. Interviews were conducted at either the participating family's home or in a university laboratory. Initially, a research assistant privately asked the child to nominate and describe an event where they hurt or upset a friend, as well as an instance where they hurt or upset a sibling (in counterbalanced order; see Recchia et al., , 2013, for more information). Subsequently, mothers and children were asked to talk together about the two separate harming events and "see if there was something to be learned" in each instance, with no specific instructions to address or discuss attributions (see Recchia, Wainryb, Bourne, & Pasupathi, 2014, for more details). The research assistant left the room during these conversations.

Following the discussions, mothers and children were individually interviewed about each conversation. These interviews were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim for analysis. Portions of the transcript of the interview with the mother formed the focus of the current thesis. Specifically, mothers were asked a series of follow-up questions about their understanding of the harming event and the conversation. Particularly germane to this investigation, mothers were asked, "What do you think was really going on when this happened with the sibling and friend? What do you think your child might have been thinking, feeling, or trying to do"? Subsequently, mothers were also asked to evaluate the act by responding to the following question: "Do you think it was ok or not ok for your child to do that? Why/why not?" Although this latter question

did not always elicit responses addressing why the child engaged in the harmful behavior, it was included in order to examine more evaluative (rather than descriptive) dimensions of mothers' perspectives on their children's conduct. Considering that mothers and children spoke about the harming event immediately prior to the maternal interview, we also probed mothers' perceived differences between their own attributions and those of their child. Specifically, we also asked the following question, based on information obtained from a separate interview with the child: "Your child said he/she did it because _____. Why do YOU think he/she did that"?

Last, to provide descriptive information about mother's prior knowledge of the particular events that were discussed, we also asked, "Before today, did you ever talk to child about what happened with (friend/sibling)?" When harm was committed against a sibling, mothers reported previously discussing 67% of the events. Similarly, when harm was perpetrated against a friend, mothers reported previously discussing 62% of the events.

Coding

The coding scheme used was developed specifically for the purpose of this project. It was created based on attribution research addressing parents' assessments, perceptions, and definitions of their children's behavior in a social context. Furthermore, attributions used in blame models were also incorporated. The final coding scheme is included in Appendix A with multiple examples drawn from the dataset, along with a definition of each code.

Specifically, based on the attribution theories of Jones and Davis (1965), Weiner (1986), Kelley (1973), and the related research completed by Dix and colleagues (1985; 1986; 1993), we measured the attributions of *locus*, *stability*, *generality*, *consistency*, *distinctiveness*, and *knowledge*. *Intentionality* was also used, however, given the important conceptual distinction between these dimensions (such that intentional behavior does not necessarily entail intentional

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harm; Nadler, 2014), we chose to make the distinction between intentionality of harm and the intentionality of behavior. Additionally, based on relevant attributions used in blame models (Malle et al., 2014; Alicke, 2000), we coded occurrence and causality of *harm*, *obligation*, and *victim amplification*. All definitions were adapted to maximize relevance to the questions that form the focus of this particular study.

Initially, we also attempted to code the dimension of *foreseeability,* defined as "the child should or should not have anticipated the consequences of his/her behavior." This was distinguished from the attribution of *knowledge*, which was defined as "the child could or could not correctly anticipate the consequences of his/her behavior." Ultimately, however, the attribution of *foreseeability* occurred so infrequently that we could not justify retaining it, and subsequently collapsed these references with *knowledge* on the basis of their conceptual similarity.

Open-ended maternal responses were coded globally for each attribution described in Appendix A. In other words, the complete set of responses to questions pertaining to each event (described in the procedure above) were coded for the overall presence/absence of each type of attribution. Attributions were coded along dimensions; therefore, a single statement could be used to code various dimensions (whereas other statements were irrelevant to coding attributions). For example, the statement, "He has to get what he wants every time" would be coded under the dimensions of locus (internal), stability (stable), and generality (general). Furthermore, in addition to making several attributions in one single statement, mothers also sometimes made contradictory attributions. For instance, the statement, "I don't think he wanted to hurt him, but he knew it was important to his brother so that's why he took it" would be coded under the dimension of intentional harm as reflecting references to *both* intentional and

unintentional harm. Similarly, mothers occasionally made contradictory attributions in the same interview when responding to two different questions. For instance, in describing one particular event, a mother said, "He has always been that "sort" of kid who says, "this is what I'm going to do"" and also said, "he's still relatively little, and figuring out who he is". In this case, these statements would be coded under the dimensions of stability as reflecting references to *both* stable and changing

Interrater Reliability

Interrater reliability was established for all coding. Two independent raters coded 20% (*N*= 20/101) of the transcripts. One of the raters was blind to the study's hypotheses. Percentage agreement and Cohen's *kappas* were calculated for each code, group, and subgroup described below. Any disagreements were discussed amongst the coders and a final code was agreed upon. All the *kappas* exceeded 0.80; specific reliability scores for each attribution can be found in Table 1.

Table 1

Cohen's Kappas for Interrater Reliabilities

	Cohen's *kappa*
Occurrence and/or causality of harm	1.0
Internal	1.0
Emotions	.96
Goals	.90
Personality	.84
Lack of reflection/negligence	.94
Misguided behavior	1.0
Thoughts/perceptions	.88
External	.91
Provocation	.88
Family-related influences	1.0
Peer-related influences	1.0
Extenuating circumstances	1.0
Stable	.90
Relationship history	1.0
Character/personality	1.0
Changing	.81
General	1.0
Event specific	.82
Consistent	.90
Inconsistent	1.0

High Distinctiveness	.91
Low Distinctiveness	1.0
Intentional behavior	.94
Unintentional behavior	1.0
Intentional harm	1.0
Unintentional harm	1.0
Obligation present	1.0
Obligation absent	1.0
Knowledge present	.90
Knowledge absent	1.0
Amplified harm	.94

Results

Plan of Analysis

We examined how mothers' attributions for harm differed across two relationship contexts and three different age groups. To do so, we conducted a series of mixed-model MANOVAs with age (7-, 11-, or 16-years) as a between-subjects factor and type of relationship (sibling, friend) as a within-subjects factor; the types of attributions were examined as dependent variables. It should be noted that although dependent variables were scored dichotomously, ANOVA-based procedures were used because they have been shown to be more appropriate for analyzing this type of data than are log linear-based procedures, as the latter run into a distinct estimation problem (see Wainryb, Shaw, Laupa, & Smith, 2001). Significant multivariate effects were followed up using univariate tests. An alpha level of $p < .05$ was used for all omnibus tests. The Bonferroni correction (with a familywise alpha level of $p < .05$) was used for post hoc pairwise comparisons. Gender (male, female) was included as an additional between-subjects factor as a control but was not the focus of this study.

Analyses of Mothers' Attributions

Occurrence and/or causality of harm (harm occurred/was caused by child). A relationship type x age x gender ANOVA with *harm occurred/was caused by the child* as the dependent variable revealed a univariate effect of relationship type, $F(1, 95) = 9.04$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2_p = .09$. Consistent with hypotheses, mothers made more attributions of occurrence of harm when discussing harm perpetrated against a sibling as compared to a friend (see Table 2).

Locus (internal, external). A relationship type x age x gender MANOVA with overall *internal* and *external* categories as dependent variables failed to reveal any significant effects of relationship type, age, or gender.

A series of two additional relationship type x age x gender MANOVAs were conducted, separately for internal (*emotions*, *goals*, *personality*, *lack of reflection/negligence*, *misguided behavior*, *thoughts/perceptions*) and external subcategories (*provocation*, *family related influences*, *peer-related influences*, *extenuating circumstance)* as dependent variables. With regards to the MANOVA for internal subcategories, the analysis failed to reveal any significant effects for relationship type, age, or gender. However, for the external subcategories, and consistent with hypotheses, results revealed a significant multivariate effect of relationship type, Wilk's λ = .79, η^2_p = .21 Follow-up ANOVAs revealed univariate effects of relationship type for *provocation*, F (1, 95) = 8.24, η^2_p = .08 and *peer-related influences*, F (1, 95) = 7.70, η^2_p = .08, in that mothers made more attributions of provocation when discussing harm perpetrated against a sibling as compared to a friend. Furthermore, mothers made more attributions of peer-related influences when discussing harm perpetrated against a friend as compared to a sibling (see Table 2).

Stability (stable, changing). A relationship type x age x gender MANOVA with *stable* and *changing* as dependent variables revealed a significant multivariate effect of relationship type, Wilk's λ = .87, η^2_p = .13. Follow-up ANOVAs revealed a univariate effect of relationship type for *stable*, F (1, 95) = 13.87, η^2_p =.13, in that mothers made more stable attributions when discussing harm perpetrated against a sibling as compared to a friend (see Table 2).

A second relationship type x age x gender MANOVA with *stable (relationship history, character/personality)* subcategories as dependent variables revealed a significant multivariate effect of relationship type, Wilk's λ = .86, η^2_p = .14. Follow-up ANOVAs revealed a univariate effect of relationship type for *relationship history*, F (1, 95) = 13.32, η^2_p =.12. Consistent with

hypotheses, mothers made significantly more stable relationship history attributions when discussing harm committed against a sibling as compared to a friend (see Table 2).

Generality (general, event-specific). A relationship type x age x gender MANOVA with *general* and *event-specific* as dependent variables revealed a significant multivariate effect of relationship type, Wilk's λ = .90, η^2_p = .10. Follow-up ANOVAs revealed a univariate effect of relationship type for *event-specific*, F (1, 95) = 9.88, η^2_p =.09. Consistent with hypotheses, mothers made more event-specific attributions when discussing harm perpetrated against a friend as compared to a sibling (see Table 2).

Consistency (consistent, inconsistent). A relationship type x age x gender MANOVA with *consistent* and *inconsistent* as dependent variables revealed a significant multivariate effect of relationship type, Wilk's λ = .89, η^2_p = .11, a two-way interaction of relationship type x gender, Wilk's λ = .92, η^2_p = .08, and a three-way interaction of relationship type x age x gender Wilk's λ = .87, η^2_p = .07. Follow-up ANOVAs revealed a univariate effect of relationship type for *consistent*, F (1, 95) = 11.78, η^2_p =.11. As expected, mothers made more consistent attributions when considering harm perpetrated against a sibling as compared to a friend (see Table 2). However, this effect for *consistent* attributions was also qualified by an interaction between relationship type and gender, F (1, 95) = 8.24, η^2_p =. 08. Simple effects tests revealed that mothers made more consistent attributions for boys (*M* = .32, *SE* = .06) as compared to girls (*M* = .13, *SE* = .06) when discussing harm perpetrated against a sibling, whereas there was no significant gender difference when discussing harm against friends.

Last, these effects were further qualified by a three-way interaction of relationship type x age x gender for *consistent*, F (2, 95) =4.05, η^2_p =. 08, in that mothers made considerably more consistent attributions for 7-year-old boys when discussing harm perpetrated against a sibling (*M*

= .57, *SE* = .11 as compared to a friend (*M* = .07, *SE* =.07), whereas this relationship effect was less pronounced for other age and gender combinations.

Distinctiveness (high, low). A relationship type x age x gender MANOVA with *high distinctiveness* and *low distinctiveness* as dependent variables revealed a significant multivariate effect of relationship type, Wilk's λ = .94, η^2_p = .06. Follow-up ANOVAs revealed a univariate effect of relationship type for *high distinctiveness*, F (1, 95) = 4.32, η^2_p =.04. As expected, mothers made significantly more attributions of high distinctiveness when discussing sibling harm compared to friend harm (see Table 2).

Intentional behavior (intentional, unintentional). A relationship type x age x gender MANOVA with *intentional behavior* and *unintentional behavior* as dependent variables revealed a significant multivariate effect of relationship type, Wilk's λ = .93, η^2_p = .07. Follow-up ANOVAs revealed a univariate effect of relationship type for *intentional behavior,* F (1, 95) = 7.53, η^2_p =.07. As expected, mothers made more attributions of intentional behavior when considering harm perpetrated against a sibling as compared to a friend (see Table 2).

Intentional harm (intentional, unintentional). A relationship type x age x gender MANOVA with *intentional harm* and *unintentional harm* as dependent variables revealed a significant multivariate effect of relationship type, Wilk's λ = .80, η^2_p = .20. Follow-up ANOVAs revealed univariate effects of relationship type for *intentional harm*, F (1, 95) = 18.79, η^2_p =.17, and *unintentional harm*, F (1, 95) = 11.34, η^2_p =.11. As expected mothers, made significantly more attributions of intentional harm when discussing harm perpetrated against a sibling, whereas mothers made significantly more attributions of unintentional harm when discussing harm perpetrated against a friend (see Table 2).

Obligation (present, absent). A relationship type x age x gender MANOVA with *obligation present* and *obligation absent* as dependent variables failed to reveal any significant effects of relationship type, age, or gender.

Knowledge (present, absent). A relationship type x age x gender MANOVA with *knowledge present* and *knowledge absent* as dependent variables failed to reveal any significant effects of relationship type, age, or gender.

Victim amplification (amplified harm). A relationship type x age x gender ANOVA with *amplified harm* as dependent variable revealed a significant two-way interaction of age and gender, $F (2, 95) = 3.82$, $\eta^2_p =. 07$. Simple effects tests revealed that, when discussing their daughters' conflicts, mothers made more attributions of amplified harm for 11-year-olds ($M = .28$, $SE = .06$) and 16-year-olds ($M = .28$, $SE = .06$) as compared to 7-year-olds ($M = .10$, $SE = .06$); there were no significant age differences when discussing harm perpetrated by sons.

Dispositional. Based on previous literature, we were particularly interested in examining the emergent attribution of "dispositional", which was created by combining internal, stable and general dimensions. A relationship type x age x gender MANOVA with this composite *dispositional* category as the dependent variable failed to reveal any significant effects of relationship type, age, and gender.

Table 2

Means and Standard Errors for Attribution Categories and Subcategories

	Harm against Friends M proportions (*SE*)	Harm against Siblings M proportions (*SE*)
Harm occurred/was caused by child	.92 (.25) [a]	1.0 (.00) [b]
Internal	.96 (.02)	.99 (.01)
Emotions	.48 (.05)	.48 (.05)
Goals	.68 (.05)	.77 (.04)
Personality	.33 (.05)	.29 (.05)
Lack of reflection/negligence	.21 (.04)	.21 (.04)
Misguided behavior	.17 (.04)	.07 (.03)
Thoughts/perceptions	.13 (.03)	.13 (.03)
External	.31 (.05)	.38 (.05)
Provocation	.18 (.04) [a]	.33 (.05) [b]
Family-related influences	.04 (.02)	.10 (.03)
Peer- related influences	.12 (.03) [a]	.02 (.01) [b]
Extenuating circumstances	.06 (.02)	.02 (.01)
Stable	.08 (.03) [a]	.26 (.04) [b]
Relationship history	.04 (.02) [a]	.20 (.04) [b]
Character/personality	.04 (.02)	.06 (.02)
Changing	.24 (.04)	.23 (.04)
General	.09 (.03)	.09 (.03)

Event-specific	.62 (.05) [a]	.40 (.05) [b]
Consistent	.08 (.03) [a]	.23 (.04) [b]
Inconsistent	.10 (.03)	.07 (.03)
High distinctiveness	.07 (.03) [a]	.15 (.04) [b]
Low distinctiveness	.05 (.02)	.01 (.01)
Intentional behavior	.71 (.05) [a]	.86 (.04) [b]
Unintentional behavior	.08 (.03)	.04 (.02)
Intentional harm	.06 (.02) [a]	.29 (.05) [b]
Unintentional harm	.52 (.05) [a]	.30 (.05) [b]
Obligation present	.03 (.02)	.10 (.03)
Obligation absent	.01 (.01)	.04 (.02)
Knowledge present	.05 (.02)	.11 (.03)
Knowledge absent	.12 (.03)	.04 (.02)
Amplified harm	.23 (.04)	.13 (.03)

*Note. M*s in the same row are labeled with different superscripts when analyses revealed

significant differences with a Bonferroni correction (alpha =.05).

Discussion

The goal of this study was to explore the different attributions mothers make in explaining transgressions committed by their 7-, 11-, and 16-year-old children against friends and younger siblings. This study provides new insight into how mothers may make varying attributions in response to harm occurring in different relationship contexts, and suggest that these patterns were largely similar across the sampled age range. More specifically, this study addressed three overarching research questions: (1) what types of attributions do mothers make for their child's harming behavior at different ages? (2) What types of attributions do mothers make for children's harming behavior across two relationship contexts (sibling and friend)? And (3) are age-related changes in attributions about hurting friends similar to, or different from age-related changes in attributions about hurting siblings? The discussion of the findings related to these research questions is described below. Prior to describing these specific patterns, it is important to note that most findings were not moderated by gender. Most studies reporting gender effects have investigated attributions for academic achievement (Miller, 1995). However, as described above, there are a few instances where gender moderated relationship effects in the current study, and this will be addressed in the following sections.

Attributions for Harm Across Age

The first aim of the current study was to examine the types of attributions mothers made for their children's harming behavior at different ages. We expected mothers to make more attributions of intentionality of behavior, internality, stability, generality, and presence of knowledge, for harm perpetrated by older children as compared to younger children. Unexpectedly, the results of the current study did not reveal any significant main effects of age. Contrary to the age-related findings in studies conducted by Dix and colleagues (1985; 1986;

1993) but consistent with others (e.g., Gretarsson & Gelfand, 1988; Himelstein et al., 1991; Scott & Dembo, 1993) it seems that mothers do not make consistently different attributions for children's harming behavior across age. For example, we expected mothers to make more attributions of intentional behavior and presence of knowledge for older children because as children age, they are more likely to distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate behavior (Jacobs et al., 2017) compared to younger children who are less capable of controlling their own behavior (Rueda & Paz-Alonso, 2013). Our assumption was that mothers may incorporate this information and reflection on age-related development into their attributions. However, results of the present study show that mothers made attributions of intentional behavior and presence of knowledge similarly across ages. There are several reasons that may explain this absence of age effects.

Firstly, the sample age range used in the studies conducted by Dix and Grusec (1985; 1986; 1993) was 4-12 years, and thus captured a somewhat different period of development than our own study. As such, it is possible that age effects may be more evident in the early years, thus leading to some inconsistencies between their findings and our own. Secondly, although we know that children are developmentally constrained due to age (in executive functioning, planning, and emotional regulation), adolescents are also going through periods of systemic growth (Keating, 2004). For example, adolescence is marked by a period of hormonal fluctuations and the development of the prefrontal cortex (Steinberg, 2005). These changes in development may decrease adolescent's ability to think about the impact of their actions, make appropriate decisions (Steinberg, 2005), and affect the perceptions they have of themselves and their relationships with others (Cole & Kerns, 2001; Dunn, 1992). Thus, it is reasonable to presume that mothers adjust the expectations they have of their adolescent children because they

are aware of the systemic changes that occur during this period of development. Through a closer analysis of the data, it seems that mothers do highlight adolescents' developmental milestones and fluctuations. For example, one mother described her 16-year-old's harmful behavior as follows: "girls especially at this age-- growing up time is a hard time. They do not always know what they are doing, there's all kinds of things that bother them and keep them up and down and stuff." Thus, it is possible that mothers are attuned to the different kinds of developmental constraints and challenges that influence children's behavior at varying ages.

Another reason for the lack of age effects may be that, as children age, the types of conflicts that they experience are also evolving. In fact, research reports that harming events do change with a child's increasing age (Recchia et al., 2013). For example, 7-year-olds are more likely to engage in property related harm as compared to 16-year-olds who engage in more offensive behavior such as yelling and teasing (Recchia et al., 2013). Thus, while the nature and severity of the harm varies with age, the behaviors can be seen as equally as intentional; a 7-year-old who purposely steals their friend's toy and a 16-year-old who teases their friend to provoke them are equivalent in the deliberateness of their actions. Put another way, if the types of harm were held constant across age, systematic age effects might be revealed. By contrast, the results from the study on actual events indicate that age differences may be reflected more in the types of harms that are experienced by children than in the attributions that mothers make about such evolving experiences of harm.

In addition to the reason noted above, this study used an open-ended method for eliciting attributions specifically in response to children's narrative accounts of harming their friends and siblings. Because of this methodological approach, mothers were given the opportunity to make spontaneous attributions. Consequently, mothers' responses included references to several

attributional dimensions that were rich in detail. This runs contrary to the findings that result

from presenting hypothetical vignettes with closed-ended response options, as found in previous

work (e.g., Dix et al., 1986; Jacobs et al., 2017). These findings build on the existing research by

suggesting that age-related attributions in parents' third-party responses to hypothetical scenarios

may possibly not generalize to their more rich, contextualized views of their own children's

actions (Gretarsson & Gelfand, 1988).

Interestingly, although not hypothesized, our results revealed one significant interaction

between gender and age, such that mothers made more attributions of victim amplification for

11- and 16-year-old girls as compared to 7-year-old girls. A possible explanation for this finding

may be that girls' harming behavior in the late elementary and adolescent years is more

susceptible to interpretation by others because as girls age, harm becomes more psychological

(e.g., due to issues such as relationship betrayal; Lagerspetz, Bjorkqvist, & Peltonen, 1988;

Owens & MacMullin, 1995; Raffaelli, 1997).

Overall regardless of age, most parents fundamentally believe that their children are

"good", and thus be described as developmental optimists vis-à-vis their children (Goodnow,

Knight, & Cashmore, 1986). Although some previous research asserts that mothers make more

dispositional attributions for their older children's misdeeds (see Dix et al., 1985,1986), results

from this study on actual events demonstrates that even with teenagers, mothers are unlikely to

draw on dispositional attributions to explain their children's hurtful actions. In fact, research has

shown that mothers are more likely to associate dispositional characteristics with positive child

behaviors as opposed to negative child behaviors (e.g., Gretarsson & Gelfand, 1988). Thus, it is

not surprising that the mothers in this study did not frequently explain their children's misdeeds

(i.e., harms) as caused by their stable, general traits. On the contrary, their explanations for harm

commonly targeted their children's contextually-situated actions rather than their more enduring personal selves.

Taken together, it seems that mothers are making attributions in line with their understanding of who their child is and how they are navigating particular issues in certain relationship contexts, as opposed to attributions that more globally reflect age expectations. That being said, it is possible that the age of the child is more important to consider post-fact (i.e., during socialization when implementing practices or deciding on punitive responses).

Attributions for Harm Across Relationships

The second aim of this study was to investigate the types of attributions mothers made for their children's harming behavior across two relationship contexts (sibling and friend). We expected our study to reveal relationship effects for attributions about occurrence and/or causality of harm, intent of behavior, intent to harm, locus, stability (vis-à-vis relationship history), generality, consistency, distinctiveness, absence of knowledge, victim amplification and obligation attributions. In contrast to the lack of significant age effects described above, many of the observed findings were in line with these expectations.

Siblings. As expected, mothers made attributions consistent with features of sibling relationships. When considering conflicts between siblings, a mother possesses a unique relationship with both the transgressor and the victim. Mothers are aware of what transpires between siblings and have knowledge of the unique features of this relationship. Previous research highlights that the distinct features of sibling relationships to include sharing history and property (Howe et al., 2002; 2011). Due to this shared space and history, conflict is relatively commonplace (e.g., Furman & Buhrmester, 1985). Indeed, children report sometimes harming their siblings deliberately, and often because they were initially provoked (e.g., Punch, 2008).

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Research has also shown that harm with siblings can be recurrent and a source of great frustration for both children and parents (Punch, 2008, Recchia et al., 2013). Taking all of this into account, mothers made attributions that were consistent with patterns observed in previous research, including attributions of agent causality, intentional behavior, intentional harm, provocation (externality) as well as a stable relationship history, high distinctiveness, and consistent behavior. The following excerpt is an example from the current dataset that highlights some of these patterns (edited for length where indicated with […]). In this example a mother recounts an instance where her 16-year-old daughter made fun of her younger brother while on a family vacation:

> The more you're around each other, families… you can get on each other's nerves. But usually there's always something with siblings. I just think that she gets tired of him bothering her and instigating and she ignores it a lot …I think she just reached a point "I've had it." So now I'm going to show you what it's like" kind of thing. That's probably what her motivating factor was. Give him a taste of his own medicine.

In this example it is evident that a mother is describing her daughter's behavior and harm as intentional (e.g., her motivation to "give him a taste of his own medicine" and "show him what it's like"), but that she also sees this harm as a direct result of her younger brother's provocation (e.g., he bothers her and is commonly an instigator). The mother also refers to the unique and historical features of the relationship between the siblings as a basis for her daughter's behavior (e.g., "usually, there is always something with siblings"). As such, this excerpt exemplifies attributions of intentional harm, intentional behavior, externality (provocation), high distinctiveness, and stable relationship history.

Contrary to what was hypothesized, however, mothers did not make more attributions of internality when discussing harm perpetrated against a sibling as compared to a friend. These results are not in line with literature suggesting that children are more internally driven when harming their siblings (Recchia et al., 2013). A potential explanation for this finding is that mothers' perspectives on sibling conflict are informed by her intimate knowledge of *both* children who were involved in the event, whereas mothers may focus predominantly on her child and his/her motivations, cognitions, and emotions when discussing harm perpetrated against a friend (because she knows less about the victim's character and personality, and also about the circumstances surrounding the harm). Thus, making internal attributions for harm against friends should have also been expected, in light of these differences in the stance that mothers may take in considering transgressions in the two relationships.

In addition to this, we expected mothers to make more attributions about the presence of obligation to avoid harm against siblings given that research suggests that adults have more expectations of appropriate behavior for older siblings (i.e., physical aggression or domination are not acceptable behaviors especially when enacted towards a younger sibling; Mendelson, de Villa, Fitch, & Goodman, 1997). While we did find that mothers referred more overall to the dimension of obligation or lack thereof with siblings (in an additional analysis not reported above), when these two categories were examined separately, significant relationship effects did not emerge. Thus, while role-related obligations do appear to be more salient to mothers when they consider sibling relationships, this does not appear to lead mothers to consistently endorse children's obligations towards their siblings. This may in part be accounted for by research suggesting that adults expect younger siblings to be pesky or annoying (Mendelson et al., 1997), and perhaps equally as responsible for the harm. For example, different mothers in our sample

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made observations such as "[sibling] is really a handful, and he's encroaching on his turf all the time", "[sibling] is always being pushy, and bossy", and "[sibling] makes faces and he instigates". Furthermore, as a counterpoint to older siblings' role-related obligations, research has also shown that some parents are more likely to normalize sibling harm, as compared to harm committed towards an individual outside of the home (Punch, 2008).

Although not hypothesized, the findings revealed that mothers made more attributions of consistency for boys as compared to girls when discussing harm against siblings. Anecdotally, the content of such attributions implies that mothers may be making more stereotypically gendered comments when discussing boy's harming behavior in the sibling relationship. For example, mothers commented that "boys are always wrestling", "boys test each other out" and "boys are going to be boys". In fact, research has shown that parents may be sensitive to gender in sibling aggression in that they are more accepting of aggressive acts committed by boys than girls (Martin & Ross, 2005). Certainly, this result requires replication and more systematic exploration in future work.

Friendships. Contrary to sibling relationships, mothers are less likely to know about what occurs when their children harm their friends. Additionally, and children generally avoid harming friends because of the fear that it might end their relationship (Newcomb & Bagwell, 1995; Raffaelli, 1997; Punch, 2008). However, the types of harms that occur with friends are more open to interpretation (e.g., misunderstandings) and situation-specific (circumstantial; Recchia et al., 2013). Beyond research conducted on this dataset, other recent research has shown that when children recounted actual reasons for harming hypothetical friends, children highlighted that their behavior was unintentional (Smetana & Ball, 2017). Children also used personal justifications (e.g., "I misunderstood the situation") to mitigate the hurt they caused

(Smetana & Ball, 2017; Wainryb, Brehl, & Matwin, 2005). Our data suggest that mothers were sensitive to these aspects of children's experiences, as they made attributions that served to minimize their children's harm or negate the negative consequences. That is, when discussing conflicts with friends, mothers were more likely to make attributions of externality (peer-related influences), event specificity, and unintentional harm. The following excerpt is an example from the current dataset that highlights these attributions (edited for length where indicated with […]). In this example a mother explains how her 11-year-old son was initially playing with his two friends, and then left to play with only one friend (while leaving the other friend behind):

> He probably did feel pretty torn cause he is pretty good friends with you know both… [child] is… pretty accepting and loving…he wants to include everybody. I think it was probably cause of peer pressure. And that's why…I said "Can there really only be so many players in the game?

In this example the mother is describing her son's behavior in the context of a specific event (i.e., a game on the playground). Additionally, the mother alludes to her son's harm as being inconsistent with his demeanor (and thus likely not deliberate) by saying that he is "pretty accepting", "loving", and "wants to include everybody". The mother further explains that peer pressure may have been a potential cause for her son's harming behavior towards his friend. Overall, this excerpt exemplifies attributions of event specificity, unintentional harm, and externality (peer-related influences).

Contrary to what was hypothesized, mothers did not make more attributions of amplified harm and absence of knowledge when discussing harm perpetrated against a friend. This is despite research suggesting that children describe not being able to fully comprehend their friend's feelings, leading to harm that is unanticipated (Recchia et al., 2013), and their friends

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potentially being too sensitive and having unexpected negative reactions (Punch, 2008). It may be possible that since most mothers in the present study interpret their child's harm towards friends as initially being unintentional, they may not feel it necessary to address why the victim got hurt as a result of the behavior. Interpreting the harm as unintentional may be enough for a mother to account for why the child engaged in the harmful behavior in the first place. Regarding the absence of knowledge, it may be that mothers believe that their children understand both victims (sibling and friend) reasonably well, even though they may share a lengthier history with their siblings. This is particularly the case since children were asked to describe a transgression against a "good friend". Thus, mothers may judge that even though they personally do not have knowledge of what transpires outside of their supervision, their children are aware of the hurtful consequences of their actions in both relationship contexts.

Taken together, when addressing maternal attributions for children's harming behavior, we can conclude that results of the present study show that age effects are inconsistent and relationship effects are maintained across age. These results are similar to prior research on this dataset indicating that children's own accounts of harming their siblings and friends are recognizably different at age seven and continue to show many of the same patterns at age 16 (Recchia et al., 2013). For instance, children's behavior is not less ruthless or conflictual with siblings with increasing age. Other research has shown that adolescents tend to more often relinquish their goals and objectives with friends (in order to avoid damaging these relationships), but are willing to stand their ground in disputes with their siblings (Raffaelli, 1997). It may be that since sibling relationships become more voluntary beginning in the late adolescent years (due to older siblings leaving the home, and other life transitions) declines in sibling conflict only begin to appear in emerging adulthood (Conger & Little, 2010; Scharf,

Shulman, & Avigad-Spitz, 2005; Lindell, 2013). In fact, research has demonstrated that conflictual sibling relationships in adolescence are related to less emotionally intense and more positive relationships in early adulthood (Lindell, Campione-Barr, & Bassett Greer, 2014).

Limitations

Some limitations need to be addressed when discussing this research. This study examines parental attributions for children's harmful actions using a cross-sectional design (children at different ages were analyzed concurrently); thus, we were not able to capture mothers' attributions for their children's harming behaviors over time. If we are to better understand developmental trajectories, a longitudinal study would be preferable to capture age-related effects in parental attributions. Furthermore, while a longitudinal design can inform us about changes in attributions across age, it can also provide insight on mothers' personal growth and changing perspectives' as they get older and more experienced in their parenting practices.

In addition to this, the study did not control for the recency of conflict events; while some mothers were making attributions for harming events from the distant past (e.g., something that happened several years ago), others were discussing more recent events. If the event did occur in the distant past (e.g., when the now 16-year-old child was an 11-year-old), this may partially explain the lack of robust age-related findings in the present sample. For example, when explaining her 11-year-old's behavior a mother stated, "A big thing was that he was 7-years-old at the time, knowing that he was 7 at the time, I would have had a different reaction now if it was like, oh yeah this happened yesterday, versus this happened three and a half years ago". Hence, the mother notes that her reactions (and her attributions to some extent) would be different if the child were describing a more recent harming event. Thus, although we coded responses for the now 11-year-old, these attributions pertained to the child's experiences when he/she was in a

younger age bracket (7-year-old).

In addition to this, we cannot be sure whether mothers are simply repeating attributions for harm based on information previously communicated to them by their children. However, it is important to note for these data that the children were the main initiators of attributions in the conversations with their mothers about the harming events (66%); however, only about half (57%) of those attributions were mentioned in the ensuing maternal interviews. Overall, this means that mothers are indeed listening to their children to some degree (i.e., they are sensitive to their children's experiences and/or explanations of the harm events), but are also cognizant of other causes or factors. Thus, the conversations about events are best characterized as co-constructed (as are the attributions, to some extent).

Another limitation is the sole use of an open-ended method for eliciting attributions. As previously discussed, closed-choice questioning has been the preferred practice in the field of attribution research (e.g., Dix et al., 1989; Jacobs et al., 2017). The absence of a more closed-ended method such as independent ratings (rating how important one factor is) renders the resulting open-ended responses more difficult to interpret as they were not delivered in a standardized format and sometimes were open to interpretation. Thus, a balance of closed-choice and open-choice may be preferable. Nevertheless, the open-choice questions provided us with the opportunity to examine personally generated and spontaneous attributions, which past research has largely failed to investigate.

All participants in the sample were from middle-class households residing in one mid-sized American city. Mothers were also quite well-educated. Therefore, the results of the study may not be pertinent to other populations such as those from low socio-economic status households or other cultural backgrounds, limiting the study's generalizability. Moreover, this

study inquired solely about harm against younger siblings. Although older siblings are more often the perpetrators and winners of conflict (Ross et al., 1994), by restricting our study to the context of harm against younger siblings, we cannot assess whether mothers' attributions for sibling harm may vary as a function of birth order. Therefore, we are not able to generalize our results to harm perpetrated against an older sibling.

Last, all participating parent interviewees for this study were mothers; fathers were not included in the sample. Previous research indicates that mothers and fathers do not differ greatly in their beliefs about their children's behavior, and do not show much variance in the types of attributions they make for their children's social behavior (e.g., Mills & Rubin, 1990; Colalillo et. al., 2015). Nevertheless, some studies assessing attributions in social behavior do uncover differences between mothers and fathers, particularly with respect to socialization practices (Dix & Reinhold, 1991; Dix, Reinhold, & Zambarano, 1990). Given these conclusions, these findings may not generalize to fathers.

Implications and Future Directions

This study was designed to investigate the different attributions that mothers make when discussing harm perpetrated by their 7-,11-, and 16-year-old children towards their friends and siblings. The findings provided evidence to support the hypothesis that mothers make different attributions for harm contingent on relationship context (friend, sibling). Additionally, this study implies that mothers' attributions for harm are not consistently related to the age of the child. To the best of our knowledge, this study is one of the first to examine mothers' attributions for harm in the context of sibling relationships and friendships, and one of the only studies to use an open-ended method for eliciting attributions about children's actual transgressions.

The ways in which mothers understand and assess their children's harmful behavior have implications for parenting and socialization. Parental beliefs about particular behaviors and the importance of responding to these behaviors are directly related to attributions (e.g., Dix et al., 1985; Slep & O'Leary, 1998). This study can provide insight on how to educate parents in utilizing optimal parenting practices and help parents manage conflicts in children's different relationships. Specific to sibling relationships, mothers can engage in socialization practices that require siblings to reflect on alternate points of view. Considering that harm between siblings is uninhibited, and often involves a disregard for the other's feelings, promoting perspective-taking may thus reduce the consistency of the harming behavior. Likewise, when managing conflicts in friendships, parents can continue to promote their children's explorations of their friend's sensitivities to harm (in the case where something about the victim resulted in greater harm than anticipated), which may thus also reduce the likelihood of unintentional harm in the future.

Social interactions between parents and children can be problematic, especially when discussing negative behaviors such as harm; most intervention programs tend to focus on modifying child behaviors (children's actions and their noncompliance, e.g., McMahon, Long, & Forehand, 2011) as opposed to encouraging parents to reflect on how they act and think about their children. By encouraging parents to consider how they make attributions and engage in this mental process, this may also help them recognize the subjectivity of the attributions. Also, encouraging parents to take their children's perspectives into consideration as well as their abilities and knowledge in the context of particular harming situations, may help parents minimize hostile attributions or attributions that hold their child accountable for their actions to an inappropriate degree. Programs can also help parents reframe their dispositional attributions for negative behaviors by considering the contextual and relational factors that give rise to

children's actions. In addition, if mothers do not consider their child's developmental constraints, it may have implications for socialization at different ages. For example, if a parent requests something of a young child, and the child is not given the time to process what is happening and what the parent wants them to do, the parent may be mistaking noncompliance for struggles with emotional regulation.

Given these considerations, an important next step is to connect mothers' attributions to their reported or actual strategies for intervention in different relationships and at different ages. For example, if a mother interprets her young child's hurtful actions to be intentional, will she consequently try to control his/her behavior by way of punishment? Or, alternatively, will she choose a nonpunitive strategy because the behavior does not violate the expectations she has for her child (due to his young age, as he may not possess the complex cognitive capacities to understand his actions)? In this respect, this study can ultimately provide us with information on mothers' strategies for intervention based on the attributions that predominate in different contexts. Related to this, it would also be helpful to examine which attributions elicit parental intervention, and which ones do not. For example, behavior that is attributed to factors that are transitory and external may be less likely to elicit disciplinary strategies as compared to a behavior that is perceived to be stable and consistent.

Additionally, considering that this study was informed by models of blame, and that research on blame and parenting is limited, it would be interesting to directly examine how blameworthiness may play a role in mothers' socialization of children. Thus, another extension of this study can examine how blame moderates the relationship between attributions and socialization practices. For example, consider a hypothetical mother making an attribution stating, "I understand that these situations are hard for him, because he has trouble controlling

his anger" versus "He just totally flies off the handle all the time with everybody for no reason". These two examples reflect a similar attribution, but the underlying ascription of blameworthiness in the latter case may arguably lead the mother to be more punitive.

Lastly, research has shown that the ways in which parents behave towards their children, and the behaviors that children learn in the family context, are related to children's social behaviors in other contexts (McDowell, Parke, & Spitzer, 2002). However, we know little about how parenting practices/behaviors directly affect children's behaviors in different relationship contexts. Thus, it would be interesting to examine whether parenting behaviors or attributions, and subsequent socialization practices/ disciplinary tactics cause children to behave in different ways towards their friends and siblings. Overall, then, this study makes important headway in delineating the elements that parents may consider when socializing their children

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Appendix A

Coding Scheme

Attributions	Definitions	Examples
Occurrence of harm and/or agent causality i. Harm occurred/was caused by child	i. Harm occurred and/or the child was the one whose actions resulted in harm.	i. "He said some really mean things to his brother"

Locus
  a. Internal
    i. Emotions
    ii. Goals
    iii. Personality
    iv. Lack of reflection/negligence
    v. Misguided behavior
    vi. Thoughts/perceptions
  b. External
    i. Provocation
    ii. Family related influences
    iii. Peer related influences
    iv. Extenuating circumstance
	a. Internal
	The child is behaving in a certain way due to personal factors.
	
	i. The child behaves in this way because of a mood he/she is in, or the emotion he/she is experiencing.
	
	ii. The child behaves in this way because he/she desires something/object/result.
	
	iii. The child behaves in this way because of something about their personality, preferences, or character.
	
	iv. The child behaves in this way due to a lack of reflection about the situation and/or victim or negligence.
	
	v. The child behaves in this way because he/she misunderstood the situation or victim.
		i. "I would think that she was feeling insecure"
		
		ii. "It's because she really wanted to ride his bike"
		
		iii. "He likes to butt-heads with people"
		
		iv. "He wasn't thinking, he just reacted"
		
		v. "I think it was just a big misunderstanding"

	vi. The child behaves in this way because of a mental impression/ thought that he/she has. **b. External** The child is behaving a certain way because of something about the situation they are in/ something extrinsic to themselves. i. The child behaves in this way because he/she was provoked by the victim or another person.	vi. "It seems like her perception is she doesn't get treated fairly" **b. External** i. "He hurt his brother because his brother was jumping up and down and being obnoxious" "He hurt his friend because he was being provoked"
	ii. The child behaves in this way because of family influences (family functioning/family system/parental modeling/parental blame).	ii. "It's my fault, as a parent there are some things I need to do better like spend more time with her" "I know that child picks up on us behaving that way, and she models that"
	iii. The child behaves in this way because of peer influences (peer pressure/peer dynamics).	iii. "She was being forced by her other friends" "There are whole bunch of after school, like day care politics that go on with those kids"
	iv. The child behaves in this way because of circumstances beyond the child's control (circumstances that are unrelated to the conflict).	iv. "I was working, and she didn't have the phone to call her friend" "It was a weird morning for her. Life was disrupted; grandma usually goes to pick them up"
Stability a. Stable	**a. Stable**	**a. Stable**

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i. Relationship History ii. Character/personality b. Changing	The child is behaving in this way due to factors that don't change over development time.	
	i. The child's behaving in this way due to the relationship with this person that is described as unchanging over developmental time.	i. "They've always been this way with each other, that's how siblings are" "There is an interesting set up with the family, she always wanted to associate herself with the older kids, and doesn't want to associate herself with the younger part of the family"
	ii. The child's behaving in this way due to a character/personality that doesn't change over developmental time.	ii. "He's always had a strong personality"
	b. Changing The child's behavior is described as occurring due to certain developmental factors (e.g., maturity) or described as specific to a developmental period.	**b. Changing** "She's just not mature enough yet to understand" "He's going through a phase. It's common insecurities of any adolescent boy or girl"

Generality
  i. General
  ii. Event-specific
	i. The child behaves this way across many different situations (different contexts- one situation vs. many situations).	i. "He's an instigator, it is very prevalent"
		"In every situation, she feels like she is always disadvantaged"

	ii. The child's behaviour is specific to	ii. "I think he was torn between staying at his friend's house and wanting

	this one unique situation.	to continue building whatever they were building" "The girls got tired of the game and wanted to do their own thing"

Consistency
  i. Consistent
  ii. Inconsistent
	i. The child's behavior is described as consistent across situations with this person (e.g., does the child always behave the same way with this person?).
	
	ii. The child's behavior is described as inconsistent across situations with this person.
		i. "Hitting is the first thing he always goes for with his brother no matter what they are doing"
		"Those two just want to be boss, he is always competing with him for center stage"
		
		ii. "He's not normally very physical with him, this is the first time"
		"I've hardly ever seen her act like that with him"

Distinctiveness
  i. High
  ii. Low
	i. The child's behavior is unique to this type of relationship (i.e., sib vs. fr). Does the child behave the same way with her sibling and friend?
	
	ii. The person's behavior is not unique to this type of relationship.
		i. "They only communicate this way with each other."
		"It's an issue of power in their relationship"
		"It's probably something common among sixth grade friends"
		
		ii. "It's a real big issue with his friends and he also does that with his sibling"

Intentional behavior
  i. Intentional
  ii. Unintentional
	i. The behavior is guided or controlled by the child.
	
	ii. The behavior is not guided or controlled by the child.
		i. "She took the cup because she knew her brother wanted it"
		
		ii. "It wasn't anything manipulative; she's not thinking "I'm going to get his stuff"

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Intentional harm
  i. Intentional
  ii. Unintentional
	i. The hurt caused by the behavior was deliberate or purposeful (was there a desire to cause harmful consequences)? Also includes instances when the harm itself is not the goal but it used clearly in service of the goal (i.e., Machiavellianism).	i. "She hurt her sibling by saying things to her and physically hurting her to get her to go away"
		"Not really caring if she had the cup or not, but just taking it because her brother wanted it"

	ii. The harm caused by the behavior was not deliberate or purposeful. The harmful consequences that ensued were not desired by the child.	ii. "I don't think he had any intention of actually hurting him at all"

Obligation
  i. Obligation present
  ii. Obligation absent
	i. The child should have acted differently due to role or relationship (not just a general moral evaluation, but specific to the obligations in particular relationships).	i. "He's the bigger brother, he should know better"
		"There's a certain way to treat your friends"

	ii. The child should not have acted differently due to role or relationship.	ii. "She doesn't have to play with her sister just because it's her sister"

Knowledge
  i. Present
  ii. Absent
	i. The child could correctly anticipate the consequences of his/her behavior.	i. "He knew it would upset his friend, he knew exactly what buttons to push"

	ii. The child could not anticipate the consequences of his/her behavior	ii. "He didn't know that it would hurt his friend's feelings"
Victim amplification i. Amplified harm	i. Did something about the victim result in greater harm than	i. "His brother's a drama queen"

	would be otherwise anticipated? This dimension does NOT answer the question of why the child engaged in the harmful behavior, but rather explains why the victim got hurt as a result of the behavior.	"His friend is just too sensitive" "Her parents just got divorced, so she's reacting"