“It was a bit my fault and a bit his fault": Mothers' and Early School-aged Children’s Blame Attributions in Conversations about Peer Conflicts

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ABSTRACT

"It was a bit my fault and a bit his fault": Mothers' and Early School-aged Children's Blame Attributions in Conversations about Peer Conflicts

Mawuena Badasu

In a sample of 36 dyads, this study investigated mothers' and their 6-7-year-old children's blaming strategies when engaged in conversations about the children's peer conflicts. Each dyad discussed two conflicts in which the child was hurt, one to which they felt they contributed (shared fault) and the other in which they felt they did not contribute to the conflict (no fault). We specifically examined: (1) how conversations about the two events differed in terms of maximizing and mitigating blame attributions across three contexts (the peer's harm against the child, child's harm to the peer, and the child's self-protection from harm) (2) variations between mothers and children's maximizing and mitigating blame strategies (3) the specific dimensions that mothers and children considered in making blame attributions. Results revealed that families maximized responsibility more in the no fault conversations in the context of harm to the child and self-protection from harm, whereas they maximized blame concerning the child's harm to his/her peer more in the shared fault conversations. Comparing mothers and children, findings indicated that mothers maximized blame more in self-protection contexts, whereas children maximized blame for the peers' harm to child and mitigated responsibility across all contexts. Regarding dimensions of blame attribution, avoidability and consequences of harm were used most often by families. Mothers referenced avoidability and act evaluations most frequently whereas children more often discussed presence of harmful acts and subsequent responses to one's own harm. Findings suggest that maternal socialization of blame is context-sensitive as mother-child dyads are listening to and largely agreeing with each other. Mothers' emphasis on self-protection raises questions about parental concerns for children's responsibility and agency in the context of victimization. Implications for children's moral development are discussed.

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Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Appendices

Introduction

Human relationships inevitably generate harm; in the course of ongoing relationships, people occasionally get hurt and hurt others, whether the offender intended harm or not. As children navigate the challenges implicated in managing hurt, this constitutes a context for the development of moral agency. Moral agency is a term used to describe "people's understanding and experience of themselves (and others) as agents whose morally relevant actions are based in goals and beliefs" (Pasupathi & Wainryb, 2010, p.55). Grappling with harm means that an individual assesses their internal beliefs and expectations as well as their obligations to others. When hurt, they recognize that one or more of these obligations has been broken, potentially entailing acceptance, reparation, and/or forgiveness. Also, accepting oneself as a potential harm-doer can ease the tension that one can have when they have been the perpetrator of hurt. Confronting and wrestling with these issues – as well as making tough decisions, adjusting one's desires, and compromising, among other things – can serve as catalysts for the development of a person's moral agency.

Conversations with others serve as an important context for children to make meaning of their morally-laden experiences (Wainryb & Recchia, 2017). In particular, children's intimate relationships with parents provide a unique context for developing and furthering moral agency. Parents' roles include listening and responding to children's stories about harm (Pasupathi & Wainryb, 2010) as well as elaborating, validating children's viewpoints, and challenging them to promote meaning-making (Wainryb & Recchia, 2017). Also, encouraging children to consider the internal psychological bases for their harmful behavior drives them to take responsibility for their actions.

Although the role of parents has been foregrounded in the moral socialization process, it is worth noting that children play an active role in constructing personal meanings out of their moral experiences (Smetana, 2013). As early as age 3, they are able to evaluate others' perspectives in order to pass judgments about intentions underlying harmful behavior, among other things (e.g. Darley & Schultz, 1990). Thus, children and their parents each play an active role in drawing meanings and arriving at moral decisions. As such, this thesis does not align *solely* with a perspective on socialization as a unidirectional transmission of norms from parents to children, wherein child behavior gradually adapts to reflect parental expectations. On the contrary, socialization is conceptualized as a joint endeavor between parents (mothers) and children (6-7-year-olds). For example, children may challenge parental views in an attempt to make meaning of their social and moral experiences, sometimes even redefining parental perspectives (Wainryb & Recchia, 2017). Ultimately, moral socialization involves a bidirectional process between parents and children, and parent-child conversations about children's peer conflicts provide such a vehicle for the interplay of the bidirectional moral socialization process.

Research provides evidence that children hold diverse perspectives regarding their peer conflicts depending on how they are positioned within events (e.g., as victim or perpetrator; Wainryb, Brehl, & Matwin, 2005). Likewise, mothers may be most effective in helping children to further their moral agency when they take into account the particulars of children's varied experiences with harm. Although there is evidence to suggest that mothers are indeed sensitive to variations across children's conflicts (Scirocco, Recchia, Wainryb, & Pasupathi, 2018), no research has directly examined how mothers' socialization strategies vary depending on the extent to which they perceive their children to be responsible for contributing to peer conflict. As

such, it is unknown what specific strategies mothers employ to attribute blame to their child or the peer involved when discussing peer conflicts, and how these vary across events.

The purpose of this study was to investigate mothers' and children's differing blame attributions based on variations in whether the child felt they did or did not contribute to a conflict in which they were harmed by a peer. In the subsequent sections, theoretical models regarding blame will be presented, followed by a review of the literature concerning children and parents' reasoning about blame and parental moral socialization. Finally, expected patterns regarding contextual variations of maternal blame attributions will be discussed.

Conceptualizing Blame

Blame is a judgment regarding an agent's actions or behavior and the outcomes they produce (Malle, Guglielmo, & Monroe, 2014). Society thrives upon values and norms such as self-control and respecting people's rights which, when broken, have consequences for human welfare. Morality therefore requires that people's actions and inactions are assessed to facilitate positive behavior and outcomes, while preventing harm. Alicke (2000) describes blame as "an aspect of everyday conduct evaluation that identifies behavior as morally wrong or socially opprobrious" (p.556). In his view, we occasionally encounter people who threaten our well-being. As such, individuals within societies view it as part of their role to ascertain wrong behavior and place responsibility on wrongdoers.

In Malle and colleagues' (2014) conceptualization of blame, a warrant – evidence – is required to make a blame attribution; why is he/she blameworthy? Or what proof do you have for accusing an individual? Conceptual models of blame thus emphasize different forms of evidence as crucial for attributing blame, and extracting evidence serves as an effort to draw meaning from a plausibly blameworthy situation. Thus, in Malle et al.'s (2014) view, a blame judgment is

passed after enough evidence has been accumulated. With this in mind, the following thesis is based on two models of blame: the culpable control model (Alicke, 2000) and the path model (Malle et al., 2014). Each is described below.

The culpable control model. Alicke's (2000) model presents structural linkages which provide evidence to adjudge a person as blameworthy or not (see Figure 1): the "mind to behavior" link, the "behavior to consequence" link and the "mind to consequence" link. The model is mainly concerned with personal control, which is deemed to be most relevant in maximizing or mitigating blame attributions. The basic idea is that if a person has access to or knowledge about alternatives to their behavior or an outcome, their personal control is high, and thus blame is maximized. As such, blame can be partly established via counterfactual reasoning, which answers the question, "how could the negative outcome have been prevented?" Counterfactuals are cognitions that suggest alternatives to past occurrences, producing negative affect (Roese, 1997), and generally increase blame. This notion of an outcome's avoidability or preventability strengthens or weakens an agent's personal control. According to Alicke (2000), the mind, behaviour and consequences of actions are structurally related in ways that regulate a person's control over a situation and inform judgments of blame.

Volitional behaviour control (mind to behavior structural link). This link connects an offender's state of mind to his behavior. Thus, essential considerations are attached to the level of their intentionality, planfulness, and knowledge: for example, were the agent's actions freely chosen or were they coerced to commit them? Actions that occurred by accident are therefore less worthy of blame compared to purposeful or planned ones.

Causal control (behavior to consequence structural link). Personal control over a negative outcome is regulated by the extent of the actor's impact on the outcome. To measure

impact, Alicke suggests observing the actor's unique contribution to the outcome, the sufficiency of his behavior to cause the outcome, and the proximity of his particular behavior in relation to the outcome. As such, mitigating factors that reduce the agent's causal control serve to reduce blameworthiness. To provide a concrete example, if a child kicked a peer so hard that they fell and broke an arm, others can judge this child as the unique causal agent of the broken arm. His blameworthiness heightens particularly when nothing else could have caused the broken arm.

Volitional outcome control (mind to consequence). In connecting an actor's mental state to the negative consequence, Alicke's blame model addresses the offender's desire to achieve the negative outcome, as well as the foreseeability of the consequence. If the offender had no desire for harm to occur and could not have anticipated the results of his/her actions, blame is mitigated. If, however, the offender intended to cause harm and/or the outcome could have been avoided, the offender is more culpable.

Other considerations. Beyond the culpable control model, Alicke, Buckingham, Zell, and Davis (2008) conducted additional research suggesting that attributions concerning an individual's character (i.e., characterization) are a key factor in blame processing. This might include attributions of actors' reputations and social attractiveness, for example. Characterization is embedded in spontaneous evaluations of others' behavior; although Alicke et al. (2008) argue that extra-evidential information should ideally not influence blame, their research reveals that positive characterization of an individual minimizes blame whereas negative characterization maximizes blame. In other words, their research suggests that it is not just what a person does that make him blameworthy or not, but also who they are. A mother may say, for instance, "Mary is such a nuisance, and you know you should not be playing with her". Characterization is

therefore an important determinant of blame attribution and also influences attributions concerning an outcome's avoidability.

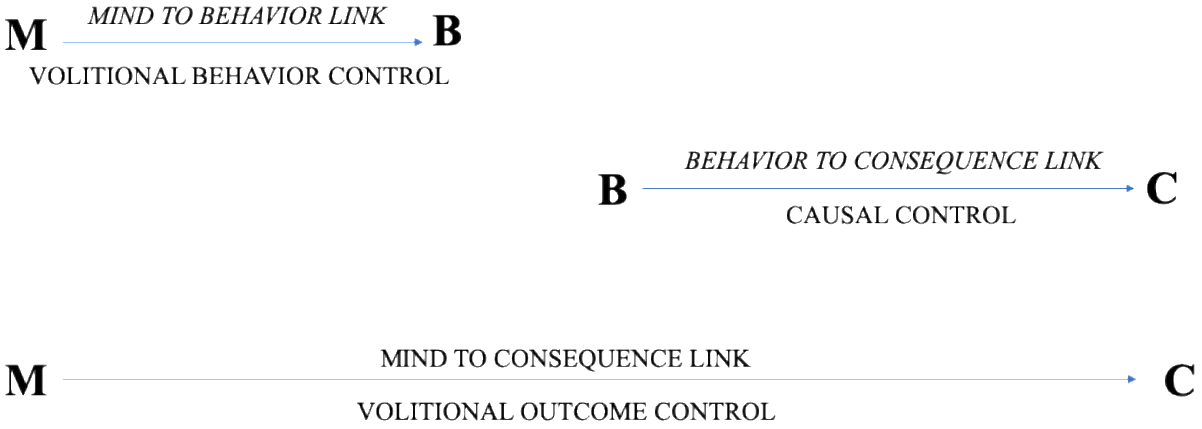

Figure 1. Structural linkages among mental, behavioral and consequence elements. B = behavioral element; C = consequence element; M = mental element (Alicke, 2000).

The path model of blame. An additional model of blame was developed more recently by Malle et al. (2014). A number of elements of this model correspond to the culpable control model's three structural links (namely, concerns with intentionality, causality and preventability/avoidability), but the path model is more extensive. Each of the steps in the path model is shown in Figure 2 and is discussed below.

Event detection. This is the stage at which a blamer perceives that a norm has been broken. Did the agent do something wrong or not? Is there anything worth blaming someone for? The agent may have committed an action or omitted an expectation or intended to perform a norm-violating deed. A mother, for example, may maximize a child's blame by pointing out a transgression, by saying "I think he didn't like it when you weren't sharing." On the other hand, she may minimize a peer's blame by saying: "He did not do anything to start it".

Agent Causality. At this stage, the blamer is trying to understand the meaning of the event by figuring out who caused the event in question. Based on the agent's role, the blamer

attempts to determine whether the agent in question is the source of the event, and the extent to which they uniquely caused the event. In the context of parenting, a mother may say, for instance "I know he got hurt, but you weren't the only one teasing him". Agent causality is closely related to event detection in the sense that they both communicate the presence of an act by an agent which requires blame judgment.

Intentionality. This stage explores an offender's motives for causing a negative act. Principally, one judges whether or not the harm caused was intentional, then they investigate the reasons. It is worth noting that Malle and his colleagues (2014) do not distinguish between the intentionality of the outcome, and the intentionality of the behavior when probing an agent's intentionality. Alicke (2000) however separates intentional behavior from intentional harm. This is a very important distinction because people sometimes purposely set out to do things without envisioning a specific outcome. For example, an angry child who throws a pencil that hits his classmate in the eye may not have intended the injury although the outward expression of his anger was intentional. Thus, the behavior is intentional, but not the consequent harm.

In cases when an agent's actions are clearly not intentional, attention then shifts to issues of preventability/avoidability (Alicke, 2000). As noted above, counterfactual reasoning is typically used to judge preventability. Specifically, the underlying questions are "what should you have done to prevent the outcome?" or "what could you have done?". Very relevant to these judgments are concerns with obligation and capacity. Specifically, obligation refers to the expectations placed on an agent to prevent a negative event from happening based on the agent's role, relationship, or context. For instance, adults may expect children to exhibit a certain level of maturity in dealing with their younger peers. So, a mother might increase blame for a child by saying "She's younger than you, so you shouldn't be fighting with her". In turn, concerns with

capacity suggest the child has the necessary social skills/training to avoid causing harm. Altogether, capacity subsumes the agent's knowledge, skills, tools, and opportunities, which could have been utilized to prevent harm from occurring. For instance, a mother may blame a child more because she expects the child to remember that she has taught him how to behave with his/her peers.

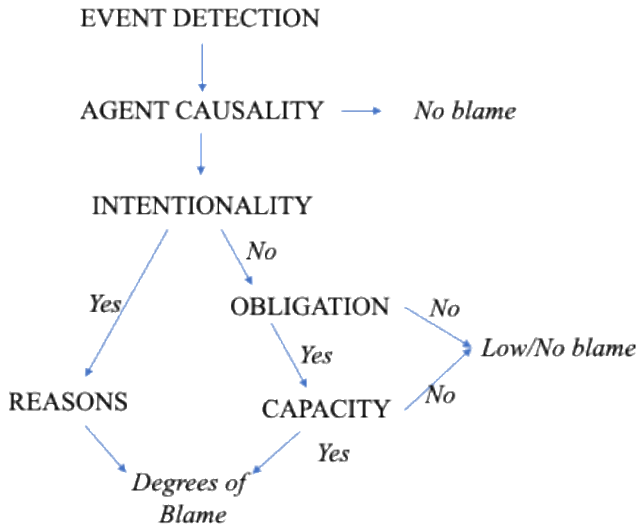

Figure 2. The path model of blame (Malle et al., 2014)

Prior Research on Children's Thinking about Blame

Piaget's (1932) seminal work on intentions and outcomes suggests that young children in the egocentric stage are largely outcome-focused when making moral judgments. More recent research, however, suggests that children as young as 3 are able to assess the mental states of individuals to evaluate their blameworthiness (Darley & Shultz, 1990; Helwig, Zelazo, & Wilson, 2001; Killen, Mulvey, Richardson, Jampol, & Woodward, 2011). Specifically, research has documented children's reasoning regarding different forms of harm, including *accidental harm,* which is characterized by an offender's positive intent and a negative outcome; *intentional harm,* which involves negative intentions and negative outcomes; and *attempted* (*but failed*)

harm, which entails negative intentions but positive outcomes (van Dijk, Poorthuis, Thomaes, & de Castro, 2018; Helwig, et al., 2001; Nobes, Panagiotaki, & Bartholomew, 2016).

Overall, research indicates that children's relative emphasis on outcome and intent does shift with age, albeit less dramatically than proposed by Piaget (1932). At age 3, children are generally less sensitive to internal psychological experiences such as goals, desires and emotions (Ball, Smetana, & Sturge-Apple, 2016), and thus tend to judge actions positively or negatively based on observable features of events, such as outcomes (Wainryb et al., 2005). With age, children increasingly attend to the mental states of offenders, and thus intentions increasingly regulate their blame judgments. By age 6-7 therefore, children can understand and address goals, desires, emotions in arriving at blame judgments, among other psychological concepts.

In line with this shift from a focus on outcome to intent, at age 4-5, well-intentioned accidental harms are considered more deserving of punishment compared to ill-intentioned attempted harms, but this pattern is reversed for 5-6-year-olds (Nobes et al., 2016). Research by Cushman, Sheketoff, Wharton, and Carey (2013) also showed that 4-year-olds consider attempted but failed harms as less blameworthy than unintentional (accidental) harm. A plausible explanation is that preschoolers evaluate harm mainly by what they observe (the harm itself), thus, accidental harm is judged more severely because the observable outcome is negative, unlike attempted harms which may have an observable positive outcome. This dynamic changes by the time children turn 7 or 8; attempted harms are regarded as naughtier and more punishable than accidental harms. This evidence denotes older children's regard for the importance of motives for pursuing an action. That is, by age 7, intentions are becoming increasingly salient in children's judgments (Killen et al., 2011).

Alongside ill-intentioned acts with positive outcomes, situations also arise in which people pursue well-intentioned acts with harmful outcomes, sometimes for the greater good. This is labeled "necessary harm", and research indicates that 7-year-olds deem necessary harm as having legitimate intentions deserving of forgiveness (Jambon & Smetana, 2014). More broadly, children's consideration of their legitimate goals appears to mitigate their judgments of their own blameworthiness (Wainryb et al., 2005). A real example from Wainryb and colleagues' study is as follows: "Do you think it was okay or not okay for you to tell Candice she couldn't play with you?" The response was "Well, I guess we knew that she'd feel sad because of that, but all we wanted to do was to play alone. That's not wrong". Thus, in spite of foreseeability of harm, the legitimate goal to play alone leads to the mitigation of their own blame. In other words, in some cases, children appear to judge harm to others as an unfortunate but nevertheless acceptable side effect of their goal-directed behavior. In sum, in Wainryb et al.'s (2005) study, perpetrators usually accepted they had caused harm (*agent causality*), meaning there was a negative event or outcome (*presence of act*) (ref. Malle et al., 2014). However, it is interesting to note that they nevertheless mitigated their blameworthiness by presenting the harm as unintentional (*intentionality*) despite the fact that sometimes it was foreseeable.

Research has also examined the extent to which children can reason about blame based on possible alternatives to a harmful act. The concept of counterfactual reasoning suggests that if something else had been done, a harmful outcome could have been avoided. Research shows that children as young as 3 are able to think counterfactually in very simple contexts when the causal chain is short (German & Nichols, 2003). This means that blame is easier to comprehend in the absence of multiple causation. Four-year-olds, in contrast, have the working memory capacity to retain events in a long causal chain (German & Nichols, 2003). At age 5 and 6, children do better

on counterfactual reasoning vignettes compared to those aged 3 and 4 (Beck, Robinson, Carroll, & Apperly, 2006).

Children aged 3 and 4 find it easier to reason about future hypotheticals (what should person do next time?) rather than reason counterfactually about the past (what could he have done?) due to the need to suppress what *actually* happened in reasoning counterfactually in the past combined with the difficulty of grappling with multiple possibilities. But research indicates continued development in children's counterfactual thinking across the school-aged years and into adolescence (Beck et al., 2006). In attributing blame, therefore, children in the early elementary years may need support to consider omitted alternative actions. However, 6-7-year-olds are able to think counterfactually and reason about potential measures to take in the future to avoid harm.

The Role of Parents in Helping Children to Develop Moral Thinking

As part of constructing moral agency, a key question is "who determines whether or not an act is morally significant?" (Pasupathi & Wainryb, 2010). Children can discern in their own ways whether an action is morally relevant and to decide who (between they and a peer) is to blame (Wainryb et al., 2005). That being said, parents may also play a role in helping children to make sense of their experiences, attribute blame to one or both players and to further navigate morally-laden experiences. Relatedly, parents can teach rules and lessons, refer to consequences for actions, praise and scold (i.e., evaluate actions), all of which can support children's constructions of meanings out of their experiences (Wainryb & Recchia, 2017).

As parents and children discuss situations involving conflicts with peers, the various morally-laden aspects of events can become clarified. In this sense, conversations provide a vehicle for children to grapple with the various aspects of their experiences. They provide a

"shared psychological space" for issues to be raised and opinions to be presented back and forth (Wainryb & Recchia, 2017). During this dialogical process, both parents and children can question each other, learn new facts, take on new perspectives, and basically begin to think differently about particular experiences. Additionally, mothers can agree with, challenge, and extend children's opinions, all of which can facilitate meaning-making. Considering the wealth of experience parents have, their knowledge of their children as well as their authority over children, parents play a vital role in supporting moral agency development.

Construction of stories and moral agency. Mothers' and children's co-construction of narratives about harm-related experiences can either hinder or facilitate moral agency. According to Bruner (1990), a *good story* captures the *landscape of action* and the *landscape of consciousness*, that is, the proceedings and meaning of an event respectively. The presence or absence of the landscape of consciousness is related to a person's level of moral agency. Thus, moral agency is connected to recognizing the psychological dimensions - goals, desires, beliefs, and emotions - of personal actions and those of others. Although younger children tend to focus on the observable dimensions of their conflicts (Wainryb et al., 2005), research confirms that 6-7-year-olds are becoming capable of exploring the intentions of others when making blame attributions (Ball et al., 2016; Nobes et al., 2016). As such, mothers' tendency to help children of this age further delve into psychological aspects of agents' actions in conflicts may be a constructive tool for supporting moral agency.

Despite the inevitability of harming and being harmed, evaluating actions, unearthing intentions (both of the child and his/her peer), and exploring reasons for acting and alternative actions that could have been taken, enable children to encounter previously unconsidered roles of agents (themselves and peers) in conflicts. Probing such psychological and evaluative elements

can serve as a tool for self-protection and for self-restoration, wherein one can view themselves less in essentialized ways as bad people, and more as moral agents equipped to make autonomous choices guided by the particularities of specific contexts (Pasupathi & Wainryb, 2010). Relatedly, in situations when children are harmed by others, rather than seeing themselves as passive victims, mothers may scaffold children's sense of control and responsibility in varied ways; not only by considering the ways in which they might have also reciprocally harmed the other, but also in reflecting on how children could have protected themselves from harm. For example, a mother could say "when she threw the pencil at you, you could have told her "that's not right!"" Hence, apart from knowing that harming and being harmed are unavoidable, mothers may explore children's agency vis-à-vis their roles as recipients of harm.

Supporting moral agency necessitates parents to play the role of listeners effectively. They need to be careful not to be overly threatening or intrusive, otherwise they may produce a combative atmosphere, which could lead to unresponsiveness or self-defensive story-telling (Pasupathi & Wainryb, 2010). That being said, challenges within parent-child conversations can be an asset, when used judiciously; for instance, children may further their own unique sense of moral agency – goals, beliefs and convictions – when they oppose or question parents' perspectives (Wainryb & Recchia, 2017).

The importance of being sensitive to contextual variations in children's experiences across events. Within conversations, theorists have suggested that mothers may maximize blame when children are not adequately attuned to their peers' welfare, whereas they may minimize blame when children take "too much" responsibility for harm to others (Wainryb & Recchia, 2017). In this sense, mothers may be sensitive to contextual variations in children's experiences

of harm. As Wainryb et al.'s (2005) study revealed, variations can be observed in children's narratives depending on whether they were the victims or perpetrators. Similarly, children appear to construct conflict narratives differently depending on whether they deem themselves to blame for a given event (Bourne, Wainryb, & Pasupathi, 2017). As such, arguably, optimal parental socialization will be sensitive to these variations in children's understandings of events (Scirocco et al., 2018). That is, parents can either maximize or mitigate their own children's or the peer's blameworthiness, all the while exploring the motives and intentions behind both children's actions. In sum, children may enter into conversations with their own understandings of blameworthiness, but parental guidance may help to further scaffold their understandings of the various facets of blame.

Prior research on parenting and blame. Past research suggests that parents make more attributions of intentionality with children's increasing age, and thus older children's transgressions are generally judged more blameworthy than those of younger children (Dix, Ruble, Grusec, & Nixon, 1986; Gretarrson & Gelfand, 1988; Miller, 1995). An explanation for this finding is that parents expect older children to have more knowledge regarding behavioral norms, thus they should be held more responsible for negative outcomes. Parents therefore may consequently react more intensely toward older children's transgressions (Miller, 1995). Indeed, Slep and O'Leary's (1998) study of mothers of 2- to 3-year-olds also revealed that these mothers were angrier when they were told that their children's misconduct was voluntary and with negative intentions than when they were told the children were not blameworthy for misconduct. Evidently, when parents perceive negative intentions, they are likely to maximize blame judgments. Linking this observed pattern with *capacity* (Malle et al., 2014), a person receives more blame when they are expected to have the skills and knowledge to avoid a negative

outcome. As such, it is possible that parents have higher expectations of older children because they felt that older children had been taught more social skills and moral awareness. The same expectation possibly applies to younger children who have been taught certain social skills. Thus, when children behave in ways that violate expectations, parents may be more likely to focus the lens on the child's failure to employ their capacity.

In general, parents consider their children's positive acts to be more intentional than their transgressions (Gretarrson & Gelfand, 1988). In contrast, some parents may hold the belief that that their children's misbehaviors such as disobedience are intentional and deserving of punishment. This is termed a negative attribution or bias. This belief suggests that accidents are deliberate and intended to annoy parents. Both mothers and fathers of 7-year olds who held such attributions consistently described their children's behaviors as problematic (Nelson, O'Brien, Calkins, & Keane, 2013).

Alongside parents' attribution biases, parenting styles can influence the conclusions that parents draw about children's behaviors. Authoritarian mothers are inclined toward verbal hostility, corporal punishment, and punitive strategies, often without justification (Coplan, Hastings, Lagacé-Séguin, & Moulton, 2002). Research reveals that authoritarian mothers react more strongly emotionally and behaviorally to children's misconduct (Dix et al., 1986; Dix, Ruble, & Zambarano, 1989). Coplan and colleagues (2002) found that authoritarian mothers rated negative behaviors of their 3- to 5-year-olds as more internally caused compared to positive behaviors. Thus, presumably, a parenting style oriented toward punishment and hostility is associated with increased judgment about the intentionality of negative behavior.

Needed Advances in Theory and Research

The paucity of recent research regarding parental socialization of blame is a major gap in the literature. Specifically, to our knowledge, no studies have directly examined parents' blame attributions in the context of parent-child conversations about children's peer conflicts. Attribution research can indirectly speak to issues of blame, but most studies of parents' attributions rely on parental responses to vignettes about hypothetical children (Coplan et al., 2002; Dix et al., 1986; Miller, 1995). Examining parent-child conversations about children's actual experiences can thus contribute to our understanding of how parents attribute blame, to whom and why.

With respect to limitations of extant blame models, Malle et al.'s (2014) blame model posits that offenders' obligation and capacity are only considered when a harmful act is not intentional but could have been prevented. However, we argue that these two aspects of blame can be evaluated even when someone acted intentionally. The problem is that Malle and his colleagues did not distinguish between harmful behaviors and harmful outcomes. Therefore, a parent can attribute blame to a child who unintentionally hurt a peer's feelings because this parent feels the child failed to utilize their capacity (i.e., skills available to support harm avoidability).

Furthermore, both blame models that served as a starting point for this study (Alicke, 2000; Malle et al., 2014) failed to address certain aspects of blame attribution, which may be relevant to parental socialization in the context of children's actual experiences in ongoing relationships. For example, a child's subsequent response to their own harmful act may arguably mitigate their blame for the initial act; that is evaluating whether or not a child exhibited remorse for their action or tried to promote reparation. Young children are known to attribute less blame

to offenders who offer apologies for harmful actions (Darby & Schlenker, 1982). Additionally, apart from evaluating subsequent responses (presence or absence of apologies), the children in Darby and Schlenker's study attributed higher responsibility to offenders who caused severe consequences.

Also, more broadly, actions can be evaluated in light of harm in order to attribute responsibility. For instance, "it was a terrible thing to break her glasses". Malle and colleagues (2014) call this "event evaluation" and argue that such "good-bad evaluations" (p.150) do not directly qualify as blame judgments because they do not refer to a person, and do not depend on social-cognitive assessment (e.g. reasons for harm). However, we consider *act evaluations* to be conceptually related to blame attributions, and hence also worthy of consideration. Additionally, as discussed earlier, foreseeability and avoidability (counterfactuals) are also mentioned in Alicke et al.'s (2008) research but they are not directly represented in the blame models. Consequently, *subsequent response, consequences, act evaluation, foreseeability* and *avoidability* are but a few concepts that have been included in the conceptualization of blame for the purpose of this study.

More broadly, in addition to filling these gaps in the literature, more work is needed to understand how conversations about blame might contribute to children's moral development and capacity to navigate social relationships with peers. Thus, beyond studying how children and mothers attribute blame, a key issue is how children are relying on their experiences and their conversations with parents to draw deeper meaning about their moral selves. Arguably, a first important step in addressing these issues is to document the specific ways in which mothers and children are constructing meanings about blame in conversations about actual conflicts with peers.

The Current Study

The current study investigated contextual variations in mothers' and their 6-7-year-old children's blame attributions when discussing the children's past conflicts with their peers. Analyses were based on a larger dataset in which mothers and their children discussed two events when the child had been hurt or upset by a peer. In one case, the child was asked to nominate an event in which they "had something to do" with the conflict (e.g., they started it, or made it worse), and a second event in which they did not "have something to do" with the event. The former is henceforth called the *shared fault conversation/event* and the latter, the *no fault conversation/event.* This manipulation was included to examine whether maternal blame attributions are sensitive to the unique features of children's different experiences.

Coding focused on the strategies that family members employed to maximize or minimize either the peer or the child's blame/responsibility. Conversations were coded to assess blame attributions concerning the harm that the peer caused to the child or that the child caused to the peer (Wainryb et al., 2005). However, to examine issues of responsibility more broadly, we also coded the extent to which family members judged children to be responsible for protecting themselves from harm (Pasupathi & Wainryb, 2010). For example, do mothers suggest that their child should or could have done something (or should do something in the future) to prevent themselves from getting hurt by a peer? Arguably, such concerns with self-protection may arise in situations when family members believed that the hurt can/could have been avoided.

Based on the two blame models discussed above (Alicke, 2000; Malle et al., 2014), we also examined various facets of families' references to blame, to investigate the different ways in which mothers help to scaffold their children's understanding of their own and others' responsibility for conflicts. Conversations were coded in ways that allowed us to examine issues

such as event detection, agent causality, intentionality/reasons, obligation, and capacity from Malle and colleagues' model, as well as foreseeability, avoidability and characterological statements from Alicke's model and Alicke et al.'s (2008) research. That is, mothers' and children's blame attributions were coded for the extent to which they centered on: whether the child or peer engaged in an act (presence of act) that had a negative impact on the victim (consequences), whether the act could be evaluated negatively (act evaluation), as well as whether the person had legitimate reasons for engaging in the act (reasons), should have been able to foresee negative outcomes (foreseeability), and/or had remorse for the action or attempted to repair the relationship (subsequent response). Additionally, attributions were also coded for how they explored whether the child or peer could have avoided a harmful outcome with alternative actions (avoidability), has a flaw in character which caused harm (characterological statements), has skills or knowledge which could have been employed to prevent harm (capacity), and/or had a role-related responsibility to prevent harm (obligation).

More specifically, based on this detailed conversational coding, the current thesis addressed three related questions: (1) how do the shared fault conversations differ from the no fault conversations in terms of valence (mitigating and maximizing blame/responsibility) and context (harm to child, harm to peer, self-protection)? (2) how do mothers and children differ from each other in how they maximize and mitigate blame in varying contexts? (3) what are the specific dimensions that mothers and children draw on to make blame attributions and how do they use them? These are further expounded in the subsequent paragraphs.

In terms of differences across events, we expected to find differences between the ways in which families discussed responsibility and blame across the two conflicts nominated by the child (Scirocco et al., 2018). Specifically, in conversations about events when the child was hurt

by a peer and felt that he/she did not have something to do with it (*no fault event*), we expected families to most frequently focus on discussing the peer's blameworthiness for harming the child. On the other hand, when the child was hurt but felt that he/she had something to do with it (*shared fault event*), we expected that discussions would include a greater focus on the ways in which the child was to blame for also harming the peer. In turn, we expected that references to responsibility for protecting oneself from harm would arise more frequently in conversations about no fault events, as a way of exploring the child's own agency in situations when children did not deem themselves to be responsible for harm.

In terms of differences between mothers and children, we expected children, more than mothers, to maximize blame for the harm that the peer committed against them, considering that they were the victims in the particular event (Wainryb et al., 2005). In the same vein, we expected that children (more than mothers) would mitigate their own responsibility for their harm against the peer, because they would like to redeem their image as perpetrator (Wainryb et al., 2005). Conversely, we expected that mothers more than children would maximize responsibility for child's self-protection from harm as a problem-solving strategy and way of scaffolding the child's sense of control.

With regards to the third research question, given the paucity of research regarding the various dimensions of making blame attributions, especially in connection with children's or families' judgments of blame, we did not advance specific hypothesis but rather aimed to document overall patterns regarding different dimensions of blame observed in family conversations in this age group.

Method

Data were collected as part of a larger study examining peer conflict in a sample that also included additional age groups of 10-11 and 15-16-year-old youth. Only detailed sample characteristics and procedures that are relevant to the current thesis are described here.

Participants

The total sample included 36 mother-child dyads; 50% of children were girls. Participants consisted of mother-child dyads residing in and around Montreal, Quebec. They were recruited via Facebook advertisements, through flyers in schools, via word of mouth, and from databases of past participants. Participating children were between ages six to seven years (M = 6.95, SD = .60). Most children had siblings (83.8%). Almost the entire sample of children primarily spoke English at home (94.6%) and smaller proportions of children also spoke French (29.7%) or other languages (18.9%) at home.

Mothers were aged between 30 to 46 years (M = 38.22, SD = 4.16). Among the participating mothers, most had completed their university education (29.7%) or had pursued post-graduate education (13.5%). A small percentage had some university education (2.7%). Many had either completed (10.8%) or had some CEGEP education (8.1%). Finally, some participants had completed part (2.7%) or all of high school (5.4%). About 27% did not provide their educational background information. More than half of the final sample of mothers were White (56.8%). The sample also comprised some South Asian (2.7%), Chinese (2.7%), Latin American (10.8%), Arabic (5.4%), Black (8.1%) and women of other ethnic identities (13.5%).

Procedure

Families participated in their homes or at a university laboratory, depending on their preference. Mothers provided written consent to participate in the study and children verbally assented to procedures. Then, in a private interview with a trained research assistant, children were asked to nominate two events: (1) when they have been hurt by a peer and they felt they had something to do with it - either that they did something to start it (even if they did not mean to) or to make it worse and (2) when they were hurt or upset but they felt they had nothing to do with it; they did not start it or make it worse. The order of elicitation of the two events were counterbalanced.

The children then engaged in a conversation with their mothers (recorded on camera) in the absence of the research assistant about the two specific events they selected. The events were discussed in the same order in which they were elicited. The instructions given for the conversation were for the mother and child to ask each other questions and explain things to make sure they understood the stories. The researcher also emphasized that the dyad should "see if there is something that could be learned" from the experiences. The recordings of the conversations were later transcribed for analysis.

Coding

Based on transcripts of conversations, we identified excerpts of the mother's and child's speech that pertained to notions of blame. Each excerpt was analyzed and labeled individually. An individual speech turn could be divided into two or more parts and labeled separately, if a speaker referred to blame in multiple ways within a turn. Similarly, one utterance could be given multiple codes (e.g., if the mother referred to both the child and peer's culpability collectively). As such, for each conversation, we coded the frequency of references to each type of blame. A

complete coding scheme is presented in Appendix A with definitions of each code, as well as examples.

Specifically, each speech excerpt pertaining to an attribution of blame was coded along six dimensions: speaker, valence, referent, type, context, and response style. **Speaker** referred to whether the mother or child made the statement. **Valence** of blame attributions referred to either maximizing, mitigating or neutral blame judgments. Related to these were the **referents** – child or peer. Thus, the latter two sets of codes identify a person's statement as blame maximizing/mitigating for either the child or peer.

Malle et al.'s (2014) path model of blame and Alicke's (2000) culpable control model as well as research by Alicke and colleagues (2008) provided the framework for coding **type** of blame attributions. Event detection and agent causality (Malle et al., 2014) were collapsed under one code, *presence of act*. All other codes based on Malle and colleagues' model were maintained: *Reasons*, *obligation,* and *capacity. Foreseeability, avoidability* and *characterological statements* were drawn from Alicke (2000) and Alicke and colleagues' (2008) studies. Additionally, *consequences, act evaluation and subsequent response* were included as potential blame attribution strategies. Sub-codes were included for only *consequences* and *avoidability.* Sub-codes for consequences include types of consequences, including *authority sanctions, emotional consequence, physical consequence, psychological consequence,* and *relational consequence.* Avoidability sub-codes include statements making reference to *past actuals, past counterfactuals* and *future hypothetical* behavior.

The coding scheme incorporated the perceived **context** of each of the codes: harm to child, harm to peer, self-protection and peer-protection. Specifically, the first two contexts for blame attributions referred to culpability for harm caused to the other antagonist (the child's

harm to the peer, or the peer's harm to the child), whereas the latter two contexts referred to the child's or peer's responsibility for protecting themselves from harm. Finally, for each code, we provided information regarding the mother's and child's response style in order to gain a general sense of how the conversations proceeded; whether the mother or child was challenging the other, and whether the child was offering a prompted or spontaneous response.

Interrater reliability

Interrater reliability was established for all coding. Two independent raters coded 21% (*N* = 7/36) of the transcribed audio-recorded data. One of the raters was blind to the study's hypotheses. First, coders identified all statements or questions by the speakers that pertained to blame; as noted above, multiple units were sometimes coded within one conversational turn. Agreement or disagreement was computed separately for each coded unit; if the two coders agreed that an entire conversational turn should not be coded, this was counted as one agreement. Subsequently, each identified unit was coded for valence, referent, type, context, and response style. Cohen's *kappas* were calculated for each code. Disagreements were resolved via discussion and consensus. All the *kappas* exceeded 0.75. Reliability scores are included in Table 1.

Table 1

Cohen's *Kappas for Interrater Reliabilities*

	Cohen's *kappas*
Conversational contribution relevant to blame	.76
Code	.84
Subcode (consequences)	1.0
Subcode (avoidability)	.91

Referent (child/peer)	.91
Valence (mitigating/maximizing/neutral)	.76
Response styles	
- Challenge	.83
- Prompted/spontaneous responses	.95
Context	.92

Results

Plan of Analysis

We examined how mothers and their 6-7-year-old children made blame judgments in conversations about occasions on which the child was hurt by a peer. Family was treated as the unit of analysis. A series of mixed-model ANOVAs were employed; in each case, child gender was entered as a between-subjects factor and type of event (shared fault, no fault) as a repeated measure, with other repeated measures (speaker, type of attribution, referent) also entered as relevant. The dependent variables were the frequencies of references within a conversation. An alpha level of $p < .05$ was used. Partial eta-squared (η^2_p) is reported as a measure of effect size for significant effects. The Bonferroni correction ($p < .05$) was used for post-hoc pairwise comparisons.

Mothers' and Children's Mitigating and Maximizing Blame Attributions Across Event Types

The goal of the first analysis was to draw comparisons between the two types of conversations mothers and children engaged in – shared fault and no-fault conversations – in terms of the difference between speakers, valence and context. We conducted a 2 (speaker) x 2 (valence) x 3 (context) x 2 (event type) x 2 (child gender) mixed-model ANOVA. In terms of valence, we focused only on statements in which mothers and children either maximized or mitigated blame but excluded neutral statements, such as when they were asking clarifying questions (e.g. Did he push you?) or when the speaker was ambivalent about the referent's blameworthiness (e.g. Did you tell her you did not like what she did?). Further, although we coded four contexts (namely, harm to child, harm to peer, self-protection, and peer-protection),

we excluded statements pertaining to peer protection from the analysis because on average, they appeared 8 times across 5 families, which was .22% of all the contributions.

The analysis revealed main effects of blame attribution for the following: speaker (F (1, 34) = 17.48, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .34$), valence (F (1, 34) = 29.9, $p < .05$, $\eta^2_p = .47$), and context (F (2, 68) = 10.72, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .24$). These effects were qualified by the following two- and three-way interactions: event by valence (F (1, 34) = 10.53, $p = .003$, $\eta^2_p = .24$), event by context (F (2, 68) = 11.26, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .25$), speaker by context (F (2, 68) = 38.66, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .53$), valence by context (F (2, 68) = 20.65, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .38$), event by valence by context (F (2, 68) = 8.01, $p = .001$, $\eta^2_p = .19$), and speaker by valence by context (F (2, 68) = 18.95, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .36$). The analysis did not reveal any effects for gender. Patterns for each significant effect are described below.

Speaker. Children (M = 2.04, SE = .15) made significantly more blame attributions than mothers (M = 1.46, SE = .19).

Valence. Family members maximized blame (M = 2.33, SE = .24) significantly more than they mitigated blame (M = 1.16, SE = .13) during their conversations.

Context. Family members referred significantly more to peers' harm against children (M = 2.65, SE = .30), as compared to both children's harm against peers (M = 1.25, SE = .23) and children's self-protection from harm (M = 1.35, SE = .22). There was not a significant difference between references to children's harm against peers and children's self-protection.

Event by valence. Overall, speakers tended to maximize blame more in the no fault conversation (M = 2.71, SE = .34) than in the shared fault conversation (M = 1.95, SE = .17). In contrast, they mitigated blame to the same extent in both the shared fault (M = 1.26, SE = .15) and no fault conversations (M = 1.06, SE = .15; see Figure 3).

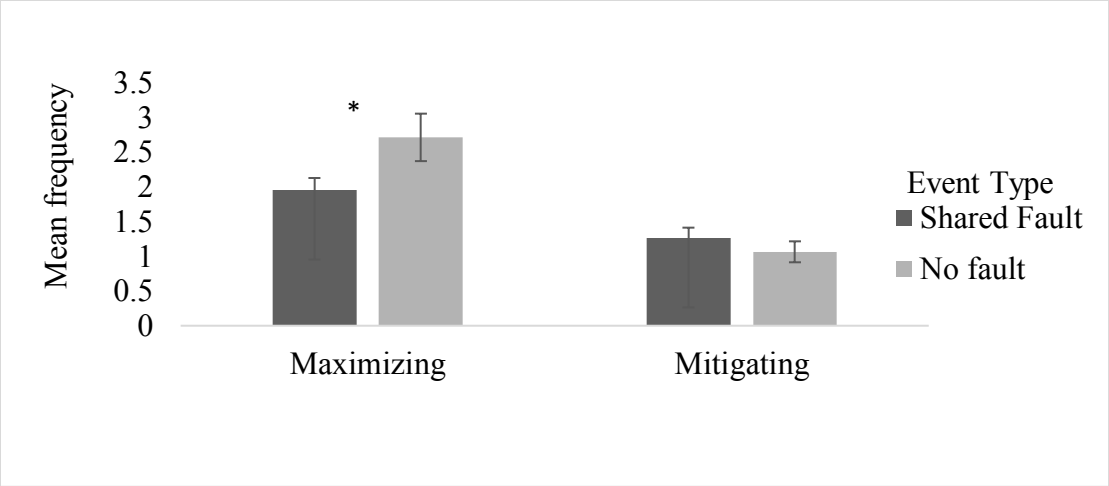

Figure 3. Frequencies of maximizing and mitigating blame attribution across events. * denotes significant difference between event types within a valence category at $p < .05$ with Bonferroni correction.

Event by context. Speakers' references to harm to the child and self-protection were more frequent in the no fault conversation (Ms = 3.22 and 1.69, *SEs* = .41 and .33 respectively), as compared to the shared fault conversation (Ms = 2.08 and 1.01, *SEs* = 0.24 and 0.18 respectively). In contrast, speakers' references to harm to the peer were more frequent in the shared fault conversation ($M = 1.74$, $SE = .34$) than in the no fault conversation ($M = .76$, $SE = .20$, see Figure 4).

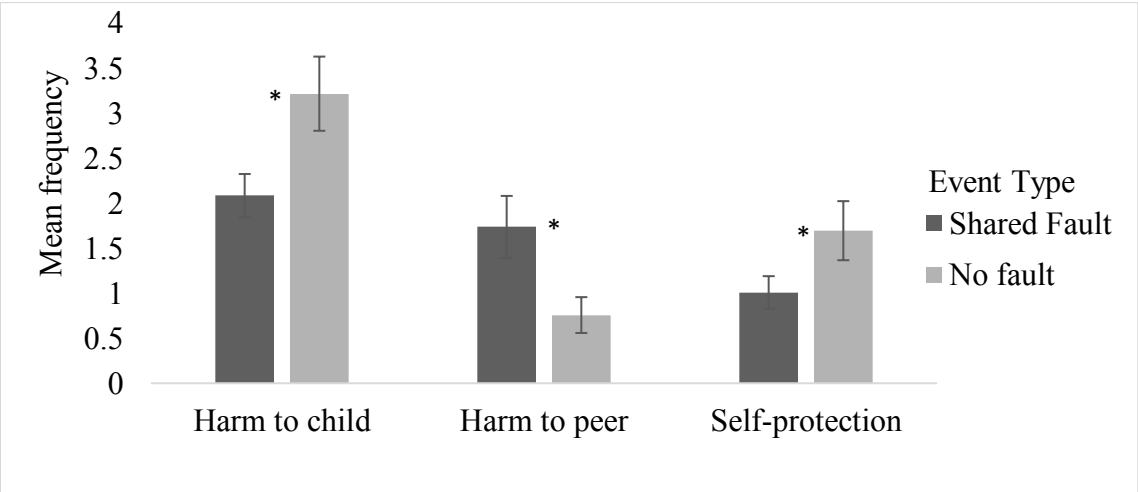

Figure 4. Frequencies of blame attribution contexts across events. * denotes significant difference between event types within a context category at $p < .05$ with Bonferroni correction.

Speaker by context. Children made significantly more blame attributions (M = 3.44, SE = .31) than mothers (M = 1.86, SE = .32) about the peer's harm to the child. Regarding the child's harm against peer, children also made more blame attributions (M = 1.54, SE = .27) than mothers (M = .95, SE = .23). In contrast, for the self-protection context, mothers made significantly more blame attributions (M = 1.58, SE = .27) than children (M = 1.13, SE = .19; see Figure 5).

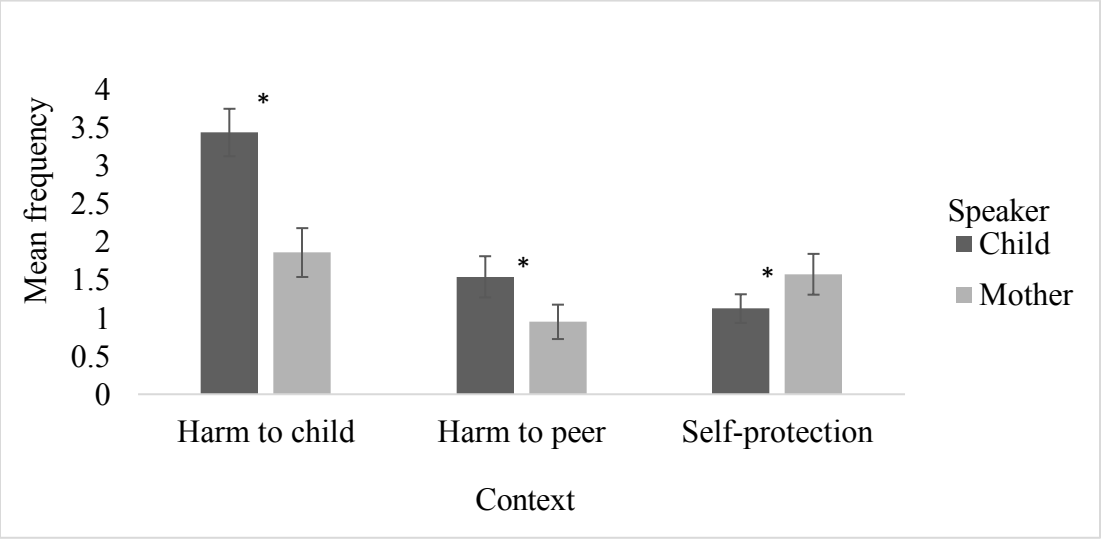

Figure 5. Frequencies of speakers' blame attribution across contexts. * denotes significant difference between speakers within a context category at $p < .05$ with Bonferroni correction.

Valence by context. When families discussed blame within the context of harm to the child and self-protection, they maximized blame significantly more (M = 4.01, 1.82, SE = .46, .36, for harm to child and self-protection, respectively) than they mitigated blame (M = 1.29, .88, SE = .21, .16, respectively). Conversely, in the context of the child's harm against the peer, there was no difference in the extent to which families mitigated and maximized blame (see Figure 6).

Figure 6. Frequencies of maximizing and mitigating blame attributions across contexts. * denotes significant difference between valence categories within a context at $p < .05$ with Bonferroni correction.

Event by valence by context. In terms of comparisons across types of events for statements that maximized blame/responsibility, and as expected, families maximized responsibility vis-à-vis the peer's harm to the child and the child's responsibility for his/her own self-protection more in the no fault conversations ($M = 5.12, 2.43$, $SE = .69, .53$ for harm to child and self-protection, respectively) than in the shared fault conversations ($M = 2.89, 1.21$, $SE = .36, .28$, respectively). Conversely, also as anticipated, they maximized blame regarding the child's harm to his/her peer more in the shared fault conversations ($M = 1.76$, $SE = .36$) than in the no fault conversations ($M = .58$, $SE = .17$) (see Figure 7). Families' blame mitigation did not differ between shared fault and no fault conversations with regards to harm to child, harm to peer or self-protection.

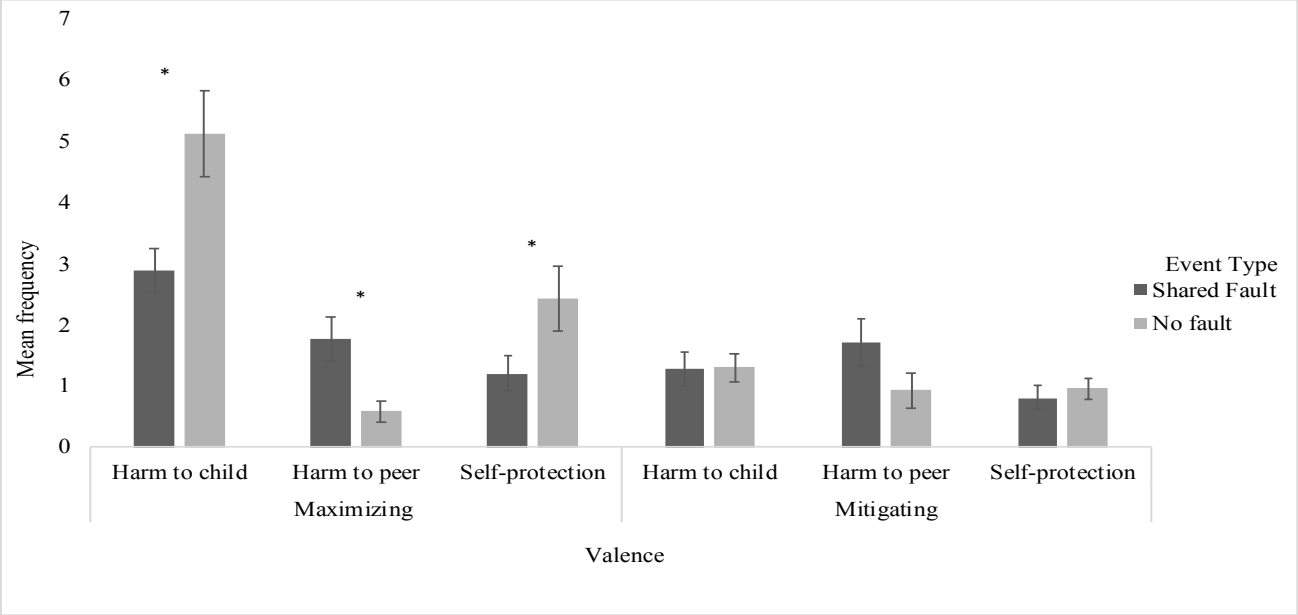

Figure 7. Frequencies of maximizing and mitigating blame attributions across contexts and events. * denotes significant difference between event types within a context at $p < .05$ with Bonferroni correction.

Speaker by valence by context. As hypothesized, children maximized blame regarding harm to the child him/herself significantly more ($M = 5.29$, $SE = .27$) than their mothers ($M = 2.72$, $SE = .21$), whereas mothers more often ($M = 2.60$, $SE = .47$) than children ($M = 1.04$, $SE = .27$) maximized children's responsibility for protecting themselves from harm (see Figure 8). Mothers and children did not differ significantly in the extent to which they maximized blame vis-à-vis the child's harm to his/her peer. With regards to the mitigation of blame, children more often mitigated blame in all contexts - i.e. harm to child ($M = 1.58$, $SE = .26$), harm to peer ($M = 2.00$, $SE = .46$) and self-protection contexts ($M = 1.20$, $SE = .20$) - as compared to their mothers ($Ms = 1.00$, .64, and .56, $SEs = .21$, .15, and .15, respectively).

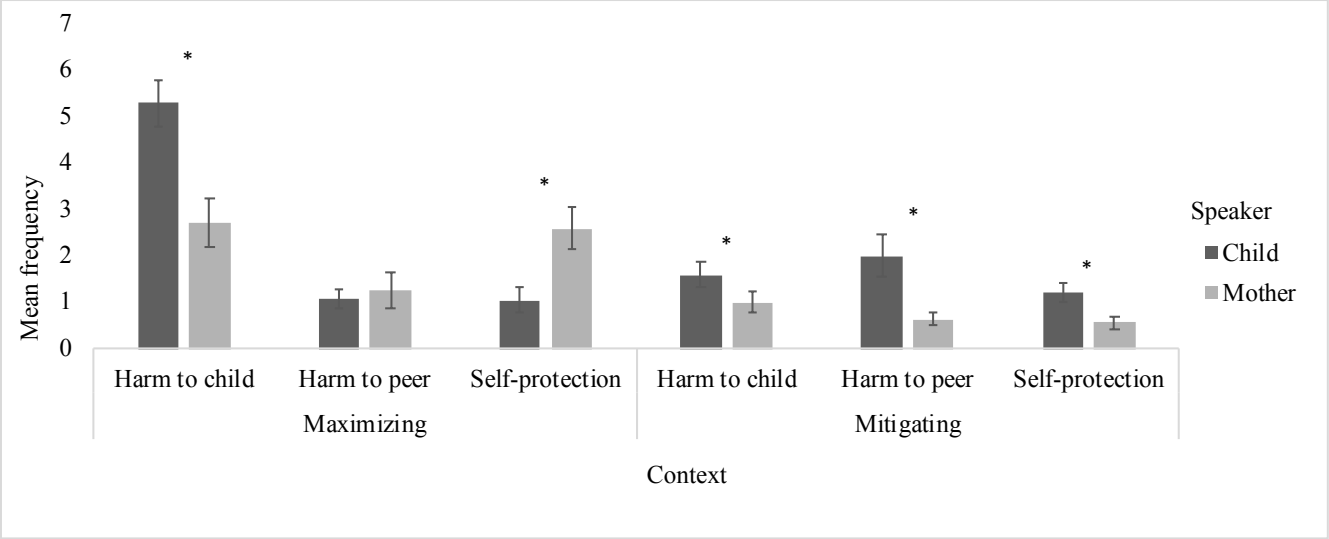

Figure 8. Frequencies of maximizing and mitigating blame attributions across contexts and speakers. * denotes significant difference between speakers within a context at $p < .05$ with Bonferroni correction.

Types of Blame Attributions

We also examined the particular ways in which families referred to blame. Out of the ten coded categories of blame attributions, three were excluded from analysis because they arose very infrequently in conversations. The excluded categories were capacity, obligation and foreseeability. Challenges by both mother and child were also too infrequent to be included. Analysis of the seven retained categories of blame attributions revealed main effects for type of blame attribution F (6, 210) = 20.38, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .37$, and the following two-way interactions: type of blame attribution by speaker (F (6, 210) = 18.96, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .35$), type of blame attribution by valence (F (6, 210) = 11.93, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .25$), but no effects of child gender.

Frequencies of codes. The frequency of the seven types of blame attribution occurred in the following order: Avoidability, consequences, reasons for harmful action, act evaluations, presence of acts, subsequent responses, and character evaluations (see Figure 9). Avoidability emerged significantly more ($M = 3.42$, $SE = .46$) than act evaluation ($M = 1.41$, $SE = .21$), character evaluation ($M = 0.40$, $SE = .10$), and consequences ($M = 2.97$, $SE = .36$). Act

evaluation occurred significantly more (M = 1.41, SE = .21) than presence of act (M = 1.21, SE = .10) and subsequent response (M = 1.04, SE = .14). Families referred to consequences more often (M = 2.97, SE = .36) than act evaluation, presence of act and subsequent responses. They also referred to reasons for harmful action significantly more than (M = 3.42, SE = .46) only character evaluation. Character evaluation emerged significantly less than all other codes (M = 0.40, SE = .10).

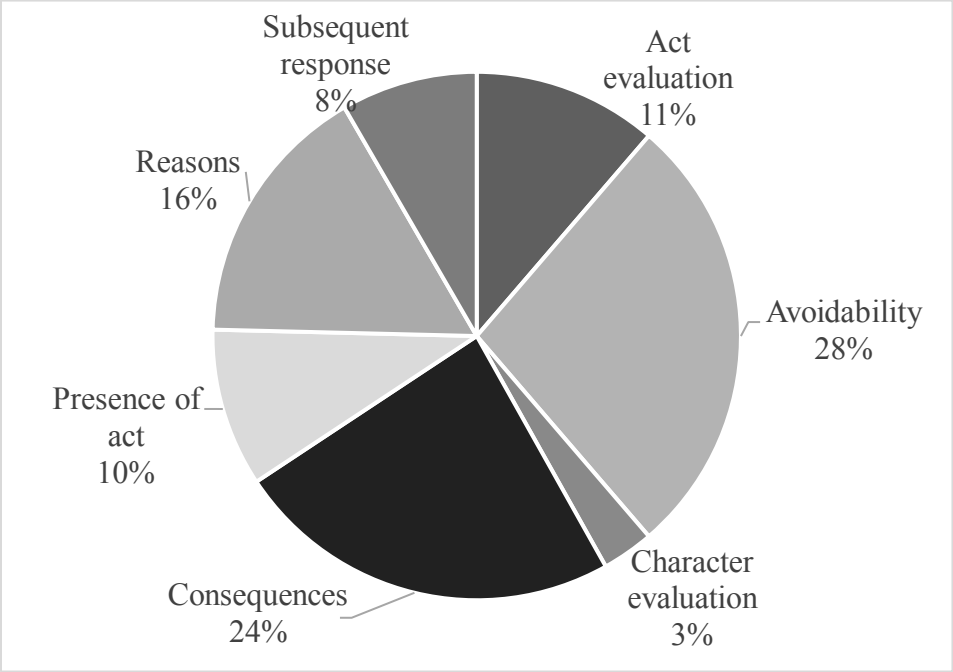

Figure 9. Frequencies of mothers' and children's blame attribution types.

Frequencies of blame attribution types across speakers. With respect to differences between family members, mothers employed more act evaluations and references to avoidability (Ms = 1.83 and 4.81, *SEs* = 0.58 and 0.28 respectively) as compared to their children (Ms = 0.99 and 2.65, *SEs* = 0.20 and 0.37 respectively). In contrast, children referred to presence of harmful act, and individuals' subsequent responses to their own harmful actions (Ms = 1.74 and 1.28, *SEs* = 0.16 and 0.17 respectively) more than mothers (Ms = 0.68 and 0.81, *SEs* = 0.10 and 0.13

respectively). Character evaluation, consequences of harmful action, reasons for harmful action were used equally by both mothers and children, (see Figure 10).

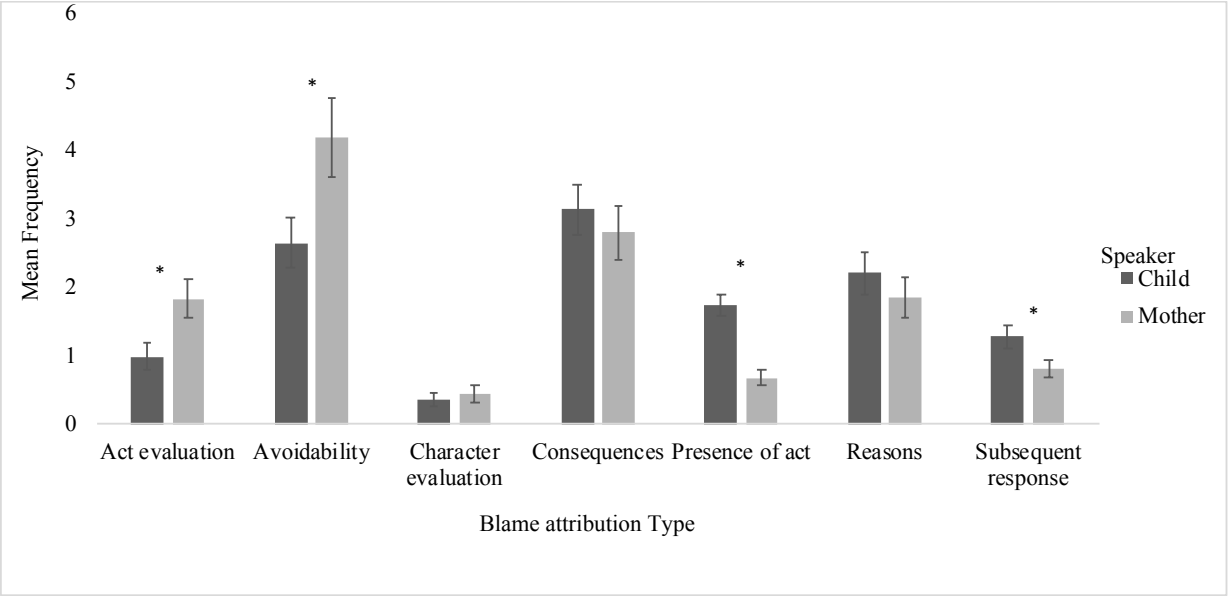

Figure 10. Frequencies of mothers' and children's use of each type of blame attribution. * denotes significant difference between speakers within a blame attribution type at $p < .05$ with Bonferroni correction.

Frequencies of blame attribution types across valence. Comparing the extent to which families maximized and mitigated blame for the child and peer, the analysis revealed that families were equally likely to maximize and mitigate act evaluations, character evaluations, reasons and subsequent responses (see Figure 11). Regarding avoidability, families maximized significantly more ($M = 8.53$, $SE = 1.38$) than they mitigated blame ($M = 3.54$, $SE = 0.49$). They also maximized blame for consequences of harmful actions ($M = 6.83$, $SE = 0.89$) significantly more than they mitigated ($M = 2.33$, $SE = 0.52$). In terms of presence of acts, families maximized significantly more ($M = 4.08$, $SE = 0.36$) than they mitigated blame ($M = 0.28$, $SE = 0.11$).

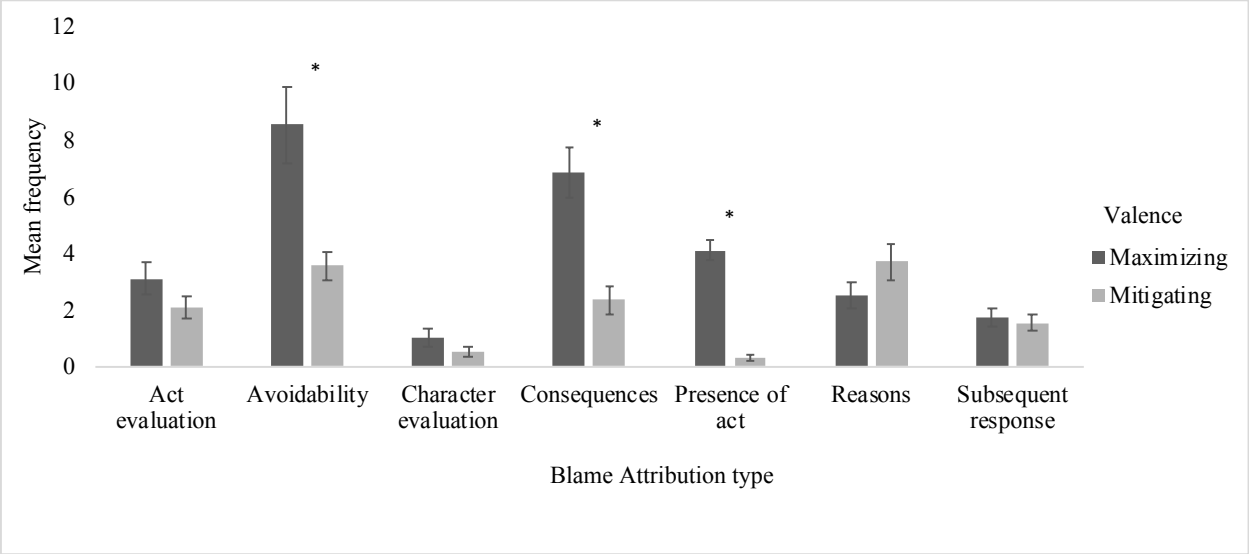

Figure 11. Frequencies of maximizing and mitigating statements across different types of blame attributions. * denotes significant difference between valence categories within a blame attribution type at $p < .05$ with Bonferroni correction.

Sub-types of Blame Attributions

We further examined the specific ways in which families discussed consequences and avoidability while making blame attributions. Regarding consequences, five subtypes emerged including consequences of authority, emotions, relations, as well as physical and psychological consequences. Families referred to future hypotheticals, past actuals and past counterfactuals. Frequencies of the sub-types are presented below. Analysis revealed a main effect for subtype of blame attribution by valence (F (7, 245) = 11.15, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .24$), but no effect of gender.

Frequencies of consequence sub-codes. The frequency of the five subtypes of blame attribution regarding consequences occurred in the following order: emotional consequence, relational consequence, authority's consequence, physical consequence, and psychological consequence (see Figure 12). Emotional consequence ($M = 1.38$, $SE = .15$) emerged significantly more often than authority sanctions ($M = 0.52$, $SE = .11$), physical consequence ($M = 0.25$, $SE = .09$), psychological consequence ($M = 0.19$, $SE = .08$), and relational consequence ($M = 0.64$, $SE = .15$). All others did not differ significantly from each other except for authority sanctions ($M =$

0.52, *SE* = .11), which emerged significantly more than psychological consequence (*M* = 0.19, *SE* = .08).

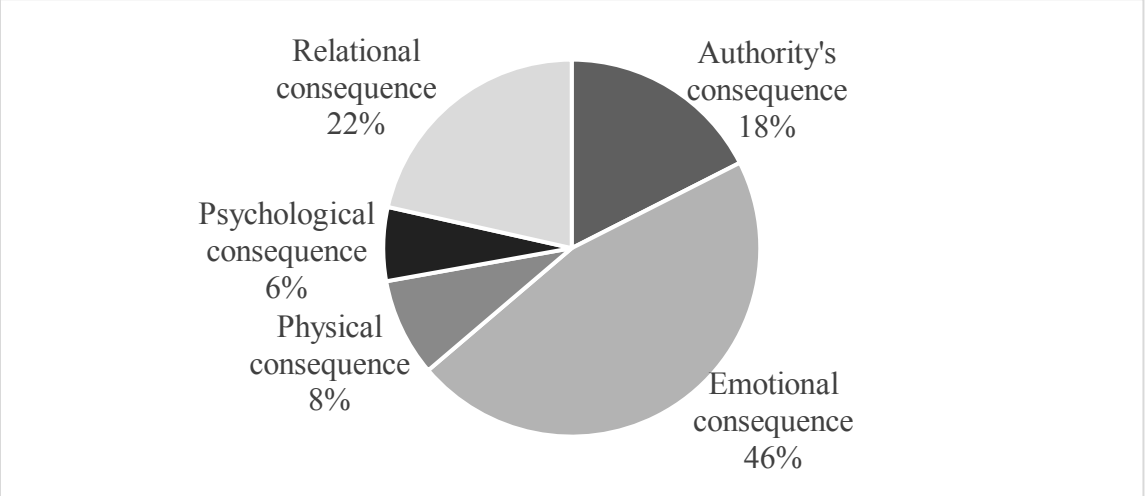

Figure 12. Frequencies of consequence subtypes of blame attribution.

Frequencies of avoidability sub-codes. The frequency of the three subtypes of blame attribution regarding avoidability occurred in the following order: past actuals, future hypotheticals, and past counterfactuals (see Figure 13). Families referred significantly less to past counterfactuals (*M* = 0.38, *SE* = .10) compared to both past actuals (*M* = .91, *SE* = .20) and future hypotheticals (*M* = .91, *SE* = .20). Future hypotheticals and past counterfactuals did not differ significantly.

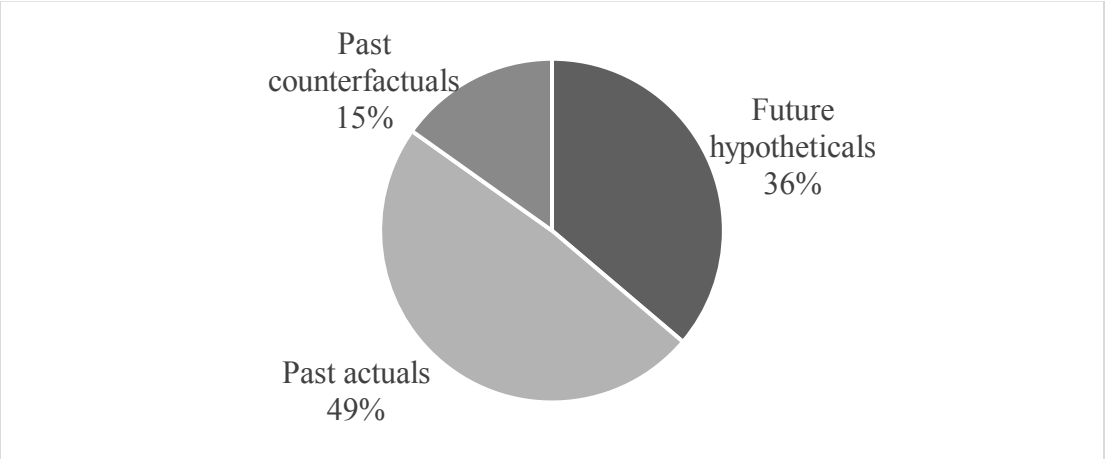

Figure 13. Frequencies of avoidability subtypes of blame attribution.

Frequencies of sub-types of blame attribution across valence. Sub-types of blame attribution were further coded for consequences and avoidability of harm. Families maximized blame ($M = 1.39$, $SE = 0.31$) more than they mitigated blame ($M = 0.19$, $SE = 0.09$) for authority's consequence (i.e., times the offender got into trouble with an authority figure such as a teacher or principal). They also maximized more ($M = 3.86$, $SE = 0.48$) than they mitigated responsibility ($M = 0.53$, $SE = 0.14$) when referring to emotional consequences of harm. On occasions where they discussed possible measures to avoid harm in the future (future hypotheticals) they maximized significantly more ($M = 3.42$, $SE = 0.70$) than they mitigated blame ($M = 0.81$, $SE = 0.24$). Yet again, blame was maximized ($M = 0.58$, $SE = 0.20$) significantly more than mitigated ($M = 0.17$, $SE = 0.10$) when families talked about physical consequences of harm. Only for relational consequences did they mitigate blame ($M = 1.28$, $SE = 0.32$) significantly more than they maximized blame ($M = 0.44$, $SE = 0.16$; see Figure 14).

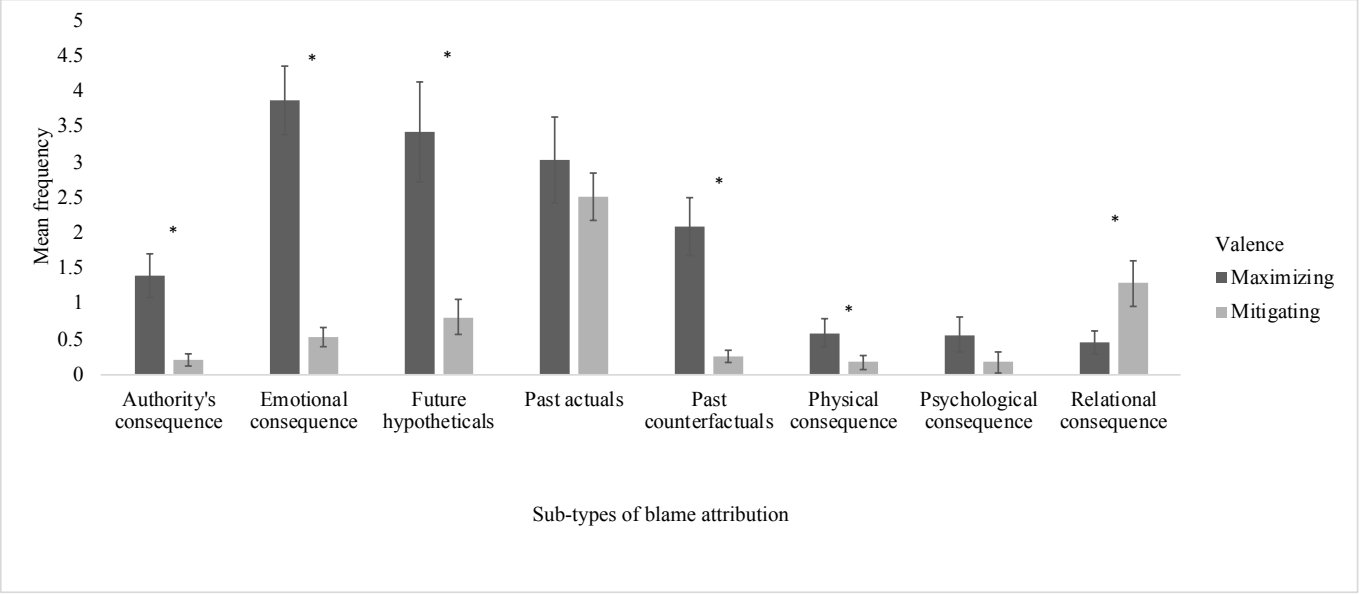

Figure 14. Frequencies of maximizing and mitigating blame attributions across sub-types of consequences and avoidability. * denotes significant difference between valence categories within a blame attribution sub-type at $p < .05$ with Bonferroni correction.

Discussion

The goal of this study was to investigate the various strategies that mothers and their 6-7 year-old children employ to make blame attributions when engaged in conversations about two peer conflicts in which the child was the victim of harm – one to which the child felt they contributed (shared fault) and the other to which they felt they did not contribute to the fight (no fault). This study provides understanding regarding specific ways in which mothers and children of this particular life stage explore who is responsible or blameworthy for children's varied conflicts with peers.

Specifically, this study addressed the following research questions: (1) how do the shared fault conversations differ from the no fault conversations in terms of valence (mitigating and maximizing blame/responsibility) and context (harm to child, harm to peer, self-protection)? (2) how do mothers and children differ from each other in how they maximize and mitigate blame in varying contexts? (3) what are the specific dimensions that mothers and children draw on to make blame attributions and how do they use them? The findings related to these research questions as well as implications of the findings for moral agency development are discussed in this section. It is worth noting that although effects of gender were examined, no significant gender differences emerged. Thus, gender differences will not be discussed.

Either way, you are responsible: Mothers' context-specific responsibility attributions

The first aim of the study was to compare the shared fault and no fault conversations regarding maximizing and mitigating blame attributions in specific contexts – harm to child, harm to peer and self-protection. We expected families to maximize the child's blame for harm against the peer when the child thought the conflict was partly their fault, and similarly, to maximize the peer's blame when the child did not contribute to the conflict. Finally, we expected

that when the child thought the conflict was not his/her fault, mothers would maximize responsibility for the child's failure to protect himself from harm. Our findings are discussed in light of these hypotheses, which were all supported.

As expected, families made more statements that maximized blame regarding the child's harm against the peer when the child acknowledged that the conflict was partly their fault. On the contrary, when children did not think they had contributed to causing the conflict, they, together with their mothers, maximized responsibility more for the peers' harm against the child. Thus, our findings suggest mothers and children of this age are listening to and largely agreeing with each other in their understandings of events. That is, as has been noted in past research (Scirocco et al., 2018), mothers appear to be sensitive to the variations in children's accounts of their conflict experiences.

More specifically, when children mentioned their harm against a peer, mothers underscored the blameworthiness of their actions (e.g., "you have to be nice to people and not break their hearts", "that's not nice, you wouldn't like someone to do that to you"). These real examples from shared fault conversations from this study are an indication that, when mothers note their children's contributions to the conflict, they aim to support children's concern for others. Similarly, they underscore the peer's lack of concern for the child when they mention harm against the child, (e.g., "It sounds like he goes out of his way to say mean things sometimes", "that's not respectful").

Also, as hypothesized, families maximized children's responsibility for protecting themselves from harm particularly when children felt they did not contribute to the conflict. This suggests a belief that there could have been a way for children to avoid getting [more] hurt. Mothers asked, for instance, "Well, she didn't think you had a good singing voice, what did you

say to her then?", "Next time, you have to report the person to your teacher, or your principal", "Well, you can tell them about your feelings. You can tell them "Stop, it hurts my feelings," right?". Contained within statements and questions regarding self-protection are efforts to confirm whether or not the child took a specific action to deal with the harm thrown at them; either via confrontation, physically responding, or redirecting attention. Mothers are also suggesting both what children could have or should have done to potentially prevent getting hurt. Thus, arguably, these strategies reflect mothers' emphasis on supporting the coping skills of their children.

Socialization of coping involves parents' deliberate measures to encourage their children to either engage with (e.g., by confrontation, assertion) or disengage from (e.g., by denial, withdrawal) stressors. Disengagement has been shown to undermine children's ability to successfully manage their emotions and relationships (Abaied & Rudolph, 2010). Findings from our dataset imply that mothers are generally encouraging children to engage with the stressor although there are occasions on which some mothers also endorse disengaging (e.g., "Instead of just ending the game, you could just avoid him", "so then why do you keep playing with her?"). On the whole however, families typically discussed specific ways for children to protect themselves from [further] hurt by directly engaging with the stressor or source of harm (i.e., the peer, typically).

Another way in which mothers seemed to be encouraging engagement was by asking children to seek adult intervention (e.g., did you go tell the teacher?", "did you go tell an adult afterwards?" "just come back home and tell mommy, okay?") and attempt to repair relationships (e.g., "So you never pushed him again," "do you and N talk again?" "You should include everybody, it doesn't take long to teach her how to dance," "what do you think you could do to

try a compromise," "did you say sorry?") (Scirocco et al., 2018). These coping suggestions are helpful for children's navigation of their social-moral experiences, moving forward in particular. Mothers are directly encouraging children to aim for conflict resolution in such a way that the children are simultaneously feeling supported. Even more significantly, mothers were consistently "refusing" to allow their children to be passive recipients of harm, thus, their parental approach was largely to facilitate children's development of their own sense of responsibility, even as a victim in a conflict.

These findings are interesting inasmuch as mothers' approaches seem to be holding children responsible across conflicts, albeit in different ways. That is, when children feel partially at fault, mothers seem to agree. When they feel they are not at fault, mothers do not challenge their children's perspective directly, but nevertheless specify aspects of the past event in which children could be held responsible for protecting themselves from harm. Obviously, due to the peer's absence during the conversation and mothers' focus on their children's moral growth, there was very little reference to the peer's self-protection (peer-protection). This is understandable, because mothers may be particularly focused on helping their own children to gain control over victimizing situations and ultimately learn to *actively* protect themselves from harm.

I'm not responsible for harm! Children victims' blame absolution and mothers' standpoint

The second aim was to compare mothers and their children's blame attribution strategies. We sought to answer the question: what are mothers' and children's distinct contributions to conversations in terms of maximizing and mitigating blame in particular contexts? We expected children to maximize harm against themselves and mitigate their harm against the peer, in both cases more than mothers. In contrast, we expected mothers to maximize responsibility in the

context of self-protection. Again, these expectations were met, and additional findings also emerged.

It is worth noting that we excluded all statements that were neutral, thus since mothers were more likely to play the role of enquirers/listeners, some of their contributions were not included in analyses. For instance, mothers would often say "tell me what happened" or "mm-hmm' (nodding) to show children they were listening. This may be one main reason we found that children made more blame attributions generally than their mothers did. This pattern of children attributing blame more than mothers can also be explained by the nature of the research protocol; specifically, children initiated both conversations by recounting their experience that would form the focus of the discussion; thus, in some respects, children guided the direction of the conversations (Wainryb & Recchia, 2017). As victims of harm, who were hurt, mad or upset, it is reasonable that children maximized blame for peers' harm against them more than mothers did (Pasupathi & Wainryb, 2010). Presumably, they had specific reasons to blame the peer based on evidence drawn from their memories of the harmful events. Based on the evidence children provided, mothers were given the opportunity to make spontaneous blame judgments (Alicke, 2000) along the same lines, blaming the peer for causing harm to their child. However, mothers did not simply mirror children's evaluations; they maximized the peer's blame much less than children. In contrast, as noted above, they more often focused on children's capacity for self-protection than their children and maximized their responsibility in this context.

It was interesting but counterintuitive to find that children were more likely to mitigate responsibility than their mothers, not only for their harm against peers (which makes sense when they play the role of perpetrators; Pasupathi & Wainryb, 2010) and their own inability to protect themselves from harm but also, for the peers' harm against them. In terms of explaining

children's tendency to also mitigate their peer's responsibility for harming them, multiple factors may contribute to this finding. We speculate that (1) in some cases, conflicts were already resolved to children's satisfaction (e.g., "she said sorry, so I didn't tell the teacher"), and (2) children sometimes viewed their peers' motivations or actions as legitimate (e.g., "She didn't hurt me, but hurt me a bit," "She was trying to throw it against the tree and by accident, it went a little too far"). In line with Wainryb and colleagues (2005), this finding may reflect that children of this age sometimes consider their peers' legitimate goals as less blameworthy and therefore mitigate blame judgments. An example in this study is: "We were playing tag, I tagged him, he was *it*, he wanted to try to tag me but he by accident pushed me". By way of interpretation, the peer in this story had a legitimate goal of *tagging the child.* The harmful behavior – *pushing the child* – only occurred by accident, which is most probably why the child mitigated blame.

In this light, one important moderating factor may be the type of relationship between the child and their peer; research suggests a certain level of care and caution within child friendships due to an awareness of potential termination of the relationship (Komolova & Wainryb, 2011). Thus, children may make benign attributions regarding their friends' motives, whereas mothers may be less likely to do so. Potentially, mothers would rather have their children draw lessons from perceived bad behavior of their peers. Their concern may possibly be that children would mitigate their harm against others along the same lines.

In sum, children are generally mitigating their harm across all contexts, whether they were harmed or harmed the peer, as well as when issues about their self-protection from harm arose. Regarding children's mitigating peers' blame for harm against them, mothers' standpoint seems to be that children call a spade a spade. Both mothers and children mitigated blame for the child's harm against the peer. Self-protection was largely maximized by mothers as discussed in

the latter part of the previous section. Even though mothers and children tended to be on the same page, when mothers and children diverged, children were more likely to absolve their guilt, whereas mothers were emphasizing their responsibility. These findings seem to have implications for moral growth, if mothers are assisting children to avoid passivity, although they may also occasionally be imposing moral lessons on children that are less embraced. Overall, however, the level of listening and agreement between both parties presents a healthy image of constructive conversation that aids children's moral reasoning.

Elements and frequencies of mothers' and children's blame strategies

The third aim of the study was to investigate the dimensions that mothers and their 6-7-year-olds focused on to attribute blame/responsibility. Because there was little previous research to guide this aspect of the study, no particular hypotheses were advanced. That is, our goal was simply to document variations among types and subtypes of blame attribution in terms of mothers' and children's usage, extent of maximization versus mitigation and possible variations in context.

As mentioned previously, young children tend to focus more on factual rather than interpretive information in their accounts of conflict (Pasupathi & Wainryb, 2010). This was evident in this study. Children identified the presence of harmful acts (e.g., "that day, he took my hat and I told him to give it back but he did not give it back") more often than mothers, and referred more to offenders' subsequent actions (e.g., "And after, I went over, and just told her that, do you want to play with me **now**? And she said yes"). Mothers, on the other hand, leaned towards interpretation, a valuable tool for centering children's thinking on personal and others' goals, beliefs and desires. They evaluated actions more often than children (e.g., "but the general story is that you felt she wasn't respecting you," "Nobody really wants to hurt anybody

intentionally, and if they do, it's them that should probably take the time to reflect about what they said and about what they did, right?"). In these two examples, mothers appear to be getting to the bottom of children's stories; the first reflects the child's feelings, and the second, desires, and repair of relationships.

Although 6-7-year-old children's narratives may not be as rich in interpretation as those of older children, Pasupathi and Wainryb's (2010) research reveals that early school-aged children nevertheless can and do include psychological concepts in their narratives. Similarly, many children in this study alluded to the peer's and their own reasons for harming, their feelings, thoughts, etc. (e.g., "I think it's because she wants to seem cool and better than everyone else," "so they really made me feel like a reject," "he pushed me on purpose," and "He was just being sarcastic"). Furthermore, these conversations provided opportunities for parents to scaffold children's reasoning about both the event and the players involved in order to help the child grapple effectively with harm (Wainryb & Recchia, 2017). In this study, mothers did raise questions and statements to stimulate children to consider possible underlying reasons for harm, as well as emotions, among other psychological concepts. For instance, "was she just not careful, or was it on purpose?" "Well, you're not telling me that part. What were you really fighting about?" "why do you think O is saying bad words?" By answering these questions, children reflect deeper and make connections, moving beyond the "landscape of action" (which encompasses only observable aspects of the conflict) to the "landscape of consciousness" (drawing the meaning of the event). Thus, by eliciting children's narration of more interpretive information, mothers are facilitating the growth of moral agency (Bruner, 1990).

Capacity, obligation and foreseeability were excluded from analyses, because children at this age and their mothers referenced each very infrequently. Considering that each of these

concepts is related to the notion of preventing/avoiding harm, their minimal usage is notable because avoidability – analogous to preventability – emerged most often than any other blame attribution type. Why the disparity, then? *Obligation* behooves the child or peer to have prevented a negative outcome because of their significant role in the relationship. As such, references to obligation indicate that the culprit holds substantial influence over the situation or other party involved (Malle et al., 2014). This was probably not the case in most of the events that were the focus of this study; since many involved similarly-aged peers, we expect them to have been of equal influence. The closest the conversations came to examples of obligation were friendship-related (i.e., "You don't break your friends' hearts" and "you should not always do what your friend wants you to do"). In turn, *capacity* and *foreseeability* reflect relatively sophisticated forms of blame attribution; discussing knowledge, skills, tools and opportunities available to children to both draw from internally and to consider in anticipating harm may require more developmentally-advanced reasoning. Thus, in the conversations, families were referring to avoidability more as specific actions which did, could have, or will prevent harm, and less as most abstract cognitive/mental resources available for harm prevention.

In terms of the frequencies of the different types of blame attributions, families particularly discussed blame via references to *avoidability* and *consequences* (about one-fifth of the time in each case). As such, we elaborate more on the meaning of these types of blame attributions in the subsections below.

Consequences. Findings suggest that emotional consequences for children (compared to relational and physical consequences and consequences from authority figures) were the main focus of the conversations and were used when maximizing responsibility about five times more than during mitigation. Alicke (2000) suggests a blame mode of processing via spontaneous

evaluations which attributes the greatest blame to the person who generates the most negative affect in the victim. Specifically, he posits that spontaneous reactions derive from evidential information, which in the case of this study, are elements of the child's account of the peer conflict. Children made comments such as "It made me feel really rejected and it made me feel sad". Mothers typically extended the emotional consequence either to signal listening or to highlight the causes of the child's emotions (e.g., "It makes you feel upset that he is telling you that you don't know how to pitch properly?").

It is also important to note however, that 6-7-year-olds have the potential to draw links between an offender's intentions and the outcomes of their actions; they consider motives behind actions rather than exclusively focusing on observable outcomes of harmful actions (Killen et al., 2011). Notably, after avoidability and consequences, families (mothers and children equally) referred most to reasons for harmful actions. In fact, referring to reasons as a type of blame attribution provides a necessary foundation for evaluating consequences as intentional, thus blameworthy, or otherwise. However, because these children were somewhat more focused on consequences, conversations naturally followed that path. It behooves mothers, therefore, to take advantage of children's emphasis on consequences (outcomes) but also to help them to link such consequences to reasons (intent to harm). Although, research suggests that mothers do scaffold children's understanding of the psychological facets of their experiences (Pasupathi & Wainryb, 2010), our findings suggest that this may not be an area of as much concern for our sample compared to issues of avoidability/preventability of harm and self-protection.

Avoidability. This type of blame attribution occurred more frequently than all others and mostly in the self-protection context, which has been discussed. When families spoke about avoidability, they were more often maximizing than mitigating responsibility. Avoidability was

most often discussed in terms of the child's actual behavior in the past (i.e., what children actually did to avoid harm). We reason that this may be the most basic form of ensuring attempts at preventing harm. That is, based on the knowledge of what children are actually doing, mothers can then potentially build on this by suggesting future means of avoiding harm and past counterfactuals, respectively. Past counterfactuals may have been the least referenced because compared to future suggestions, suggestions regarding the past cannot aid children to undo the harm. It seems more reasonable to talk about what children should do "next time" compared to what they "could have done" to avoid harm.

Families mostly maximized responsibility when speaking about measures to prevent being harmed in the future (e.g., "So you should be deciding not to hang out with her too much") and possible ways children could have avoided harming the peer or getting hurt by the peer in the past (e.g., "Remember we decided probably it was best not to bring your cards to school," "I think if you had told him that it hurt your feelings I think he would've understood that pretty well"), but not for past actual behavior. By age 6, children can more skillfully reason counterfactually compared to two to three years prior (Beck et al., 2006). Nevertheless, counterfactual thinking continues to develop across school-aged years and into adolescence, and thus mothers of this age-group may still need to scaffold refinement in counterfactual thinking. It may therefore be helpful for mothers to more frequently discuss past counterfactuals because future hypothetical thinking is mostly developed by age 4. However, maternal goals are presumably separate from improving cognitive reasoning capacities, and largely focused on actively dealing with peer conflicts.

Instilling responsibility in children: Beneficial or not?

Taken together, it appears that mothers' paramount intent was to instill a sense of responsibility in their 6-7-year-olds, particularly when children believe they did not contribute to the conflict. Considering that the child was always a victim of harm across events, mothers then appear to be discouraging them from taking no responsibility (being passive recipients of harm). Thus, questions, strategies and suggestions to facilitate children's thinking regarding avoiding harm appear to be tools that mothers are using to help their children navigate victimizing experiences, and to learn to take self-defensive actions.

Moral agency development is likely facilitated by this approach to instill responsibility. As mentioned, self-protection was mostly based on references to avoidability including references to past actual, past counterfactual and future hypothetical behavior. The latter two subtypes are characterized by precise measures to be (have been) safe from harm via evaluating events and planning for future ones respectively. Moral agency is catalyzed by such planning and evaluation: specifically, via tough-decision-making, adjusting desires and making compromises, all of which are involved with avoiding harm. For instance, one mother who suggested that her child stop playing with the hurtful peer was guiding her child to make a tough decision to end what she perceived to be a destructive relationship with a playmate.

At the heart of moral agency is understanding one's own and others' goals and beliefs. In attempting to draw meaning and support the child's self-protection strategies (e.g., compromising, etc. as mentioned above), mothers delved into internal states of both the child and the peer. For instance, one mother said:

> *So, it's okay for you to stand up right? And to say, you know "I am going to do what I'm doing, and you have to accept that." Because people have to be accepting of you, that's important, right? And also, you remember like for [peer], she's telling you like you can't play with her or she doesn't want to be your friend anymore. In that case you can also*

reflect upon that and say "Well, if that's how you like to be, then that's okay with me. I mean, I'm going to go do something else".

This particular mother is scaffolding moral agency by highlighting the peer's goal to terminate friendship ("she doesn't want to be your friend") and emphasizing the importance of tolerance ("people have to be accepting of you"). Based on these interpretations and values, she is suggesting self-protection strategies**:** to speak up assertively ("it's okay for you to stand up") or to withdraw when necessary ("if that's how you like to be… I'm going to go do something else"). It is worthy to note that this mother did not push her suggestions down the child's throat. Eventually, both agree on these approaches to handling the conflict.

A drawback for self-protection would occur if mothers overemphasized the child's failure to self-protect. That is, by focusing on self-protection, perhaps some mothers were invalidating children's hurt and perhaps even implying that children were to blame for their own victimization? Hopefully, the extent of agreement between mothers and their children in this sample suggests that this was not the typical pattern. Relatedly, given that children were mitigating their self-protection more than their mothers, it is worth mentioning that parents ought to be careful not to make the mistake of insisting on their own values and overlooking children's own perspectives (e.g., being intrusive; Poulin, Nadeau, & Scaramella, 2012). This strategy, especially in the approaching adolescent years, may interfere with children's socioemotional adjustment and make them reluctant to disclose to parents in morality-related conversations (an important vehicle for moral agency development; Wainryb & Recchia, 2017). In this study, mothers appear to have taken the more profitable course of assisting children to consider *suggestions* (advice-giving; Poulin et al., 2012) for improving peer relationships and conflicts.

Limitations

This study examined blame attributions in actual conversations instead of hypothetical vignettes (Coplan et al., 2002; Dix et al., 1986; Miller, 1995). The advantage was the understanding attained from mother-child discussions of children's actual past conflicts. However, this design prevented us from measuring specific processes in [more] detail when they rarely arose. For instance, considering that Malle and colleagues (2014) mentioned capacity and obligation on their blame models, vignettes could have been designed to provoke discussions of these concerns. Their infrequency in the data, however, caused us to eliminate them from analyses and make possible assumptions about their rare use within early school year stages.

Furthermore, the study's findings cannot be generalized to fathers because only mothers were included. Focusing exclusively on mothers may cause a skewed representation of parental socialization processes. This is particularly because fathers differ in their parenting strategies (Simons & Conger, 2007). Thus, having just one parent may be limiting to fully understand socialization. Finally, although our sample was more diverse than in some similar investigations, the study's findings are mainly generalizable to well-educated families of European descent in Quebec.

Implications and Future Directions

This study sought to investigate mothers' and their 6-7-year-old children's blame attribution strategies when engaged in conversations about children's past peer conflicts. The two conversations centered on a conflict to which the child contributed and another to which they felt they did not. The findings indicate that, in spite of the context of the conversation, mothers were largely in agreement with children regarding their contributions to the conflict, but more noteworthy is their reorientation in the case of non-contribution to conflict. Mothers shifted

attention from blaming the peer in this conversation, to placing responsibility on the child for not ensuring they were unaffected by the peer's harm.

This maternal outlook has implications for the bidirectional process of socialization and moral agency development. To the extent that mothers are promoting children's active engagement in conflicts with or without pressuring children's thinking to align with theirs, they can maintain a thriving relationship with their children or place roadblocks between them, hindering child disclosure, respectively. Thus, a future direction for this study could be to, apart from coding challenges, investigate mother-child connectedness within the realm of maternal self-protection suggestions.

Moral agency development has been at the heart of theoretical framework that served as the motivation for this study. Evidently, mothers and children evaluated motives, desires, beliefs and emotions of both child and peer across all contexts. They frequently emphasized consequences and reasons which signal discussions regarding intentions behind harmful outcomes. Beyond reasons and consequences, avoidability (past counterfactuals and future hypotheticals especially), particularly within self-protection contexts, compelled weighing the offender's goals and drawing on personal beliefs to plan for subsequent self-protection from harm. All these blame attribution types created avenues to support children's moral agency development.

Ultimately, the findings of this study may inform interventions that aim to encourage parental listening, moral socialization in conversations with 6-7-year-olds, as well as effective blame/responsibility modeling. Arguably, the nature of parents' blaming is likely to influence children's own blaming strategies. Thus, it would also be beneficial to conduct a follow-up study

to investigate how children are navigating blaming and conflict resolution to observe links between mothers' prior suggestions and children's current strategies.

Altogether, mothers are supporting children's moral agency by attending to and being responsive to the particulars of children's stories, being sensitive to the contextual variations in attributing blame and responsibility. Also, they are facilitating meaning-making by understanding psychological aspects of the conflict and helping children to think along those lines. Ultimately, this study situates blame and responsibility within a framework of parent-child conversations about conflicts. It thus makes a contribution to understand how children's conversations with others can build on their developing understandings of blame in peer conflict.

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Appendix A

Category	Code	Sub-code	Description	Example
Speaker	- Mother (m)	-	The mother is the person attributing blame	**M**: And did you ever talk to Hannah about it?
	- Child (c)	-	The child is the one attributing blame	**C**: I spoke to her but she refused to listen!
Type	- Presence of act (pres_act)	-	Did the referent do anything blameworthy?	**Child Max (C)**: I hurt his feelings. **Peer Mit (M)**: She did not push you.
	- Reasons (reas)	-	Motivation, feeling, effort, intent to harm. *Examples*: Was action provoked? Was harm intentional? Was goal of the action instrumental, benevolent, hostile, etc.? Was the action emotionally-driven? Did the person have a valid reason to perform the action?	**Child Mit (M)**: So it sounds like the ball just slipped out of your fingers. **Child Max (C):** I was trying to hurt him/tease him/get back at him. (*intent to harm*)
	- Foreseeability (foresee)	-	Should or could the person have known the consequence of the referent's harmful action or the effect on the person himself?	**Child Max (M):** You should have known that your words would make her sad.

			Should/could the person have predicted the harm caused or their own hurt?	**Child Mit (C):** I don't know her well enough to know when she's going to get very upset.
	- Avoidability (avoid)	- Past counterfactuals (p_cf)	Should/could referent have taken an action to either avoid/prevent harm or avoid getting hurt? Yes=Max, No=Mit	***Harm to peer*** **Child Max (C):** I could have told her to stop instead of hitting her. ***Self-protection*** **Child Mit (M):** I can't think of any way you could have handled it or anything else you could have done to avoid getting hurt.
		- Past actuals (p_ac)	Did referent actually take an action to avoid/prevent harm or prevent themselves from getting hurt? Yes=Mit, No=Max	***Harm to peer*** **Child Mit (C):** I tried to keep myself from hitting him back. ***Self-protection*** **Child Max (M):** You did not tell them to stop hurting you.
		- Future hypotheticals (f_hy)	Does referent have an option about what to do differently in the future to avoid/prevent harm or to avoid getting hurt? Yes=Max, Mit=No Also, no other alternatives to what referent actually already did = Mit	***Harm to peer*** **Child Mit (M):** Honestly, I think next time she does that, you don't have any other choice except to respond how you did. **Child Max (C):** Next time I will respond with words instead of hands.

				Self-protection **Child Mit (M):** I really don't think you will ever be able to get her to stop saying mean words **Child Max (C):** Next time, I should just get a teacher if she tries to hurt me.
	- Characterological statements (charac)	-	Is there a perceived flaw in person's nature? Yes=max, No=Mit Characterological statements can be double-coded when the flaw refers also to one's **capacity** or their **reasons** for causing harm as well as **foreseeability**.	**Child Mit (M):** Everyone knows how gentle you are; I don't think you intended to hurt him (**charac + reas**). **Peer Max (C):** That boy has always been so unkind, especially toward me!
	- Capacity (capa)	-	Does person have the abilities, skills and knowledge to avoid acting in a blameworthy way? Yes=Max, No=Mit	**Child Max (M):** I have taught you how to behave with other kids. **Peer Mit (C):** She doesn't yet know how to talk politely.
	- Obligation (oblig)	-	Is this person in a position/status (as a close friend, older, more mature,	**Child Max (M):** Just because she's a friend doesn't mean that you

			etc.) that is relevant to their blameworthiness? Does speaker expect better from referent because of their role in relation to the peer? Yes=Max, No=Mit	need to do everything she wants. **Peer Max (C):** I am the younger kid; she should know better than to treat me like that.
	- Consequences (consq) NB: CANNOT occur with self-protection	- Emotional (emo)	Negative impact of harm on emotions/feelings	**Peer Mit (M):** It doesn't seem your feelings were hurt when she said that.
		- Physical (phys)	Negative impact of harm on the physical body	**Peer Max (C):** He scratched my arm so hard, I bled.
		- Material (mat)	Negative impact of harm on other's property	**Child Max (M):** You destroyed her backpack!
		- Relational (relat)	Negative impact of harm on the peer relationship	**Child Mit (C):** I did not snub him after that incident.
		- Psychological (psych)	Negative impact of harm on self-image/worth/ self-evaluation, self-esteem, body image, etc.	**Peer max (M):** It appears he hurt you so bad it made you question your worth.
		- Authority (auth)	Authority (teacher, principal, etc.) blames offender.	**Peer Max (C):** Well, she got into trouble with the teacher.

	- Act evaluation (act_eval)	-	Can referent's action be described as "wrong" or "right"? The speaker is either praising (mit) or criticizing (max) the referent for an action.	**Child Mit (M):** I think leaving the scene was just fine. **Child Max (C):** I felt so bad I did the wrong thing! **Peer Max (M):** It was not nice of him to tease you.
	- Subsequent response (subs_resp)	-	Did person show remorsefulness or remorselessness? Did they attempt to make reparations or perpetuate their own earlier harm? Subsequent response is only for offender's own harm/wrongful act.	**Child Max (M):** You knew she was upset yet you kept calling her by the same name. **Child Mit (C):** I felt so bad I've never done it again. **Peer Mit (M):** I think he made it clear that he regrets what he did at that time.
Referent	- Child	-	The child is the blameworthy person in the speaker's statement	**Child Max (M):** And you don't shout at anyone, okay?
	- Peer	-	The peer is the blameworthy person in the speaker's statement	**Peer Max (M):** He was trying to put you into trouble.
Valence	- Maximizing blame (max)	-	Speaker judges referent (action/behavior/outcome) as blameworthy.	**Peer Max (C):** I just don't want to lend my stuff to her because she

				always loses things.
	- Mitigating blame (mit)	-	Speaker judges referent (action/behavior/outcome) as not blameworthy.	**Peer Mit (C):** She is usually friendly so I know she did not mean to hurt me.
	- Neutral statement (neut)	-	Speaker is ambivalent or uncertain if referenct's action/ behavior/outcome is blameworthy.	**Child neut (M):** Were you mean to him first before he grabbed your arm?
Response styles	- Challenge (chall)	-	The mother/child is countering a statement made by the other. The speaker should not be challenging the child's action in the conflict.	**C**: No! Your advice to tell someone they're a dick next time will never help! **M**: But I'm saying, like maybe call him out that he's just being shit, like not very nice.
	- Prompted response (pr)	-	The child is directly answering the mother.	M: Did he play well? **C: Yeah, he played really well.**
	- Spontaneous response (sp)	-	The child provides information which has not been directly/clearly requested by the mother.	M: Did he play well? **C:** Yeah, **so that's why he was pissed.** Because he played well and no one else did.

Context	- Harm to child (harm_child)	-	The blameworthiness/responsibility refers to the peer's harm to the child.	**Peer Max (M):** She called you names you did not like. **Peer Mit (C):** He did nothing to upset me.
	- Harm to peer (harm_peer)	-	The blameworthiness/ responsibility refers to the child's harm to the peer.	**Child Max (M):** You kept on bothering him. **Child Mit (C):** My words were kind; he took it wrongly.
	- Self-protection (self-pro)	-	The blameworthiness/ responsibility refers to child's self-protection for harm by the peer.	**Child Mit (M):** It's a good thing you told him how you felt; I'm sure he will be careful next time. **Child Max (C):** I should have moved away from him so that he wouldn't punch me.
	- Peer-protection (peer-pro)		The blameworthiness/responsibility refers to peer's self-protection for harm by the child.	**Peer Mit (C):** He did tell me to stop calling him names. **Peer Max (M):** And he could have told you, "I'm not in the

				right mood. Can you please not?"