Adolescents' Reasoning about Unambiguous Peer Harm: Variations Across Relationship Contexts and Types of Harm

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Abstract

Adolescents' Reasoning about Unambiguous Peer Harm: Variations Across Relationship Contexts and Types of Harm

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This thesis examined variations across relationship contexts and types of transgressions in adolescents' reasoning about unambiguous peer harm at school. A total of 141 Canadian and American adolescents (73 girls, 67 boys, 1 other) ranging from ages 14 to 17 years (M = 15.74 *SD* = 1.06) responded to four online vignettes depicting psychological or material unambiguous harms committed by a good friend or a peer they did not know. Overall, when the perpetrator was a good friend, youths evaluated the harm as more bad and reported feeling more hurt and sad, but also made more benign attributions and endorsed more restorative responses, as well as more learning and relationship-oriented goals. These findings suggest that even in the face of unambiguous transgressions, youth still found ways to mitigate their friends' culpability by interpreting their behavior through a more generous lens. Conversely, when the perpetrator was a neutral peer, youths interpreted their behavior as more hostile and endorsed more punitive strategies and justice goals. Regarding situational features of harm, youths judged material harms to have more serious consequences than psychological harms and reported stronger emotional responses to them; youth also interpreted material harms as more hostile and less benign and endorsed more punitive responses. Finally, youth also endorsed more revenge, justice, and learning goals in response to material harms, and more relationship-oriented goals following psychological harms. Overall, this study adds to the literature by examining how youths' cognitive, affective, and behavioral judgments are informed by socio-contextual features of harm. Ultimately, the more forgiving pattern observed with good friends can inform processes to address peer harm in schools in more peaceful and restorative ways.

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Adolescents' Reasoning about Unambiguous Peer Harm: Variations Across Relationship Contexts and Types of Harm

"When we talk about repair and restorative justice, it's all about relationships, and relationships in the context of harm" (Kaba, 2021, p. 179).

Increasingly, scholars and practitioners are advocating for alternative approaches to addressing peer harm in schools as mounting evidence highlights the detrimental consequences of punitive and exclusionary practices (American Psychological Association, 2008). A promising avenue is restorative justice which involves values and practices that emphasize harm restoration, respectful relationships, accountability, inclusive dialogue, and social engagement (Drewery, 2016; Llewellyn & Llewellyn, 2015; Morrison & Vaandering, 2012; Reimer, 2019). Although the formal implementation of restorative justice models in schools is a relatively recent phenomenon, this approach is not unfamiliar to most people, as restorative approaches may be relatively common in response to transgressions in close relationships (Kaba, 2019). Indeed, adolescents may endorse more relationship-oriented responses and be more inclined towards forgiveness when harmed by a good friend, while responding more aggressively or punitively when harmed by distant others (e.g., Peets et al., 2007). Nevertheless, there may be a limit to how forgiving youths are of their friends' violations. Furthermore, their judgments of other people's transgressions may vary across situations (Dirks et al., 2007). Given that youths are crucial actors in school communities, the present thesis aims to examine variations across relationship contexts and types of transgressions in youths' reasoning about different approaches to address peer harm. Ultimately, this study aims to challenge one-size-fits-all approaches to address peer harm in schools by centering youths' perspectives and highlighting socio-contextual variations informing their justice orientations.

Different Approaches to Address Harm

In Western societies, the standard justice process in the aftermath of harm is led by a designated authority figure who judges which law or rule was broken to then enforce the pre-established sanction for said offense (Zehr, 2002). This approach has been criticized for alienating important stakeholders in the resolution of conflicts; for instance, individuals do not have a voice in the process and are disincentivized from admitting their own faults, and society loses pedagogical and community-building opportunities (Christie, 1977). Furthermore, although in theory this process was established so that comparable offenses would be treated equally and individuals would be aware of the consequences for their transgressions, in practice, disproportionate punishments have resulted in the mass incarceration and systemic exclusion from educational institutions of individuals from historically minoritized and marginalized communities (e.g., Black and Brown youths; Del Toro & Wang, 2022; Epstein et al., 2017; Legette & Anyon, in press; Lyubansky & Barter, 2019; Mallett et al., 2017).

In schools, punitive discipline is based on a hierarchical system that prioritizes enforcing rules, assigning blame, and imposing punishments (Morrison et al., 2005; Zehr, 2002). This disciplinary approach has been justified with behavioral models emphasizing rewards and punishments to decrease undesirable behaviors and increase rule compliance (Macready, 2009). Likewise, retributive notions of accountability, borrowed from the criminal system, propel the idea that for justice to be achieved, punishments ought to be proportional to the harm in question (Okimoto et al., 2012). This belief is so pervasive in Western societies that individuals commonly equate obtaining justice with punishing perpetrators (Lyubansky & Barter, 2019). Educational institutions, in particular, have a long history of employing different forms of punishment to enforce rules and seek compliance from students; as corporal punishment began to

lose popularity, schools transitioned to the use of exclusionary practices (such as suspension), which were initially conceived as more progressive. Indeed, parents, students, teachers, and other school staff often endorse exclusionary policies (Lyubansky & Barter, 2019).

Despite its pervasiveness in schools, there is little evidence supporting the efficacy of punitive discipline in decreasing behavioral problems; instead, a growing body of scholarship documents its detrimental consequences on children's development (e.g., American Psychological Association, 2008). For instance, punitive practices do not provide learning opportunities in the aftermath of harm; instead, they send the message that certain students ought to be excluded from the community (Gomez et al., 2021). Moreover, scholars have documented how exclusionary practices can have negative effects on the academic achievement and engagement of punished students and even their nonpunished peers (e.g., Del Toro & Wang, 2022; Wang et al., 2022). Thus, overall, students do not appear to benefit from exclusionary discipline.

Given the challenges with punitive discipline, support is growing in favor of implementing alternative disciplinary models in schools, such as restorative justice. Historically, restorative justice models are rooted in Indigenous peacemaking traditions that prioritize dialogical practices that bring together those in conflict, as well as family members, community members, and authority figures to promote harmony and respectful relationships (Jayne, 2021; Menkel-Meadow, 2007; but see Said, 2022 and Tauri, 2016 for criticisms on the colonization of restorative justice). As applied in schools, restorative justice encompasses a continuum of proactive to reactive practices aiming to repair harm and foster respectful relationships (Morrison et al., 2005). These practices provide learning opportunities for students as they listen to different perspectives, discuss root causes of harm, are held accountable for their behavior, and participate

in decision-making processes (Drewery, 2016; Macready, 2009). Importantly, however, restorative justice goes beyond specific practices; it involves a change in the ethos of the school values to promote social engagement and collective problem-solving by centering students' voices and questioning systemic inequities (Lustick, 2020; Morrison & Vaandering, 2012; Reimer, 2019). In this way, rather than controlling students' behavior, restorative justice models aim to transform the relational climate in schools (Reimer, 2019).

Nevertheless, despite the promise of restorative justice models in schools, it is implemented inconsistently and in heterogeneous ways. For example, some institutions follow a whole school philosophy, while others employ it as isolated practices in tandem with exclusionary discipline (Morrison et al., 2005; Reimer, 2019; Vaandering, 2014). Furthermore, although some research highlights adolescents' positive experiences with restorative justice in schools (e.g., Schumacher, 2014), scholarship examining stakeholder perspectives has commonly centered on investigating the perspectives of teachers and other school staff (Velez et al., 2020). Inasmuch as youths are key actors and agents in the school community, it is critical to also chart youths' orientations to justice in their schools. Thus, to further examine youths' perspectives, the current study aims to contribute to the extant literature by investigating the socio-contextual factors that may inform youths' punitive and restorative orientations in response to peer harm.

Youths' Judgments and Reasoning in Response to Peer Harm

According to the social information-processing model, when children face interpersonal conflict, they encode and interpret internal and external cues, clarify their goals in the situation, evaluate possible responses, and ultimately select and enact a response (Crick & Dodge, 1994). As they encode and interpret cues, children construct an understanding of why the other person hurt them (i.e., they make attributions about their behavior) that guides their preferred responses

to harm. For example, children endorse more conciliatory and prosocial responses when they make benign interpretations of others' behaviors (e.g., 'they did not realize it would hurt me'), whereas children endorse more aggressive responses when they attribute hostility to others' actions (e.g., 'they were trying to hurt me'; McDonald, 2008; McDonald & Asher, 2018; Nasby et al., 1979; Orobio de Castro et al., 2003; Peets et al., 2007). As children make sense of harm, cognitions and emotions continuously interact to influence children's social-information processing (Crick & Dodge, 1994; Lemerise & Arsenio, 2000). For instance, children's emotional response may influence their interpretation of others' behavior, and their interpretations may also trigger particular feelings. In conflict situations, children also clarify and formulate goals, which orient them towards achieving desired outcomes or avoiding undesired ones (e.g., getting even, maintaining the relationship, preventing further victimization; Crick & Dodge, 1994; Young, 2020). Children's goals may inform their endorsement of different responses, but children also use their social knowledge, scripts and schemas to interpret the situation and evaluate different possibilities to address harm (Crick & Dodge, 1994; McDonald, 2008). For example, youths' prescriptive judgments of the desirability of different responses to peer harm may also be influenced by their descriptive expectations of how particular harms are typically addressed at school (Posada & Wainryb, 2008; Rakoczy & Schmidt, 2013; Roberts et al., 2016).

Overall, children have been found to support both aggressive and punitive responses to address moral transgressions (e.g., peer harm; McDonald & Asher, 2018; Smetana, 1981). Yet, there are a variety of beliefs and goals that underlie children's and youths' endorsement of these strategies. For instance, individuals can support punishment motivated by retributive goals to inflict suffering on perpetrators because they deserve it, deterrence goals to prevent similar

behaviors, or learning goals to promote understanding and reflection (Darley et al., 2000; Barreiro, 2012; Marshall et al., 2022; Pareja Conto et al., 2022). Nonetheless, moral, relational, and pragmatic concerns may also inhibit the endorsement of punitive responses. Specifically, adolescents have been found to criticize punitive practices for not being fair, and for failing to promote learning, repair relationships, or even achieve retribution (Bell, 2020; Pareja Conto et al., 2022). Thus, although youth sometimes endorse punishment in response to others' transgressions, they also report varied criticisms of these strategies.

Indeed, youths also endorse addressing peer conflict with restorative and prosocial responses (Chung & Asher, 1996; McDonald & Asher, 2018; Pareja Conto et al., 2022). For instance, a recent study found that adolescents judged responses to harm that encouraged empathy and perspective-taking, in line with restorative practices, as fairer than imposing punishments (Rote et al., 2020). Similarly, in another study, youths favored material compensation and psychological restoration in the form of apologies over punitive responses (Pareja Conto et al., 2022). They justified these preferences on the basis of concerns with fairness, benefiting victims, and repairing the relationship. Yet, in the same study, youths were also critical of whether restoration would consistently benefit victims, suggesting that their sociomoral judgments were grounded in situational features of the harm.

As alluded to above, cognitive and affective factors may be intertwined with youths' judgments, reasoning, and behavioral responses to harm. Indeed, scholars have found that adolescents' emotional responses and attributions to perpetrators' behavior are key determinants in their evaluation of different responses to address harm (e.g., Crick & Dodge, 1994; Peets et al., 2007; Peets et al., 2013; Recchia et al., 2020). For instance, children judge perpetrators as more deserving of punishments when they intentionally (rather than accidentally) harm others

(Heck et al., 2021). Feelings of anger are also positively related to maximizing attributions of blame for others' behavior and thus endorsing aggressive responses (e.g., physical or relational aggression; McDonald & Asher, 2018; Murphy & Eisenberg, 2002; Recchia et al., 2020). In contrast, feelings of sadness are positively associated with relationship-maintaining strategies such as confrontation (e.g., seeking clarification or expressing one's point of view) and conciliatory strategies (e.g., apologizing; Murphy & Eisenberg, 2002; Recchia et al., 2020). Similarly, research with undergraduates has found that stronger feelings of sadness are associated with judging restorative responses as fairer, while stronger feelings of anger are associated with evaluating punishment as fairer (Okimoto et al., 2009). In line with this, Vidmar (2000) observed that, in the context of criminal transgressions, individuals tend to endorse more punitive responses based on their degree of emotional arousal in response to the crime (particularly feelings of anger), as well as the seriousness of the offense and the degree of harm it caused.

Socio-Contextual Factors: Variations across Relationship Contexts and Types of Harm

More specific to socio-contextual variations, adolescents' judgments may also vary across relationship contexts of harm. Indeed, youths report more negative feelings (i.e., anger, sadness, and hurt) and a greater sense of violation of expectations in response to harm by close friends than neutral peers (Whitesell & Harter, 1996). However, despite their emotional responses to their friends' transgressions, when judging ambiguous harmful events, children make fewer negative interpretations of their behavior and endorse responding with less hostility toward them, as compared to other peers (Peets et al., 2007). These findings suggest that the close and secure bond with a good friend may mitigate the strong emotional responses triggered by their hurtful actions and encourage youths to seek more relationship-maintaining strategies to

address the harms (e.g., talking to solve the situation). Alternatively, youths' emotions in the face of harms by good friends may signal the importance of the relational bond, thus explaining their desires to maintain the relationship and endorse strategies that will support this overall goal (MacEvoy & Asher, 2012). For instance, a study by Recchia and colleagues (2020) found that youths experience more feelings of sadness but not more feelings of anger in response to transgressions by good friends, as compared to other peers.

Similarly, attributions of blame also vary across relationship contexts: adolescents tend to assign more culpability to neutral peers than good friends (Whitesell & Harter, 1996). Interestingly, when adolescents make more internal attributions for others' offenses, they also advocate for harsher punishments (Oosterhoff et al., 2018). Likewise, given their mitigation of culpability with good friends, youths may be more willing to consider their perspective, which has been positively associated with endorsing less punitive and more restorative attitudes (Rasmussen et al., 2018). Indeed, research with undergraduates suggests that victims judge restorative responses to harm as fairer when they perceive a stronger shared identity with the perpetrator, while they evaluate punishment as fairer when they feel a weaker shared identity with the perpetrator (Okimoto et al., 2009). Thus, evidence to date suggests that adolescents may favor restorative goals that emphasize promoting a shared understanding when victimized by a good friend, as compared to other peers.

The previous findings are in line with the centrality and intimacy characteristic of children's friendships in adolescence (Whitesell & Harter, 1996). However, some of the findings discussed thus far are based on children's responses to ambiguous harms wherein the perpetrator's intentions are not clear and thus their actions could be interpreted as purely accidental. Yet, research on adolescents' experiences suggests that actions causing harm to peers

are often intentional in that they are guided by instrumental goals (Wainryb et al., 2005). In this way, in situations of unambiguous transgressions, the affordances of friendships may amplify the negative evaluation or emotional responses to the harm (Crick & Dodge, 1994; Dirks et al., 2007). Thus, findings regarding youths' generous interpretations of harm committed by good friends may not necessarily extend to unambiguous transgressions. To prevent youths from interpreting transgressions by good friends as accidental, we designed hypothetical harms in which the perpetrator could have an instrumental reason to engage in the harmful action (e.g., saving face; winning a race), and the possible negative consequences of the act were fairly salient (e.g., public put-down; property loss). Indeed, Gromet and Darley (2009) theorized that features of harm, such as relationship context and severity of the unambiguous transgression, may interact in unique ways to influence individuals' judgments. Specifically, given the intense emotional responses that may follow from serious transgressions in close relationships, in this context, individuals may favor punishment over restoration or a combination of the two (Gromet & Darley, 2009; Vidmar, 2002). For example, in the context of unambiguous provocations by good friends, adolescents may endorse strategies that are in line with both restorative and retributive responses (Dirks et al., 2007). Specifically, Dirks and colleagues (2007) found that youths were more likely to endorse seeking an explanation or verbal aggression in response to harm committed by good friends, while they were more likely to endorse doing nothing when the perpetrator was a neutral peer.

Beyond the interpersonal context of harm, adolescents' sociomoral judgments may also vary based on other contextual features, such as the type of transgression. In fact, there is evidence that youths' responses to unambiguous transgression are situation-specific. For instance, Dirks and colleagues (2007) found that youths were more likely to endorse physical

aggression in response to physical and material harms than psychological harms (e.g., name-calling, social exclusion). Interestingly, when responding to material damages and name-calling, youths were also less likely to endorse seeking an explanation to address the harms. Broadly speaking, then, salient features of particular harm types may trigger unique cognitive and affective responses that can influence adolescents' judgments. Thus, to better understand how youths' sociomoral judgments vary across different types of harm, we presented participants with psychological and material transgressions. Specifically, psychological harms involved verbal insults accompanied by laughter from other peers. In the case of material harms, the actor destroyed a personal belonging which resulted in the participant missing an upcoming deadline or event, such as competing in an annual race.

In line with this, youths' judgments and reasoning may be sensitive to the intrinsic features of different forms of harm. For instance, adolescents are highly attuned to social evaluations from same-age peers, and, thus, they may experience strong emotional responses to public verbal offenses (Sommerville, 2013). Indeed, as they age, 5- to 10-year-old children make greater severity judgments of psychological harms such as making fun of a peer in front of the classroom (Heck et al., 2021). Likewise, in the same study, older children ascribed a longer-lasting impact to psychological harms. These judgments, in turn, are likely to influence youths' endorsement of punishment and retribution to address psychological harms (Gromet & Darley, 2009). Nonetheless, youths' sociomoral judgments may also be informed by the typicality of psychological harms, as these tend to occur more frequently than other types of harm amongst peers (e.g., Geiger & Fischer, 2006; Saint-Martin et al., 2022). Therefore, adolescents may judge psychological transgressions as less severe violations and endorse less hostility and punishments for psychological harm than other less frequent types of harm (Vidmar, 2002). Similarly, youths'

prescriptive judgments may also be influenced by their expectations of how harms are typically addressed at school (Rakoczy & Schmidt, 2013; Roberts et al., 2016). Hazler and colleagues (2001) observed that pre-service teachers are less likely to judge as severe and thus intervene in instances of psychological peer harm than other types of harm, such as physical transgressions. In line with this, since material harms tend to be less common than psychological transgressions (e.g., Geiger & Fischer, 2006; Saint-Martin et al., 2022), teachers may also judge the former as more severe and respond accordingly.

Importantly, material harms can also result in emotional damage thus intensifying adolescents' emotional and cognitive responses. In particular, in the current dataset, youths judged material harms that resulted in losing a personal belonging (e.g., their science report) and missing an important opportunity (e.g., submitting their assignment on time). The loss of personal belongings can create particular needs that may not be fully addressed solely with punitive responses. For instance, in a previous study using hypothetical material transgressions involving property damage or loss, youths judged that compensation would be fair and benefit victims, apologies would help to repair the relationship, and suspension would promote learning and achieve retribution (Pareja Conto et al., 2022). In the same study, youths also criticized apologies for not benefitting victims, arguing that apologies would not repair their material loss. Therefore, given the complexity of needs that may result from material harms, adolescents may judge these more severely than psychological harms.

The Current Study

The present thesis drew on an existing dataset to examine how socio-contextual features of harm influence youths' reasoning and judgments in the aftermath of harm. Specifically, we explored adolescents' emotional, cognitive, and behavioral judgments in response to different

forms of unambiguous harms committed by a good friend or an unknown peer. In this way, we sought to answer the following research question: *how are adolescents' (a) emotional responses, (b) attributions, (c) descriptive and (d) prescriptive judgements, and (e) goals related to socio-contextual features of the harms?* To this end, we presented youths with unambiguous psychological and material harms depicting name-calling in a public forum or destroying their possessions before an important deadline, respectively. Importantly, although adolescents may be more attuned to psychological harms and thus judge these more severely than other types of harm (e.g., Heck et al., 2021), it is also possible that they will evaluate psychological harm less severely than material harm on the basis of their relative typicality in their interpersonal relations (e.g., Geiger & Fischer, 2006). Similarly, youths' judgments of responses to different types of harms may also be influenced by their previous experiences in school. In existing research, teachers have been found to judge psychological peer harm less severely than other types of harm and thus intervene less often in these situations (Hazler et al., 2001). However, otherwise, the literature does not lead to clear predictions about youths' reasoning across material or psychological harms, and thus we examined these patterns in an exploratory way. In turn, we had competing hypotheses regarding the relationship context:

H1: Based on previous research (e.g., Oosterhoff et al., 2018; Peets et al., 2007; Recchia et al., 2020), we expected that youths would report more feelings of sadness and hurt in response to transgressions by a good friend but still make more benign attributions for their behavior. In contrast, we expected youth to report more feelings of anger and hostile attributions in response to harms by an unknown peer. Additionally, we expected youths to endorse more restorative responses and more relationship-oriented goals to address

harms by a good friend, and more punitive responses and revenge goals to harms by an unknown peer.

H2: Alternatively, given the particularly intense emotional responses that may follow from unambiguous harms committed by a good friend (i.e., more sadness, hurt *and* anger) as compared to an unknown peer, we expected youths to endorse more punitive than restorative responses (or a combination of the two), as well as more revenge goals, to address harms by a good friend, in comparison to an unknown peer (Dirks et al., 2007; Gromet & Darley, 2009; Whitesell & Harter, 1996).

Method

Participants

A total of 141 adolescents (73 girls, 67 boys, 1 other) ranging from ages 14 to 17 years ($M = 15.74$, $SD = 1.06$) were recruited to complete online questionnaires. One participant was omitted from analyses for taking less than 40% of the median time of other participants to complete the questionnaires, and therefore the final analytic sample consisted of 140 adolescents (73 girls, 66 boys, 1 other). The sample size was determined on the basis of a priori power analyses in G*Power to allow for the detection of moderate differences ($r = \sim.25$) in youths' reasoning (power > 80% at $p < 0.05$), taking into account the range of effects reported in past research (Burgess et al., 2006; Peets et al., 2007). Participants were recruited in Canada and the United States via advertisements posted on social media and via word of mouth. Parents provided written informed consent, and youths provided written assent to participate. In appreciation for their participation, adolescents received a gift certificate.

Regarding race and ethnicity backgrounds, 54% of youths identified as White, 13% as Indigenous, 12% as Latine, 8% as South Asian, 8% as East/Southeast Asian, 7% as Middle

Eastern, and 5% as Black. In comparison to their own classmates, 60.5% of youths reported that many were of their own ethnic/racial group, while 22.5% and 17% reported that some and not many of their classmates were of their ethnic/racial group, respectively. Most adolescents were born in Canada (68%), followed by the United States (11%). Mothers of adolescents in the sample primarily had postsecondary education (71% reported completing a university degree or higher, 12% completed a college degree, 9% completed high school, 6% completed some high school/college, and 2% did not report their education). Fathers of adolescents (reported as the other caregiver for 92% of youths) were also well-educated (62% had a university degree or higher, 15% completed a college degree, 9% completed high school, 10% completed some high school/college and 4% chose not to report their education). Regarding family income, 6% of parents reported family incomes of < than $25,000 per year, 6.5% reported incomes of $26,000 to $50,000, 20% reported $51,000 to $100,000, 21.5% reported $100,000 to $150,000, 16% reported $150,000 to $200,000, and 19% reported incomes > $200,000 per year; 11% of parents did not report family income. English was the predominant language spoken at home (94%), and all adolescents reported that they were fluent in English prior to participation.

Procedure and Measures

This study was part of a larger investigation of adolescents' reasoning about peer harm. Only measures relevant to the current study will be discussed. In approximately one 60-minute session, youths completed a series of online measures. To examine socio-contextual variations, we presented participants with four hypothetical vignettes depicting unambiguous harms committed by a good friend or a kid they did not know (in a counterbalanced order). Specifically, we alternated the order to expose participants to a scenario involving a good friend or kid they did not know, followed by a scenario involving a different actor. In total, each participant was

exposed to two hypothetical scenarios depicting harms committed by a good friend and two by a kid they did not know. For each relationship context, youths were presented with one vignette depicting a psychological harm (e.g., public verbal insults) and another vignette depicting a material harm (e.g., destroying an assignment; see Table 1); the assignment of harm vignettes to relationship contexts was counterbalanced across participants. To present participants with unambiguously harmful situations, we created hypothetical events where the actor could be understood to be engaging in intentional behavior aimed at an instrumental goal (see Wainryb et al., 2005). We designed the vignettes with ecological validity in mind, aiming to depict realistic situations that youths might actually face in their schools. Using a snowball sample of 16 participants in the same age range, we did two rounds of pilot testing with 10 vignettes to ensure ecological validity. In addition, pilot testing sought to ensure that youths evaluated each set of material and psychological harms in comparable terms based on their emotional responses, and their judgments of the severity and commonality of the transgressions. Previous research has found that youths' responses to hypothetical vignettes are related to their responses to actual comparable events and to their socio-cognitive evaluations of actual harmful events across different relationship contexts (see Peets et al., 2013; Turiel, 2008). After selecting the vignettes for the larger study (see Table 1), we did a final round of pilot testing with a snowball sample of 6 participants to test out the entire study protocol.

Table 1
Harm Vignettes

Psychological harms	
Math class	One day in math class your teacher asks a [actor] to solve a math problem in front of the class. Since they are not able to solve it, your teacher then asks you to solve the math problem. You are very good in math class, so you usually get the answers right. When you finish solving the problem, your teacher congratulates you in front of everyone. [actor] starts calling you mean names and making fun of you in front of everyone. All the students in

	the class burst out laughing, including [actor]. Then, [actor] tells you "You are such a loser! Nobody thinks you are as good as you think you are."
Soccer team	You and [actor] are trying out to join the soccer team at your school. There is only one spot available on the team. You have practiced really hard for the try-outs, so you think you have a good chance of being selected. After you score a goal, the coach congratulates you in front of everyone. [actor] starts calling you mean names and making fun of you in front of everyone. All the other kids on the field burst out laughing, including [actor]. Then, [actor] tells you "You are such a loser! Nobody thinks you are as good as you think you are."
Material harms	
Science class	You often get the best grades on the lab reports for science class. The final lab report is worth 40% of your grade, so you have been working very hard to maintain your high average. [actor] is jealous of always having lower grades than you. Just before science class, [actor] breaks into your locker, steals your report and destroys it. You do not have the chance to re-do your report before it is due.
Race competition	You and [actor] are both participating in an annual race competition at your school. The rules of the competition include that students must wear running shoes to compete. The day of the final race you will be competing against [actor] for first place. You think you have a good chance of winning. A few minutes before the race, [actor] breaks into your locker, steals your running shoes and destroys them. You do not have the chance to replace your shoes before the race.

Note. Following a counterbalanced order, the actors would alternate in order between "a good friend" and "a kid you do not know".

After reading each vignette, we presented participations with a manipulation check question to make sure they understood who had committed the harm. Specifically, we asked youths "In the previous scenario, was the person who hurt you a good friend or a kid you don't know?" Participants could not proceed until they correctly identified their relationship to the perpetrator; when they failed the manipulation check question, they were prompted to re-read the vignette and try again. Participants then responded to each vignette by reporting their evaluations of the harm (3 items), their emotional responses (3 items), their attributions about the person's behavior (16 items), their descriptive expectations in response to the harm (10 items), their

prescriptive evaluations about different responses to address the harm (9 items), and their goals in this situation (13 items). The specific items that participants rated are presented in Table 2. Average scores for each vignette were computed across the respective items for each subscale for attributions, descriptive expectations, prescriptive evaluations, and goals. Internal reliabilities were calculated for attributions, descriptive expectations, prescriptive evaluations, and goals within each vignette presented to participants (i.e., psychological-friend; psychological-peer; material-friend; material-peer). Internal reliabilities ranged from .72 to .91, with the median coefficient alpha being .81.

Evaluations of the Harm

After each vignette, we presented participants with 6-point scales ranging from (1) *not at all* to (6) *very much* to evaluate: "How bad are this person's actions?" "How serious are the consequences of this person's actions for you?" and "How often does this type of harm happen at your school?" This latter question allowed us to confirm the types of harms that participants deemed to be most typical/common in their schools. We did not compute internal reliabilities for their evaluations of the harm because each was measured using a single item.

Emotional Responses

Then, participants reported how sad, hurt and angry they would be if this happened to them (e.g., "How sad would you be if this happened to you?") on a 6-point scale ranging from (1) *not at all* to (6) *very much*. Internal reliabilities were not computed for emotions because each emotion was measured using a single item.

Attributions

To assess participants' interpretations of the actor's behavior (i.e., their attributions about the actor's intent; Crick & Dodge, 1994), we asked them: "Why do you think this person acted

the way they did?" We presented participants with items portraying *benign* interpretations wherein the actor's behavior was interpreted as without the intent to harm and as a resulting from an unstable cause (e.g., "This person did not realize it would hurt me" and "This person is going through a hard time," respectively; Dodge, 1980; McDonald, 2008; Nasby et al., 1979). Conversely, *hostile* interpretations implied attributions of negative or malevolent intent (e.g., "This person enjoys hurting others"). Participants rated each item on 6-point Likert scales ranging from (1) *not at all likely* to (6) *very likely*. Internal reliabilities for benign attributions ranged from .76 to .86, and for hostile attributions ranged from .79 to .89.

Descriptive Expectations

Following the presentation of each vignette, we also asked participants to report their descriptive expectations about what is likely to happen in their school in a situation like the one we presented (Posada & Wainryb, 2008; Rakoczy & Schmidt, 2013; Roberts et al., 2016). Specifically, we asked participants: "What would usually happen in your school if someone behaved like this person did?" Using 6-point Likert scales ranging from (1) *definitely not* to (6) *definitely yes*, participants assessed the likelihood of responses typically conceived as restorative or punitive, as well as a no-response alternative. Restorative responses emphasized dialogue, repairing harms, fostering respectful relationships, and promoting reflection and accountability (e.g., "This person would listen and try to understand how the harm impacted you"; Drewery, 2016; Macready, 2009; Morrison et al., 2005). In contrast, punitive responses involved the imposition of negative consequences on the actor (e.g., "This person would be excluded from the group for what they did"; Morrison et al., 2005; Morrison & Vaandering, 2012; Zehr, 2002). Internal reliabilities for restorative responses ranged from .80 to .89, for punitive responses

ranged from .72 to .78. As noted above, the no-response alternative was a single-item measure for each vignette thus we did not compute internal reliabilities for this question.

Prescriptive Evaluations

Using 6-point Likert scales ranging from (1) *not at all good* to (6) *very good*, participants also reported their prescriptive evaluations about the desirability of restorative and punitive responses to address the harms (Posada & Wainryb, 2008; Rakoczy & Schmidt, 2013; Roberts et al., 2016). Specifically, to assess youths' prescriptive evaluations of different responses to harm, we asked: "There are a number of ways that this situation could be handled. Do you think that each of the following is a good or not such a good way to handle this situation?" Internal reliabilities for restorative responses ranged from .77 to .81, and for punitive responses ranged from .74 to .83.

Goals

To examine the goals participants expected they would pursue in response to each particular harm (Crick & Dodge, 1994; McDonald & Asher, 2018), we asked them: "In thinking about how you would respond, what would your goals be in this situation?" Youths rated numerous goals using 6-point Likert scales ranging from (1) *not at all likely* to (6) *very likely*. The subscales for goals were developed based on a combination of exploratory factor analyses and previous research (e.g., Chung & Asher, 1996; Marshall et al., 2022; McDonald & Asher, 2018). Specifically, learning goals involved seeking to promote the actor's understanding of the impacts of the harm (e.g., "I would be trying to make sure this person understands how bad I felt"). Relationship-oriented goals were concerned with maintaining or repairing the relationship with the actor (e.g., "I would be trying to make it easier to spend time with this person in the future"). Revenge goals focused on desires to retaliate in the face of harms (e.g., "I would be

trying to get back at this person"). Justice goals were concerned with an emphasis on deservingness, fairness, and accountability (e.g., "I would be trying to seek justice"). Internal reliabilities for learning goals ranged from .85 to .87, relationship-oriented goals ranged from .84 to .91, revenge goals ranged from .75 to .82, and justice goals ranged from .72 to .86.

Table 2

Subscales and Item Wording for Attributions, Descriptive and Prescriptive Judgments, and Goals

Attributions	
Benign	This person is dealing with difficult life circumstances
	This person is going through a hard time
	This person could not control their actions
	This person was having a bad day
	This person did not do it on purpose
	This person made a mistake
	This person acted without thinking
	This person did not realize it would hurt me
	This person did not mean to do it
Hostile	This person is not very nice
	This person enjoys hurting others
	This person only cares about themselves
	This person was trying to hurt me
	This person does not care about me or my feelings
	This person does not like me
	This person does not respect me
Descriptive Expectations of Responses	
Restorative responses	This person would express remorse and apologize for what they did
	This person would listen and try to understand how the harm impacted you
	This person would explain to you why they did it
	This person would commit to never doing it again and make a plan to avoid it
	This person would compensate you for the harm
Punitive responses	This person would be punished
	This person would get scolded
	This person would be shamed for what they did
	This person would be excluded from the group for what they did

No response	Nothing would happen
Prescriptive Evaluations of Responses	
Restorative responses	This person expresses remorse and apologizes for what they did
	This person listens and tries to understand how the harm impacted you
	This person explains to you why they did it
	This person commits to never doing it again and makes a plan to avoid it
	This person compensates you for the harm
Punitive responses	This person is punished
	This person gets scolded
	This person is shamed for what they did
	This person is excluded from the group for what they did
Goals	
Learning	I would be trying to make sure this person understands how bad I felt
	I would be trying to help this person recognize that what they did was wrong
	I would be trying to make sure this person understands the importance of not doing this again
Relationship-oriented	I would be trying to make up with this person
	I would be trying to make it easier to spend time with this person in the future
	I would be trying to get along with this person
Revenge	I would be trying to hurt this person like they hurt me
	I would be trying to get back at this person
	I would be trying to get this person out of the group
Justice	I would be trying to seek justice
	I would be trying to hold this person accountable for their actions
	I would be trying to make sure that the outcome is fair
	I would be trying to ensure that this person gets what they deserve

Results

Statistical significance for quantitative analyses was assessed using two-tailed tests at $p < .05$. Effect size is reported as partial eta-squared (η_p^2). We did not include gender in our analyses to avoid excluding any gender non-confirming participants and given our primary interest in the within subject effects. Nonetheless, in the Supplementary Analyses section, we report

exploratory unique and interactive associations with age and gender.

Evaluations of the Harms

First, we examined youths' evaluations of how bad, serious, and how often the harms were. To this end, we conducted three 2 × 2 ANOVAs with two repeated-measures factors: relationship context (good friend, unknown peer) and type of harm (psychological, material). The outcome variables were youths' ratings for each of the three evaluations of the harm, which each ranged from (1) *not at all* to (6) *very much*. The findings are presented in Table 3.

Bad

For ratings of how bad, the analyses revealed there were significant main effects for relationship context, F (1, 138) = 11.22, p = .001, η_p^2 = .08, and type of harm, F (1, 138) = 74.71, p < .001, η_p^2 = .35. The interaction effect was non-significant, F (1, 138) = 1.84, p = .177, η_p^2 = .01. Specifically, youths evaluated harms by a good friend as more bad than harms by an unknown peer, and material harms as more bad than psychological harms.

Serious

For ratings of the severity of the consequences of the harm, the analyses revealed there was a significant main effect of type of harm, F (1, 139) = 132.77, p < .001, η_p^2 = .49, no significant main effect for relationship context, F (1, 139) = 1.45, p = .231, η_p^2 = .01, and a significant interaction effect, F (1, 139) = 6.71, p = .011, η_p^2 = .05. Overall, youths evaluated the consequences of material harms as more serious than those of psychological harms; for the latter type only, harms by good friends were deemed to have more serious consequences than by unknown peers.

Often

For ratings of how often, the analyses revealed there were significant main effects of relationship context, F (1, 131) = 5.32, p = .023, η_p^2 = .04, and type of harm, F (1, 131) = 40.96, p < .001, η_p^2 = .24. The interaction effect was non-significant, F (1, 131) = 0.29, p = .588, η_p^2 < .01. In particular, youths judged harms by an unknown peer as occurring more often than those by a good friend, and psychological harms as occurring more often than material harms.

Emotional Responses

To examine youths' emotional responses across relationship context and type of harm, we conducted three 2 × 2 ANOVAs with two repeated-measures factors: relationship context (good friend, unknown peer) and type of harm (psychological, material). The outcome variables were the ratings for their reported feeling of sadness, hurt and anger, respectively, which ranged from (1) *not at all* to (6) *very much*. The findings are presented in Table 3.

Sadness

The analysis for feelings of sadness revealed significant main effects for relationship context, F (1, 137) = 18.24, p < .001, η_p^2 = .12, and type of harm, F (1, 137) = 15.02, p < .001, η_p^2 = .10, as well as a significant two-way interaction, F (1, 137) = 17.79, p < .001, η_p^2 = .12. Partially in line with our hypotheses, in the case of psychological harms only, youths reported more feelings of sadness when the actor was a good friend than an unknown peer.

Hurt

For feelings of hurt, there were significant main effects for relationship context, F (1, 137) = 22.23, p < .001, η_p^2 = .14, and type of harm, F (1, 137) = 56.21, p < .001, η_p^2 = .29. The interaction effect was non-significant, F (1, 137) = 2.63, p = .107, η_p^2 = .02. Youths reported more hurt feelings when the actor was a good friend than an unknown peer (in line with our hypotheses), as well as more hurt feelings in the case of material harm than psychological harm.

Anger

The analysis for feelings of anger revealed a significant main effect for type of harm, F (1, 138) = 88.28, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .39$, but unexpectedly no significant main effect for relationship context, F (1, 138) = 3.04, $p = .083$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$, nor a significant interaction, F (1, 138) = 2.62, $p = .108$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$. In particular, youths reported more feelings of anger in the case of material harm than psychological harm.

Attributions

To examine youths' attributions of the actor's intent, we conducted two 2 × 2 ANOVAs with two repeated-measures factors: relationship context (good friend, unknown peer) and type of harm (psychological, material). The outcome variables were the ratings for benign and hostile attributions, respectively, which each ranged from (1) *not at all likely* to (6) *very likely*. The findings are presented in Table 3.

Benign

The analysis for benign attributions revealed significant main effects for relationship context, F (1, 139) = 26.77, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .16$, and type of harm, F (1, 139) = 93.47, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .40$, as well as a two-way interaction between relationship context and type of harm, F (1, 139) = 5.21, $p = .024$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$. In particular, youths made more benign attributions for good friends than unknown peers for both types of harm (in line with H1), but the relationship difference was of greater magnitude in the context of psychological harm.

Hostile

For hostile attributions, there were significant main effects for relationship context, F (1, 139) = 70.27, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .34$, and type of harm, F (1, 139) = 114.06, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .45$, as well as a significant interaction effect, F (1, 139) = 6.50, $p = .012$, $\eta_p^2 = .05$. Specifically, youths

made more hostile attributions for unknown peers than good friends for both types of harms (in line with H1), but the relationship difference was more pronounced in the context of psychological harm (this interaction effect was evident particularly for boys; see Supplementary Materials).

Descriptive Expectations of Responses

To examine youths' descriptive expectations of responses to harm across relationship context and type of harm, we conducted three 2 × 2 ANOVAs with two repeated-measures factors: relationship context (good friend, unknown peer) and type of harm (psychological, material). The outcome variables were youths' ratings for descriptive expectations of restorative responses, punitive responses, and no-response, respectively, which each ranged from (1) *definitely not* to (6) *definitely yes*. The findings are presented in Table 3.

Restorative Responses

The analysis for restorative responses revealed significant main effects for relationship context, F (1, 139) = 63.79, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .32$, and type of harm, F (1, 139) = 63.19, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .31$, as well as a significant two-way interaction effect, F (1, 139) = 6.18, $p = .014$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$. Specifically, youths rated restorative responses as more likely to occur when the actor was a good friend than an unknown peer for both material and psychological harms, but the relationship difference was bigger in the context of psychological harms.

Punitive Responses

For punitive responses, there was a significant main effect for type of harm, F (1, 139) = 176.42, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .56$, but no significant main effect for relationship context, F (1, 139) = 1.10, $p = .296$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$, nor a significant interaction, F (1, 139) = 0.12, $p = .727$, $\eta_p^2 < .01$.

Punitive responses were rated as more likely to occur in the case of material harms than psychological harms.

No Response

For the no response option, there was a significant main effect for type of harm, F (1, 117) = 51.54, p < .001, $\eta_p{}^2$ = .31, but no significant main effect for relationship context, F (1, 117) = 1.21, p = .274, $\eta_p{}^2$ = .01, nor a significant interaction, F (1, 117) = 0.18, p = .675, $\eta_p{}^2$ < .01. In particular, youths reported that it was more likely that nothing would happen in response to psychological harms than material harms.

Prescriptive Evaluations of Responses

To examine youths' prescriptive evaluations of responses to harm across relationship context and type of harm, we conducted two 2 × 2 ANOVAs with two repeated-measures factors: relationship context (good friend, unknown peer) and type of harm (psychological, material). The outcome variables were youths' ratings for prescriptive evaluations of restorative and punitive responses, respectively, which each ranged from (1) *not at all good* to (6) *very good*. The findings are presented in Table 3.

Restorative Responses

The analysis for restorative responses revealed a significant main effect for relationship context, F (1, 139) = 14.47, p < .001, $\eta_p{}^2$ = .09, but no significant main effect for type of harm, F (1, 139) = 0.39, p = .536, $\eta_p{}^2$ < .01, nor a significant interaction, F (1, 139) = 0.03, p = .853, $\eta_p{}^2$ < .01. In line with H1, restorative responses were endorsed more to address harms by a good friend than an unknown peer.

Punitive Responses

For punitive responses, there were significant main effects of relationship context, F (1, 139) = 25.78, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .16$, and type of harm, F (1, 139) = 144.72, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .51$. The interaction effect was non-significant, F (1, 139) = 3.17, $p = .077$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$. Punitive responses were endorsed more strongly to address harms by an unknown peer than a good friend (in line with H1), and to address material harms than psychological harms.

Goals

To examine youths' goals, we conducted four 2 × 2 ANOVAs with two repeated-measures factors: relationship context (good friend, unknown peer) and type of harm (psychological, material). The outcome variables were youths' ratings for learning, relationship-oriented, revenge, and justice goals, respectively, which each ranged from (1) *not at all likely* to (6) *very likely*. The findings are presented in Table 3.

Learning

The analysis for learning goals revealed significant main effects of relationship context, F (1, 139) = 35.96, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .21$, and type of harm, F (1, 139) = 29.47, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .18$. The interaction effect was non-significant, F (1, 139) = 2.05, $p = .154$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$. Learning goals were endorsed more for harms by a good friend than an unknown peer, and in the case of material harms more than psychological harm.

Relationship-Oriented

For relationship-oriented goals, there were significant main effects of relationship context, F (1, 139) = 63.72, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .31$, and type of harm, F (1, 139) = 31.49, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .19$, as well as a significant two-way interaction effect, F (1, 139) = 4.59, $p = .034$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$. Specifically, youths endorsed more relationship-oriented goals for harms by a good friend than an unknown peer both in the case of psychological and material harms (in line with H1), but the

Table 3

Youths' Ratings Across Relationship Context and Type of Harm

	Good Friend (F)		Unknown Peer (U)		
	Psychological (P)	Material (M)	Psychological (P)	Material (M)	
Harm Evaluations	*M (SE)*	*M (SE)*	*M (SE)*	*M (SE)*	Significant effects
Bad	4.94 (.10)	5.66 (.06)	4.63 (.12)	5.53 (.08)	F > U; M > P
Serious	4.23 (.13)	5.30 (.10)	3.91 (.14)	5.42 (.09)	M > P; F > U only for P
Often	2.36 (.11)	1.79 (.10)	2.58 (.14)	1.92 (.12)	U > F; P > M
Emotions					
Sadness	4.56 (.15)	4.65 (.15)	3.79 (.15)	4.69 (.14)	M > P; F > U only for P
Hurt	4.66 (.14)	5.44 (.09)	4.14 (.15)	5.16 (.11)	F > U; M > P
Anger	4.50 (.14)	5.55 (.08)	4.26 (.14)	5.53 (.08)	M > P
Attributions					
Benign	3.89 (.09)	3.19 (.09)	3.37 (.08)	2.92 (.08)	P > M; F > U especially for P
Hostile	3.47 (.10)	4.36 (.09)	4.28 (.10)	4.85 (.08)	M > P; U > F especially for P
Descriptive Expectations					

Restorative	3.30 (.12)	3.76 (.12)	2.56 (.11)	3.37 (.11)	M > P; F > U especially for P
Punitive	3.28 (.10)	4.38 (.11)	3.37 (.11)	4.43 (.11)	M > P
No response	2.89 (.16)	2.03 (.14)	3.05 (.17)	2.09 (.15)	P > M
Prescriptive Evaluations					
Restorative	4.33 (.09)	4.37 (.10)	4.10 (.11)	4.16 (.11)	F > U
Punitive	3.06 (.10)	4.10 (.12)	3.46 (.12)	4.30 (.11)	U > F; M > P
Goals					
Learning	4.23 (.13)	4.61 (.12)	3.72 (.14)	4.30 (.13)	F > U; M > P
Relationship-oriented	3.47 (.14)	2.81 (.13)	2.39 (.12)	2.05 (.11)	P > M; F > U especially for P
Revenge	2.31 (.11)	2.72 (.12)	2.41 (.10)	2.76 (.13)	M > P
Justice	3.46 (.11)	4.56 (.10)	3.71 (.13)	4.71 (.11)	U > F; M > P

Note. Youths' ratings for each variable ranged from 1 to 6. > denotes significantly greater than, < denotes significantly less than ($p < .05$). Semicolons separate different comparison statements (e.g., for learning goals, "F > U; M > P" indicates that learning goals were endorsed more than for good friends than unknown peers and for material harms than psychological harms).

difference was more pronounced in the context of psychological harms.

Revenge

The analysis for revenge goals revealed a significant main effect for type of harm, F (1, 139) = 19.45, $p < .001$, $\eta_p{}^2 = .12$, but unexpectedly no significant main effect for relationship context, F (1, 139) = 1.41, $p = .237$, $\eta_p{}^2 = .01$, nor an interaction effect, F (1, 139) = 0.24, $p = .628$, $\eta_p{}^2 < .01$. Revenge goals were endorsed more in the case of material harms than psychological harms.

Justice

The analysis for justice goals revealed significant main effects of relationship context, F (1, 139) = 10.12, $p = .002$, $\eta_p{}^2 = .07$, and type of harm, F (1, 139) = 132.23, $p < .001$, $\eta_p{}^2 = .49$. The interaction effect was non-significant, F (1, 139) = 0.54, $p = .464$, $\eta_p{}^2 < .01$. Specifically, justice goals were endorsed more for harms by an unknown peer than a good friend, and in the case of material harms more than psychological harms.

Summary of Findings

As compared to harms by unknown peers, youths evaluated harms by good friends as more bad overall and as having more serious consequences in the context of psychological harms. Furthermore, they reported more overall feelings of hurt, and more feelings of sadness in the case of psychological transgressions, for harms by good friends. In contrast, youths judged harms by unknown peers as occurring more often, they made more hostile attributions about their behavior, and they endorsed more punitive responses and justice goals following transgressions by unknown peers.

Youths evaluated psychological harms as occurring more often and had higher expectations that nothing would happen in response. In comparison, youths evaluated material

harms as more bad and as resulting in more serious consequences. Youths also reported they would feel more hurt and angry in response to material harms, and made more hostile attributions in response. In addition, youths judged punitive responses to material harms as more typical and desirable than for psychological harms. Finally, youths also endorsed more learning, revenge and justice goals in the face of material harms.

Discussion

This study examined how youths' emotional, cognitive, and behavioral judgments in the aftermath of unambiguous situations of peer harm varied across relationship contexts and types of harm. In particular, we explored adolescents' emotional responses, attributions, descriptive expectations, prescriptive evaluations, and their goals in response to psychological and material harms by a good friend or an unknown peer. Taken together, our findings document socio-contextual variations in how youths understand and evaluate unambiguous peer transgressions. As we discuss our findings, we have included excerpts from participants' responses to open-ended questions bearing on their viewpoints on ideal responses to harm in each vignette. These responses were not systematically analyzed for this thesis but are included here to incorporate youths' voices into our interpretations of quantitative patterns and to further illuminate their perspectives.

Variations across Types of Harms

In comparison to psychological harms, youths evaluated material harms as more bad and they also judged that the consequences of these transgressions would be more serious. In addition, adolescents expected and endorsed more punitive responses to address material harms, as well as reported endorsing more revenge goals in response. For instance, when reasoning about material transgressions, youths' responses dwelled on the loss they had endured as a result

of the harm, which seemed to encourage a more punitive stance (e.g., "Expulsion for breaking into my locker and damaging my property which cost me the chance to compete"; "In this situation, I would want to see the kid punished severely, no matter how bad their grades are, there is no justification behind destroying my hard work"). These findings are in line with research with adults and undergraduate students wherein participants endorse more punitive and retributive responses to address more severe transgressions (e.g., Darley et al., 2000; Vidmar, 2000). Interestingly, although participants *expected* more restorative responses following material transgressions, there were no significant differences in their *endorsement* of restoration across types of harm. Conversely, in comparison to material harms, youths reported that psychological harms were more frequent in their schools, and they were also more likely to expect that nothing would happen in response. Hazler and colleagues (2001) found a similar pattern when exploring the perceptions of pre-service teachers. Previous studies have also documented that psychological harms are more frequent than other types of peer harm (e.g., Geiger & Fischer, 2006; Saint-Martin et al., 2022), and that typicality could have discouraged youths to seek out punishments, as explained by a participant in our study:

> I'd probably just shake it off, work on making the team, and talk to them about it later. They're probably just competitive. We have this a lot at my school, especially with some of our competitive teams, and freaking out, and getting them in trouble really just isn't the way to go.

Youths' emotional responses were also situation-specific; they reported feeling more hurt, sad, and angry in the face of material transgressions. In this way, the transgressions they evaluated more negatively and as having more serious consequences also resulted in stronger emotional responses. Interestingly, feelings of anger only differed significantly based on the type

of harm (not across relationship contexts). This pattern may help to explain why youths endorsed more punitive responses and revenge goals to address material transgressions; previous research has found that feelings of anger elicit stronger desires for punishments and revenge (e.g., McDonald & Asher, 2018; Okimoto et al., 2009; Recchia et al., 2020; Vidmar, 2000). Similarly, youths also made more hostile and fewer benign attributions following material transgressions as compared to psychological transgressions. The previous findings are also in line with previous research documenting that individuals endorse more punitive and retributive strategies when they attribute more hostility to the actor (Crick & Dodge, 1994; McDonald & Asher, 2018; Nasby et al., 1979; Orobio de Castro et al., 2003; Vidmar, 2000). In contrast, youths in our study were more inclined to consider circumstantial reasons to explain the actor's behavior when the transgression was psychological (e.g., "It's clear that he doesn't understand the concepts, or needs a little help, and likely is self-conscious about his math ability, so it's better to just help him get better").

Finally, we also explored other goals in the aftermath of harm, such as learning and justice goals. Regarding learning goals, we found that youths endorsed these more in response to material transgressions. This suggests that they were more concerned with promoting learning and reflection in response to the harms they evaluated more negatively. Youths also reported more justice goals to address material harms. Yet, questions remain about how youths interpreted items measuring justice goals. For example, when they endorsed "seek[ing] justice" and "mak[ing] sure the outcome is fair", how did they conceptualize justice and fairness? Were youths referring to retributive notions wherein justice is obtained when the response is proportional to the moral magnitude of the harm (see Ball et al., 2021)? Alternatively, were their justice concerns about repairing harm, being accountable for your own behavior, and promoting

respectful relationships amongst all involved (Drewery, 2016; Zehr, 2002)? Given youths' higher endorsement of revenge and punishments in the face of material transgressions, it is likely that their inclination for seeking justice, in this case, was more aligned with the former orientation. Nonetheless, future qualitative studies could further investigate youths' perspectives on justice, fairness and accountability in the aftermath of peer harm.

Variations across Relationship Context

Overall, youths judged harms by good friends as more bad than harms by unknown peers; nevertheless, they still endorsed more restorative responses and relationship-oriented goals to address transgressions by good friends, and more punishments in response to harms by unknown peers (in line with H1). Furthermore, in comparison to unknown peers, youths also expected harms by good friends to occur less often. The previous patterns suggest that although youths see transgressions by friends as more serious violations, the positive bond with good friends may orient them to pursue goals and strategies that will help them maintain and restore the relationship. Indeed, one participant justified their desire to maintain the friendship despite the negative evaluations of the harm by explaining that the relationship was more important: "I wouldn't really care about the race, and the friendship would be more important. However, that is pretty messed up, so I would talk to my friend to figure out what caused them to do it and proceed with fixing the friendship from there." This orientation to endorse more relationship-oriented goals to address harm by good friends was particularly pronounced in the case of psychological transgressions. Thus, it is possible that youths' negative evaluations of material transgressions somewhat mitigated their tendency to seek reconciliation with good friends by calling into question the friendship, as explained by another adolescent: "Stop being friends with them because you're clearly no [sic] good friends if they did that just to get a chance at winning

the race." Indeed, youths' evaluations and reasoning across the relationship contexts were also situation specific at other times. More precisely, youths judged that the consequences of the harm would be more serious when the perpetrator was a good friend only in the case of psychological transgressions. It is possible that youths are most accustomed to witnessing or experiencing psychological transgressions in school but not between good friends, thus violating their expectations of a positive friendship.

Youths' emotional responses somewhat mirrored their evaluations of the harm; partially in line with H1, they reported more feelings of hurt in the face of transgressions by good friends and more feelings of sadness for psychological harms by good friends. In this way, the transgressions they evaluated as more bad also resulted in more hurt feelings (e.g., "Since this is a good friend, it hurts me much more than if it was a random person"). Yet, there were no differences in feelings of anger across relationship contexts. The previous findings regarding youths' emotional responses to harms by good friends are in line with previous research with adolescents (e.g., Recchia et al., 2020). As proposed by MacEvoy and Asher (2012), youths' feelings of sadness and hurt may be related to the significance of the relationship, and thus their desires to maintain the friendship may orient them toward more prosocial and restorative strategies. Indeed, past studies have also found that when individuals report feelings of sadness and hurt, they also endorse more restorative, conciliatory, and relationship-oriented goals and strategies, as was the case for transgressions by good friends (Murphy & Eisenberg, 2002; Okimoto et al., 2009; Recchia et al., 2020). The previous pattern was further explained by a participant in response to a material harm:

> Since this person is a good friend, I would prefer to discuss it with them personally and privately, possibly outside of the school setting. I would try to reason and discuss the

> issue with their actions, and knowing that they are a good person, try to help them overcome whatever caused that sudden attack. I would be personally hurt by this comment, seeing as we know each other very personally, so I would definitely try and maintain our relationship by being honest about how it made me feel and express my concern for whatever could have prompted them to throw away a good friendship.

As reflected in the above open-ended response, youths' attributions of the actors' behaviors may also be particularly important to better understand the patterns observed. In line with previous research (e.g., Peets et al., 2007) and in support of H1, youths made more hostile interpretations of transgressions by unknown peers and more benign interpretations of harms by good friends. Thus, even in the case of unambiguous harm and despite their negative evaluations of transgressions by good friends, youths still made more generous interpretations of their behavior and endorsed more restorative responses and relational goals to address their transgressions (in line with H1). This pattern provides further support for previous research documenting that individuals endorse more conciliatory strategies when they make benign attributions of others' behaviors, while they endorse more punitive and retributive strategies when they attribute more hostility to others (Crick & Dodge, 1994; McDonald & Asher, 2018; Nasby et al., 1979; Orobio de Castro et al., 2003; Peets et al., 2007). Interestingly, even when adolescents evaluated the harm as a violation of the friendship, they were still inclined to consider benign interpretations that accounted for the circumstances that may have prompted the friend to act in this way, for example:

> I would talk to the person and I would potentially rethink being friends with this person. Friends are supposed to support and bring you up, not tear you down first chance they have, so they have a better chance of making the team. I understand people have bad days

that [is] why you would have to talk to the person and understand their side of the story and their reasons.

Regarding other additional goals, youths endorsed more justice goals to address harms by unknown peers. As explained in the section on types of harm, it is possible that youth were following a more retributive orientation to justice given their stronger desires to punish unknown peers. In addition, youths also endorsed more learning goals in response to harms by good friends. These rehabilitative desires are also in line with their reported relational goals following transgressions by good friends; if youths are committed to maintaining the friendship but nevertheless judge harms by good friends more severely, it follows that they would want the good friend to reflect and stop engaging in hurtful behaviors.

Yet, despite the overall patterns described thus far, variability in the data reflected notable individual differences in how forgiving participants were of transgressions by a good friend. Some participants reported that the best way to respond to the harm was to end the friendship (e.g., "unfriend them and never speak to them again after making them redo my paper until they get every answer right and their paper gets a big fat zero"), and others suggested the friend's actions would have a long term impact on the relationship ("I would tell my good friend in private that I found what they said very rude. If my good friend's attitude changes in a positive matter and I believe she will be better, I would continue to hang out with her, but we wouldn't be as close as before"). In contrast, other participants normalized these transgressions within their friendships (e.g., "I would probably snap back because my close friends and I mess with each other in this fashion very often, and there should not be a real punishment for this because between us we know that we are joking with each other"), while others emphasized their desires to maintain the friendship and have an open dialogue with the friend despite their negative

evaluations of the harms (e.g., "Express my feelings because communication is the best way to resolve issues, especially with close people. Because a friendship is a commitment with forgiveness, so it shouldn't get ruined quickly"). In light of these diverging patterns, future studies could explore factors influencing variations in individuals' judgments and behaviors following transgressions by good friends, which could have a long-term impact on the stability and quality of their relationships (Dryburgh et al., 2022).

Limitations and Future Directions

As is typical of most research projects, this study has some limitations that should be noted. Firstly, the methodology relies on hypothetical vignettes to control for socio-contextual variations in situations of peer harm. Although this approach allows us to manipulate the variables of interest, it will be important for future research to complement this study with other methods, such as exploring youths' reasoning using narrative accounts to capture which socio-contextual features are salient to them in their own experiences of peer harm (e.g., Pasupathi et al., 2017). For instance, there may be relationship-specific variations in youths' reasoning depending on their history of victimization within a particular friendship. Indeed, previous research has found that adolescents may be less inclined to repair the relationship when there is growing animosity with a close friend, and violations of the friendship may lead to its transformation into an antipathetic relationship (e.g., Casper & Card., 2010).

To explore the relationship context, we presented participants with harms by good friends and unknown peers. Our goal with this approach was to avoid presenting youths with relationships that could be more easily associated with a history of victimization, antagonism or ambivalence, as could be more typical between frenemies or disliked peers. It is possible that some participants may not find it believable that a good friend would behave as we described;

nevertheless, youth overall made more negative evaluations of harms by good friends and reported more hurt feelings in response. It is also possible that qualifying a friendship as 'good' could have biased participants to be more forgiving and generous in their interpretations of the harms, such that their judgments were informed by the 'good' attribute rather than the relationship context per se. Nevertheless, the characterization of someone as a "good" or even "best" friend is aligned with common parlance, as individuals often label some of their friendships as such. Thus, given the longevity and other positive characteristics typical of such friendships (Erdley & Day, 2017), studying what supports youths in maintaining and repairing said bonds could be productive in informing how to foster more respectful relationships between nonfriend peers and more relational ways to address harm in schools.

As previously alluded, sometimes adolescents discussed the long-term implications of the harms in their open-ended responses, such as slowly ending the friendship or taking some distance from the actor. Other times adolescents described a change in their behavioral strategy to address the harm: "In the moment, I would probably take it as a joke. However, the more I think about it, this person is not a real friend. I would probably slowly drift away from them if they meant what they said." However, this study was not designed to capture changes in youths' judgments over time, and thus this could be an avenue for future studies. In addition, the pre-determined responses analyzed in this thesis may not include all the possibilities youths expected and endorsed to address the harms. For instance, participants' responses to our open-ended questions included other strategies and goals, such as: "Help them with their grades," "This kid deserves a beating," and " To try and fit in […] Make a comeback if they are teasing you." Similarly, we also did not include the option to not respond as a way to address the harm in the

pre-determined prescriptive responses presented to participants, and it is possible some youths would have positively evaluated this behavioral strategy.

A further limitation of this thesis was the lack of specificity in who was carrying out the descriptive and prescriptive responses that emphasized punitive actions towards the perpetrator (e.g., "this person is shamed for what they did"). While this allowed us to broadly explore youths' reasoning about different responses to peer harm, it is possible that youths' judgments about different responses to address the harms would vary based on who is involved in said process. Take, for instance, this distinction made by an adolescent in our study regarding transgressions within friendships:

> Because it is a good friend, I would rather deal with it between the two of us instead of with teachers or authorities. A teacher intervening while the mean word [is] being spoken would be helpful, but after that it would be better for just the friends to talk about it. This way each friend could freely express their feelings and why they acted the way they did. A solution and apologies can be made, and the situation can become a part of the past.

Given that youths naturally highlighted these considerations in their open-ended responses, future research should examine youths' descriptive and prescriptive ratings of different solutions as carried out by targets themselves, peers, teachers, other educational staff, parents, or other community members.

For this study, we also developed vignettes that did not explicitly describe sociodemographics, such as gender, race, and ethnicity of protagonists. However, it is possible that adolescents' reasoning may also vary across same-gender and other-gender transgressions by good friends and unknown peers (MacEvoy & Asher, 2012). Similarly, racial/ethnic characteristics of the actor may also influence individuals' judgments, such as their descriptive

expectations and prescriptive evaluations of different responses to address peer harm in schools. For instance, students recognize biased practices in their schools that result in more frequent and harsher punishments against ethnic/racial minoritized students (e.g., Bell, 2020; Ruck & Wortley, 2002). Additionally, this thesis focused on the cognitive, affective and behavioral judgments of adolescents in a fairly narrow age range (i.e., 14 to 17 years). Nonetheless, there could be age-related differences in students' expectations and evaluations of punitive and restorative responses (see Recchia et al., 2022).

There are also some limitations regarding our exploration of participants' goals in the aftermath of harm. For instance, there are additional goals that may drive individuals' endorsements of punishment, such as re-establishing social consensus and deterring the actor from hurting them again (Darley et al., 2000; Barreiro, 2012; Marshall et al., 2022; Vidmar, 2000). Thus, a useful direction for future research is to investigate the numerous goals that may underlie youths' endorsement of restorative and punitive responses in different social contexts. In addition, we did not examine any goals that captured the inclination to prioritize victims' emotional needs in the aftermath of peer harm. Future research can also explore how victim-oriented concerns vary across socio-contextual features of harms. In line with this, we only explored youths' sociomoral judgments from their perspectives as victims of peer harm, and there could be important variations in their reasoning when considering harms from the perspectives of the perpetrator or a bystander (e.g., Wainryb et al., 2005).

Implications and Conclusions

In summary, this study underscored how variations across relationship contexts and types of harm distinctly colored and shaped youths' sociomoral judgments. In this way, the current thesis builds on existing scholarship in social-information processing by exploring youths'

judgments in response to hypothetical unambiguous harms. Overall, we found that youths were more generous in their interpretations of good friends' behaviors; this study extends past work by documenting this pattern in the context of unambiguous transgressions, where actors had an instrumental reason to engage in the harmful action and where the negative consequences of the act were fairly salient. Thus, despite their negative evaluation of harms by good friends, youth made more benign attributions and endorsed more restorative responses and relational goals. These findings suggest that the relationship context may mitigate the influence that negative evaluations of harm have on individuals' desires for punishments and revenge (see Vidmar, 2000). Indeed, this more forgiving orientation towards harms by good friends was evident even in the context of material transgressions, which were seen as more bad and having more serious consequences than psychological harms. Therefore, it seems that youths are capable of endorsing more restorative, relational and conciliatory strategies even when they are deeply hurt by others' actions. The patterns observed with good friends can thus inform processes to address conflicts between students in more peaceful and restorative ways. For example, one helpful approach, which can take place within restorative conversations, may be to encourage youths to consider the circumstances that may have influenced others' behaviors (e.g., they may be going through a hard time), rather than interpreting their acts as driven solely by the intent to harm them (e.g., they enjoy hurting others).

In line with this, the findings from this study challenge one-size-fits-all approaches to address peer harm in schools and extend the budding psychological literature on restorative practices by highlighting considerations that are particularly important to youths. In addition to informing scholarship on moral development, our results can directly inform efforts to implement nonpunitive strategies to address peer harm in schools in ways that fit adolescents'

needs and use their perspectives as a starting point. For instance, in the face of material harms, youths were less inclined to support goals to maintain the relationship and, in turn, they endorsed more punishments and revenge goals in response. One possible avenue within restorative processes is to sensitively respond to youths' needs in the aftermath of peer harm by making space for students to express their desires for punishment and revenge, which can be validated and even normalized within restorative spaces without the need for these to be acted upon (see Recchia et al., 2022).

Questions remain about youths' overall inclination to attribute hostility and be more punitive towards unknown peers and what this pattern suggests about the peer climate in schools. Why is it that youths had this overall more retributive orientation towards a student they did not know well? One possibility, in line with the literature on moral circles, is that youths could have felt morally obligated to be more forgiving and less retributive towards actors in their own social circle (Chalik & Rhodes, 2022). In this way, students' social circles may work as a barrier to peacemaking with those they are not in relationship with. Youths' retributive and punitive orientation could have also been informed by the preponderance of punitive discipline in Western schools such that they defaulted to assigning blame and seeking consequences proportional to the harms when the actors were unknown peers. Restorative justice models premised on prioritizing respectful and harmonious relationships among all school community may be a promising approach to mitigate this tendency towards retribution and punishment, as they may be well suited to promote empathy, perspective-taking and relationship-building (Drewery, 2016; Reimer, 2019; Schumacher, 2014). In this way, restorative practices could ultimately support children in the need to broaden their moral circles (Chalik & Rhodes, 2022).

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Supplementary Analyses

In this *Supplementary Analyses* section, we report exploratory unique and interactive associations with age and gender. To examine gender effects, we conducted mixed-model ANOVAs with two repeated-measures factors, relationship context (good friend, unknown peer) and type of harm (psychological, material), and gender as a between-subjects factor. The outcome variables were youths' ratings for the variables of interest, which ranged from 1 to 6. In this section, we report only unique and interactive effects involving gender to avoid duplicating the results presented above. Main effects of gender are illustrated in Table 4, two-way significant interactions between gender and type of harm in Table 5, and a significant three-way interaction between gender, type of harm and relationship context in Figure 1. Specifically, there was a significant three-way interaction for hostile attributions (F (1, 137) = 4.06, p = .046, η_p^2 = .03); girls reported more hostile attributions than boys only in the case of psychological transgressions by good friends.

Table 4

Supplementary Analyses for Gender and Age Across all Variables of Interest

	Girls	**Boys**	**Age**
	M (SE)	*M (SE)*	Bivariate Correlations
Harm Evaluations			
Bad	5.21 (.09)	5.16 (.09)	.22**
Serious	4.78 (.11)	4.64 (.12)	.12
Often	2.23 (.13)	2.11 (.13)	.03
Emotions			
Sadness	4.80 (.15)***	3.99 (.16)***	.17*

Hurt	5.14 (.12)***	4.50 (.13)***	.18*
Anger	5.15 (.11)*	4.75 (.12)*	.14
Attributions			
Benign	3.49 (.10)*	3.19 (.10)*	.17*
Hostile	4.26 (.10)	4.21 (.10)	.15
Descriptive Expectations			
Restorative	3.30 (.13)	3.17 (.14)	.05
Punitive	3.80 (.12)	3.90 (.12)	-.00
No response	2.74 (.16)*	2.25 (.18)*	.04
Prescriptive Evaluations			
Restorative	4.38 (.12)	4.08 (.12)	.25**
Punitive	3.66 (.13)	3.78 (.14)	-.04
Goals			
Learning	4.49 (.16)**	3.89 (.16)**	.18*
Relationship-oriented	2.71 (.13)	2.66 (.14)	.07
Revenge	2.43 (.13)	2.69 (.14)	.12
Justice	4.15 (.13)	4.05 (.14)	.06

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

To examine age effects, we conducted 2 × 2 ANOVAs with two repeated-measures factors, relationship context (good friend, unknown peer) and type of harm (psychological, material), and age centered as a covariate (see Thomas et al., 2009). The outcome variables were youths' ratings for the variables of interest, which ranged from 1 to 6. In this section, we only report on significant main effects of the covariate and interactions between age and the repeated-

Table 5

Significant Interactions Between Gender and Type of Harm

	Girls		Boys		
	Psychological	Material	Psychological	Material	
	M (SE)	*M (SE)*	*M (SE)*	*M (SE)*	F-Tests
Emotional Responses					
Hurt	4.82 (.18)	5.46 (.12)	3.90 (.19)	5.10 (.13)	F (1, 135) = 5.54, p = .020, $\eta_p{}^2$ = .04
Anger	4.71 (.17)	5.60 (.09)	4.03 (.18)	5.46 (.10)	F (1, 136) = 4.76, p = .031, $\eta_p{}^2$ = .03
Descriptive Expectations					
Punitive	3.36 (.12)	4.25 (.13)	3.26 (.13)	4.55 (.14)	F (1, 137) = 5.98, p = .016, $\eta_p{}^2$ = .04
Prescriptive Evaluations					
Restorative	4.28 (.12)	4.49 (.13)	4.14 (.13)	4.02 (.14)	F (1, 137) = 4.65, p = .033, $\eta_p{}^2$ = .03

Note. Youths' ratings for each variable ranged from 1 to 6. Only significant interactions between gender and type of harm are displayed. There were no significant interactions between gender and relationship context.

measures factors. To explore the significant main effects of age, we conducted bivariate correlations between age and the variables of interest (see Table 4). A number of significant two-way and three-way interactions also emerged. First, the analysis for feelings of sadness revealed a significant two-way interaction between type of harm and age, F (1, 136) = 4.50, p = .036, η_p^2 = .03. Bivariate correlations with age indicated that only for psychological harms feelings of sadness were significantly positively correlated with age (r = .22, p < .05). Regarding descriptive expectations for punitive responses, we found a significant two-way interaction between relationship context and age, F (1, 138) = 5.16, p = .025, η_p^2 = .04. Although none of the bivariate correlations with age was significant, the pattern of associations indicated that with age participants had lower expectations of punishments in response to harms by unknown peers (r = -.08, *ns*), whereas they seemed to expect more punishments for harms by good friends (r = .07, *ns*). Regarding descriptive expectations for the no response option, we found a significant two-way interaction between type of harm and age, F (1, 116) = 7.20, p = .008, η_p^2 = .06, and a significant three-way interaction between relationship context, type of harm, and age, F (1, 116) = 5.21, p = .024, η_p^2 = .04. Bivariate correlations indicated that older participants were significantly less likely to report nothing would happen only in the case material harms by unknown peers (r = -.18, p < .05). Regarding prescriptive evaluations for punitive responses, we found a significant two-way interaction between relationship context and age, F (1, 138) = 5.31, p = .023, η_p^2 = .04. Bivariate correlations with age were not significant but suggested that age was not linked to youths' evaluations of the desirability of punitive responses for good friends (r = .02, *ns*) but a slight negative association with age was evident for unknown peers (r = -.09, *ns*).

Figure 1

Hostile Attributions Interaction Between Relationship Context, Type of Harm and Gender