INTERGENERATIONAL LINKAGES: HOW EXPERIENCES WITH SIBLINGS RELATE TO THE PARENTING OF SIBLINGS

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──────────── ABSTRACT ────────────

The purpose of this research was to examine whether, and in which ways, parents' early experiences with siblings relate to the quality of sibling relationships achieved by their offspring. Naturalistic observations of children interacting with their siblings, and interviews with parents provided a data base for estimating the quality of sibling relations in two generations of 56 families. Results indicated that mothers who reported negative sibling histories were most likely to have children who interacted more positively with one another. This pattern was best explained by the maternal selection of child-rearing strategies, such as less differential treatment of siblings, reduced use of authoritarian strategies and greater reliance on redirection techniques. Greater concerns among mothers reporting negative sibling histories about how conflict in the home may adversely affect sibling relationships was also associated with more positive interactions between offspring. Knowledge of parents' particular goals or expectations for the sibling relationship, or characteristics of the children themselves accounted for very little variance in sibling relationship quality among offspring. Results are discussed in reference to current theoretical models of intergenerational linkages.

KEY WORDS ● intergenerational linkages ● sibling histories ● sibling relationships

There is increasing evidence that individuals' experiences within their families-of-origin influence later behavior and relationships. In particular, childhood experiences with parents may affect the quality of the relationships that individuals later develop with their children (Caspi & Elder, 1988; Main et al., 1985; Simons et al., 1991). Although differing on the

specific mechanisms advanced to explain such associations, theories as diverse as psychodynamic (Winnicott, 1984), attachment (Bowlby, 1988; Main et al., 1985) and family systems (Minuchin, 1974) agree that early parent–child experiences influence the character of later parenting behaviors. However, few theories have considered how early experiences with siblings may also play a role in the establishment of parenting styles and behaviors. This is true despite growing evidence for the importance of sibling relationships across the life-span. This study is a first attempt to examine the intergenerational linkages between parents' perceptions of their childhood experiences with siblings and their parenting of siblings.

There are several reasons to expect childhood experiences with siblings to have bearing on later parenting behaviors. First, sibling relationships are salient relationships for individuals. Close to 90 percent of all Americans grow up with at least one sibling (Cicirelli, 1982), and by the age of one year, children spend as much time with their siblings as they do with their mothers (Cicirelli, 1982; Dunn, 1983). In addition to availability, the unique quality of interactions between siblings gives this relationship special status in the family (Minuchin, 1974). Siblings develop intimate knowledge about each other, and even preschool-aged siblings demonstrate levels of social understanding in these interactions that exceed expectations based on traditional developmental theories (Dunn & Kendrick, 1982). Furthermore, older siblings have been shown to serve at times as attachment figures (Stewart, 1983), as well as caregivers (Weisner & Gallimore, 1977), tutors (Cicirelli, 1976) and playmates (Furman & Buhrmester, 1985; Kramer & Gottman, 1992).

Children often rank siblings as important sources of reliable alliance, affection, companionship and intimacy (Furman & Buhrmester, 1985). Barnes & Austin (1991) demonstrated that children's perceptions of sibling warmth were more direct predictors of their self-esteem than perceptions of maternal warmth and responsiveness. Although conflict is also a predominant feature of sibling interactions, Katz et al. (1992) reviewed research suggesting that these conflicting encounters may actually foster social development as they provide children with a relatively safe context for practising skills in conflict, conflict management and the regulation of negative affect. Finally, the importance of sibling relationships continues throughout the life-span. Bank & Kahn (1982) propose that the emotional connections developed among siblings in childhood persist over time and have an important influence on later adaptation. Older adults are likely to report that they now feel closer to their siblings than they did in childhood and that they consider at least one of their siblings to be a close friend (Ross & Milgram, 1982) or a source of support (Lopata, 1973). These features suggest that individuals learn much about closeness and conflict through their interactions with siblings. As a result, early experiences with siblings may influence individuals' understanding of relationships (e.g. their internal working models of relationships; Main et al., 1985), as well as the social competences they demonstrate with others.

Clearly, the quality of sibling relationships differs across families, and

variations in quality are likely to have different implications for subsequent relationships. In particular, individuals' conceptions of what sibling relationships are like, or could be like, may be shaped by the quality of their early experiences with siblings. For example, individuals who consider themselves to have had positive experiences with siblings in childhood may believe that sibling relationships are important for children and should be nurtured. Accordingly, these parents may select child-rearing strategies that they believe will encourage closeness between their children. Conversely, individuals who recall more negative experiences with siblings may devalue the importance of sibling relationships and do little to encourage positive relationships between their own children. This study evaluates these hypotheses by examining associations between parents' reports of their childhood sibling relationships, their current parenting goals and behaviors, and the quality of their children's sibling relationships.

The present study uses parents' retrospective reports as the basis for determining the quality of parents' childhood sibling relations. Although retrospective reports are subject to bias, Belsky et al. (1990) argue that parents' perceptions of the quality of their childhood relationships may be just as important in shaping their current beliefs and behaviors as the actual events. Accordingly, these and other researchers (e.g. Main et al., 1985; Putallaz et al., 1991) have found that parental recollections can provide meaningful reports of childhood relationships that foreshadow the character of subsequent family relationships.

There may be several ways in which characteristics of sibling relationships are 'linked' across generations. First, some direct mechanism may exist such that parents who experienced positive sibling relationships in childhood have children who have positive sibling relationships, and parents with negative sibling histories have children with negative sibling relationships. However, studies of intergenerational patterns of child abuse (Egeland et al., 1988; Hunter & Kilstrom, 1979), marital instability (Mueller & Pope, 1977) and adolescent pregnancy (Furstenberg et al., 1987) have shown that a sizeable proportion of individuals avoid perpetuating these patterns across generations. Thus, it is unlikely that this direct process is representative of the majority of families.

Another possibility is that linkages in sibling relations across generations are mediated by the child-rearing strategies that parents use to moderate interactions between siblings. Previous research has demonstrated that child-rearing strategies such as differential parental treatment (Dunn, 1983; Stocker et al., 1989) and parental responses to sibling conflict (Felson & Russo, 1988; Washo, 1991) are related to sibling relationship quality. This study evaluates the hypothesis that parents make decisions about how to rear their children, in part, on the basis of their early experiences with their own parents and siblings, and that these decisions have important implications for the quality of sibling relationships among offspring. Two sets of child-rearing variables (general strategies parents use to raise siblings, and specific techniques parents use to respond to conflict between siblings) are considered in order to evaluate the veracity of this hypothesis.

Childhood experiences with siblings may also lead parents to develop implicit or explicit beliefs (Sigel, 1985) or attributions (Dix & Grusec, 1985) about sibling relationships that may help shape their goals, hopes and expectations for their children's sibling relationships. These goals may, in turn, influence the quality of their children's relationship. Although parental belief systems about sibling relationships encompass many dimensions, the present study focuses on two basic dimensions of parental expectations: the degree to which parents desire to see (1) less conflict and (2) greater closeness in their children's sibling relationship.

Although parental sibling history is unlikely to directly influence specific characteristics of children, such as their age, gender or styles of behavior, these factors may, nonetheless, significantly contribute to the quality of children's sibling relationships. For example, it is possible that parents with particular sibling histories may be more likely to have children who possess certain characteristics that, in turn, influence the quality of their sibling relationships. Children's age and gender have been inconsistently linked with the quality of sibling relationships (see Dunn, 1983 for a review). In addition, characteristics such as internalizing or externalizing behaviors have been associated with difficulties in relationship formation (Achenbach, 1985), which may have a negative effect on the quality of their sibling relationships. Family status variables, such as the number of siblings parents have, or their birth order, may also conceivably play a role in the quality of sibling relationships. Therefore, this study will also evaluate the degree to which similarities in sibling relationship quality across generations may be due to these characteristics of children or their families.

In summary, the present study investigates how parents' reports of their childhood sibling relationships relate to the quality of their children's sibling relationships. This focus is not meant to imply that this is a unidirectional process. Clearly, characteristics of the sibling dyad and sibling–parent interaction also influence parents' selection of child-rearing techniques and objectives. However, a decision was made to begin the study of intergenerational linkages in sibling relationships by limiting the focus to parental variables. Specifically, we examine whether any observed associations between sibling relationships in the two generations are directly linked or are moderated by either: (1) parents' selection of child-rearing behaviors, (2) their goals for their children's sibling relationship or (3) characteristics of the children themselves. We also examine whether similar patterns of association exist for mothers and fathers.

Methods

Fifty-six two-parent, two-child families participated. Secondborn children were 39.70 months on average (SD = 12.78) and their older siblings were 71.80 months (SD = 9.47). The mean age difference between the siblings ranged was 32.11 months (SD = 10.36). The 56 sibling dyads included 17 older female–younger female pairs, 13 older male–younger male pairs, 13 older female–younger male pairs and 13 older male–younger female pairs.

Mothers were 32.39 years of age on average (SD = 3.98 years) and fathers were 34.89 years (SD = 6.07). Mothers averaged 15.23 years of education (SD = 2.49) and fathers, 16.23 years (SD = 2.78). Median family income was in the range of $30,000–$39,999. Mothers and fathers had a mean of 3.21 (SD = 1.79) and 3.39 (SD = 2.39) siblings, respectively. Two mothers had no siblings. Families were recruited through newspaper advertisements and were paid $40 for their participation in the study.

Families participated in two sessions that were scheduled in their home and in a laboratory playroom. Parental interviews and observations of sibling interaction were conducted during the home session. Observations of parent–sibling interaction were carried out in the laboratory session.

Parental interviews. Parents were individually interviewed about their own and their children's sibling relationships. The structured in-depth interview, composed of both open- and closed-ended questions, took 1.5 to 2.5 hours to complete and was audiotaped.

The first portion of the interview focused on parents' perceptions of their children's sibling relationships. Parents were asked to describe their children's relationship on the following dimensions: closeness, affection, co-operation, loyalty, jealousy, competition, antagonism and conflict. This led to a discussion of parents' goals for their children's relationship (e.g. the importance they placed on reducing conflict, competition and rivalry, and increasing closeness in the sibling relationship). Furthermore, open-ended questions were used to assess the types of child-rearing strategies parents employed to facilitate prosocial sibling relations, as well as the parenting behaviors they performed that may inhibit the establishment of prosocial sibling relationships. The second portion of the interview focused on the parents' childhood relationships with siblings. Parents discussed the degree to which conflict and intimacy occurred in these relationships, as well as the ways in which their early experiences with siblings have influenced the parenting of their children.

Several measures were constructed from this interview. As presented below, these assessed parental goals for their children's relationship, general child-rearing strategies used to encourage and inhibit prosocial relationships among offspring and the quality of parents' childhood relationships with siblings.

First, two scales were derived to assess parental goals for: (1) more closeness and (2) less conflict in their children's sibling relationships. The Parental Goals for Closeness Scale was composed of 5 items and assessed the degree to which parents wanted their children to: (1) be emotionally closer to each other in the future, (2) like each other, (3) be good friends, (4) share their possessions with each other and (5) be affectionate. The Parental Goals for Conflict Scale was composed of 3 items that evaluated the degree to which parents wanted the children to engage in: (1) fewer disputes, (2) less competition and (3) less conflict in the future. Parents rated each item on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from (1) definitely not important to (5) extremely important. Summary scores for each scale were derived by summing the individual ratings. Internal consistency was .51 for the Parental Goals for Closeness Scale and .48 for the Parental Goals for Conflict Scale. The moderate level of these alpha coefficients may reflect the relatively small number of items included in the scales, as well as the limited variability in the current sample.

The second set of measures were designed to summarize parents' reports of how they facilitate and inhibit prosocial relations among siblings. Using content analyses, six categories of how parents encourage prosocial sibling

relations were derived: (1) arranging family activities, (2) using parental behaviors to model appropriate sibling interactions, (3) encouraging children to establish their own relationships on their own terms, (4) directly encouraging warm and affectionate sibling interactions, (5) engaging in fair or nonpreferential treatment and (6) other. In addition, six categories describing child-rearing methods that might inhibit prosocial sibling relations were also identified: (1) differential treatment of siblings, (2) failure to encourage warm and affectionate sibling behaviors, (3) conflict in the home, (4) a lack of family time, (5) 'nothing' and (6) other. The category 'conflict in the home' referred to discussions of how children's general exposure to conflict and negative affect in the home might have a negative influence on their interactions with siblings.

Two independent raters, blind to the specific hypotheses of the study, used transcripts of this portion of the interview to classify the parental responses into the above categories. Because parents generated different numbers of child-rearing strategies, proportions of the total number of responses were calculated for each category. Inter-rater agreement was .88 (kappa) for the Parental Encouragement of Prosocial Sibling Relations categories and .92 for Parental Inhibition of Prosocial Sibling Relations categories.

A 5-item scale was developed to index the overall quality of parents' childhood sibling relationships. The Parental Sibling History Scale assessed parents' appraisals of the degree to which: (1) conflict occurred in childhood sibling relationships, (2) conflict and closeness occurred in the same relationships and (3) conflict prevented the formation of close sibling relationships. In addition, the scale assessed: (4) the importance parents placed on their sibling relationships over time and (5) an overall evaluation of the childhood sibling relationships as negative, positive or mixed.

Two independent raters listened to audiotapes of the interviews in order to accurately record parents' responses and to judge the quality of the parents' sibling relationships in childhood. Items were rated on 5-point Likert scales, except for the last item which was rated on a 3-point scale. Lower scores indicated a greater incidence of conflict, at higher intensity levels, and that conflict was clearly perceived as preventing the formation of close sibling relationships in childhood. A summary score was derived by summing across ratings on the five items. The internal consistency of the scale was .75 and .76 (alpha) when data from mothers and fathers were used, respectively. Interrater agreement on the summary score was 92.68 percent and 90.56 percent for the maternal and paternal interviews, respectively.

Sibling interactions. Naturalistic observations of sibling interaction were conducted by audiotaping the children's conversation as they played alone in a room in their home. Following the procedures of Kramer & Gottman (1992), the children were not instructed to play together or separately, but were told they could play with any of the toys and materials they had available to them. The play session lasted 30 minutes. No adults were present during the observation, and a researcher remained in the home to prevent adults from entering the play room.

The observations of sibling interaction were coded using a rapid coding system that assessed 49 categories of positive and negative conversation, activities, affects, and repair and maintenance of the interaction (see the Appendix). This coding system, based on one developed by Kramer & Gottman (1992) for preschool-aged children and their younger siblings, focused on the interactive behaviors of the dyads, rather than the actions of individual children.

Verbatim transcripts of each sibling play session, along with the audiotapes, were used for coding. The 30-minute play sessions were divided into six 5-minute observation periods. Coders indicated which of the categories occurred during each of the observation periods. The percentage of positive interaction was computed for each of the 5-minute segments by dividing the total number of positive categories by the total number of categories that occurred, and multiplying this by 100. The mean of the scores from the six observation periods was used as a summary measure of percent positive interaction for the play session.

One-third of the sibling play sessions were randomly selected for coding by a second independent rater to asses inter-observer agreement. Percent agreement for the percent positive interaction score averaged 85.86 percent. Percent positive interaction scores have been found to be significantly correlated over a three-month interval ($r = .41, p < .01$; Kramer & Gottman, 1992).

Parent–sibling interactions. Mothers and fathers were each videotaped as they interacted with their two children in a laboratory playroom. Parents were asked to behave as if they were at home and had a few minutes free to spend with the children. Although this study involved the observation of various subsystems of the families for a total of one hour, this report focuses on the mother–sibling and father–sibling components, which each took 10 minutes.

Three types of sibling conflicts were coded from the videotapes of parent–sibling interaction. Prohibitions and threats were defined as verbal attempts by one child to overly control, limit or restrict the other child, that were not met with resistance by the other child. Simple conflicts (Dunn & Munn, 1985) were prohibitions that were resisted by the other child, but no further opposition was observed. Complex conflicts (Dunn & Munn, 1987) were extended conflicts that involved mutual opposition. The number of conflicts occurring in each category were combined to derive a summary measure of total conflicts.

Parental responses to sibling conflicts were classified into the following five categories: (1) Power Assertion, (2) Collaborative Problem-solving, (3) Redirection, (4) Commands to Stop Fighting and (5) Non-intervention. These categories were derived from factor-analytic research on parental responses to sibling conflict using written self-report measures (Washo, 1991). Power Assertions were responses in which parents used or threatened to use punitive measures to end the children's conflicts (e.g. yelling, withdrawing privileges, choosing a 'winner'). Collaborative Problem-solving techniques were coded when parents worked with the children to achieve a mutually satisfactory outcome to the conflict on their own. Redirection referred to non-punitive responses that were aimed at ending the conflict quickly without addressing the underlying conflicting issue (e.g. removing the object the children were fighting over or separating the children rather than discussing object ownership issues or sharing). Commands to Stop Fighting were techniques that, on the basis of prior research, were not expected to be effective in managing conflicts (e.g. simply telling children to be quiet, threatening to punish without intending to carry through with punishment). Non-intervention strategies were used when parents ignored the conflict and/or allowed children to resolve the issue themselves. One-third of the parent–sibling observations were independently coded by a second coder to assess inter-rater agreement. Inter-rater agreement was .79 (kappa) for the occurrence of conflict, .83 for the type of conflict and .80 for the parental response to conflict.

Authoritarian parenting strategies. Parents may not display power assertive

strategies in the laboratory even though they may use these behaviors regularly at home. Therefore, a self-report measure, the Authoritarian Strategies Scale, was constructed on the basis of Vuchinich et al.'s (1988) coding system for family conflict. Parents simply indicated which of 23 conflict management strategies they use with their children. Thirteen items related exclusively to Authoritarian strategies, and endorsement of these items comprised the measure of Authoritarian Parenting Strategies. Internal consistency of this measure was .72.

Individual child characteristics. The Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL; Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1974) was administered to mothers to assess externalizing, internalizing and total behavior problems for each sibling. Two versions of the CBCL, appropriate for children aged 2 to 3 years and 4 to 18 years, were used. Both versions require parents to indicate on a 3-point scale how often a set of potentially maladaptive behaviors occur. Three summary scores were used in the present study to indicate the extent of externalizing behavior patterns (e.g. undercontrolled behaviors such as aggression and stealing), internalizing behavior patterns (overcontrolled behaviors such as withdrawal, anxious or depressed behaviors) and total behavior problems. The CBCL has demonstrated reliability and validity when used to assess children's behavior as observed by parents (Achenbach, 1985).

Results

Descriptive statistics for the measures of parental sibling history, parental goals for closeness and conflict, general child-rearing strategies to encourage and inhibit prosocial sibling relations, parental responses to sibling conflict, and sibling relationship quality for the sample as a whole are provided in Table 1. These data indicate that measures of the quality of parental sibling history, parental goals for conflict, child-rearing strategies and children's sibling interaction quality revealed an adequate degree of variability across subjects. However, the smaller standard deviations relative to the mean for the parental goals for closeness scale indicate that most parents wanted to see greater closeness among their children. Preliminary analyses using a series of univariate and multivariate analyses of variance (ANOVA and MANOVA) tests revealed no systematic differences in parents' descriptions of their sibling histories or their goals for their children's relationship in accordance with either parental gender (2 levels) or children's gender constellation (4 levels). However, mothers reported engaging in more differential treatment of siblings than fathers ($F(1,54) = 7.24, p < .01$).

The first examination of intergenerational linkages was a test of whether parental sibling history was directly related to the quality of sibling relationships among offspring. For these analyses, mothers and fathers were classified into groups representing positive and negative sibling histories on the basis of median splits on the sibling history summary scores. This classification procedure was used because responses to the maternal sibling history measure approximated a bi-modal distribution. Medians were 14.5 and 15 for mothers and fathers, respectively. Two mothers were excluded from these analyses because they lacked siblings. Parents reporting positive versus negative sibling histories did not differ significantly in the number of siblings they had, in their birth order or in the ages of their children.

A univariate ANOVA was conducted to evaluate the effect of maternal

TABLE 1

Descriptive statistics for measures of parental sibling history, parental goals, child-rearing strategies and sibling relationship quality

Instrument	Mothers ($N = 56$)		Fathers ($N = 56$)	
	M	SD	M	SD
Parental sibling history[1]	14.96	4.11	15.06	3.86
Parental goals for closeness[2]	18.95	2.08	19.27	2.33
Parental goals for conflict[3]	8.38	2.25	8.05	2.21
General child-rearing strategies:				
parental encouragement of prosocial sibling				
relations[4]				
Arranging family activities	.37	.36	.33	.42
Using parental behaviors to model appropriate sibling interactions	.33	.42	.27	.40
Encouraging children to establish own relationship	.02	.09	.06	.23
Direct encouragement of warm, affectionate sibling behaviors	.09	.23	.08	.23
Fair, non-preferential treatment	.04	.15	.04	.17
Other	.15	.26	.21	.38
General child-rearing strategies:				
parental inhibition of prosocial sibling relations[5]				
Differential treatment	.27	.41	.10	.29
Failure to encourage warm, affectionate sibling behaviors	.01	.07	.00	.00
Conflict in the home	.20	.36	.20	.39
Lack of family time	.03	.11	.06	.23
Nothing	.17	.37	.29	.45
Other	.32	.43	.35	.47
Specific child-rearing strategies:				
parental responses to sibling conflict as observed				
during parent–sibling interactions[5]				
Collaborative problem-solving	.41	.89	.25	1.00
Redirection	.30	.71	.36	1.05
Commands to Stop Fighting	.08	.22	.08	.20
Power assertion	.00	.00	.02	.13
Non-intervention	.54	1.06	.21	.56
Parental reports of authoritarian parenting[6]	10.79	2.02	10.55	2.52
Observations of sibling interaction quality[7]	47.92	17.21		

[1] Possible range 0–23, with higher scores indicating that parents recalled more positive sibling relationships in childhood (mothers, $N = 54$, fathers, $N = 56$).

[2] Possible range 5–25, with higher scores indicating that parents placed greater emphasis on closeness between their children.

[3] Possible range 3–15, with higher scores indicating that parents placed more emphasis on their children engaging in less sibling conflict.

[4] Data are mean proportions of parental responses to the interview that fit each category.

[5] Data are mean frequencies of observed parental conflict management strategies.

[6] Possible range 1–13, with higher scores indicating greater endorsement of authoritarian strategies.

[7] Percent positive sibling interaction.

sibling history (2 levels) on sibling relationship quality. A significant effect was found on percent positive sibling interaction ($F(1,52) = 7.99, p < .01$). Unexpectedly, mothers who reported more negative relations with siblings during childhood had children who interacted more positively with one another ($M = 54.14, SD = 16.22$) than children of mothers with more pleasant sibling histories ($M = 41.47, SD = 16.72$). A corresponding effect for paternal sibling history was not found. Thus, evidence for an intergenerational linkage in sibling relationship quality was obtained for mothers only.

The finding that mothers' early experiences with siblings were related to their children's success in sibling interaction led us to examine whether this effect was mediated by their selection of child-rearing techniques. We addressed this by asking two questions: first, do mothers who report positive versus negative sibling histories adopt different strategies for encouraging harmonious sibling relationships? And second, do mothers respond differently to children's conflicts in accordance with their perceived childhood experiences?

TABLE 2
General child-rearing strategies: maternal inhibition of prosocial sibling relations ($N = 54$)

| | Maternal sibling history | | | | |
| | Positive ($N = 27$) | | Negative ($N = 27$) | | |
Child-rearing strategy	M	SD	M	SD	$F(1,52)$
Differential treatment	.41	.48	.13	.30	6.51**
Conflict in the home	.09	.28	.31	.42	5.26*
Nothing	.22	.42	.11	.32	1.18
Other	.26	.42	.39	.45	1.20

$* p < .05; ** p < .01.$

Table 2 presents descriptive data regarding the methods mothers reported to use that are relevant to the facilitation or inhibition of prosocial sibling relationships. These data refer to the mean proportion of parental responses fitting each category. Four child-rearing techniques were rarely reported, and these were eliminated from further analyses. These included: encouraging children to establish their own relationship; using fair, non-preferential treatment; failing to encourage warm, affectionate sibling behaviors; and a lack of family time.

With respect to the remaining categories, no significant differences were found between mothers with perceived positive and negative sibling histories in the methods they reported using to promote prosocial sibling relations among their children. However, differences were found in their reported use of techniques that might inhibit prosocial sibling relations. Results of a MANOVA performed on the remaining four child-rearing techniques that might inhibit sibling relationships (differential treatment, conflict in the home, nothing and other) by maternal sibling history (2 levels) indicated an effect for sibling history ($F(4,49) = 3.41, p < .05$). Subsequent univariate ANOVAs (presented in Table 2) indicated that mothers with perceived negative sibling histories were less likely than those with positive histories to report engaging in inequitable treatment. They were also more likely to spontaneously report that

conflict in the home (including their own expressions of anger) was a major factor that diminished the quality of their children's relationship. A parallel MANOVA performed on the paternal reports failed to reveal significant effects for sibling history on parenting strategies.

We next examined whether reported sibling history was related to mothers' actual use of specific child-rearing behaviors, in this case, responses to children's conflicts in the laboratory observations. A total of 97 conflicts (68 prohibitions/threats, 12 simple conflicts and 17 complex conflicts) occurred between siblings as they interacted with their mothers. Table 1 provides the mean frequencies of the conflict management strategies parents used as a whole. As shown in this table, parents were most likely to respond to the sibling conflicts with Collaborative Problem-solving, Redirection and Non-intervention strategies. Instances of Commands to Stop Fighting and Power Assertion were very rare and, as a result, these categories were excluded from subsequent analyses. However, parents did report using Authoritarian strategies at home to a significant degree, as indexed by their responses to the questionnaire. Therefore, parental self-reports of authoritarian conflict management strategies were used as the primary measure of this construct.

TABLE 3
Specific child-rearing strategies: maternal responses to sibling conflict as observed during mother–sibling interactions ($N = 54$)

| Maternal management techniques | Maternal sibling history | | | | |
| | Positive ($N = 27$) | | Negative ($N = 27$) | | |
	M	SD	M	SD	$F(1,52)$
Self-report measure					
Authoritarian	11.59	1.60	10.07	1.94	4.85**
Observational measures					
Collaborative problem-solving	0.26	0.53	0.59	1.15	1.87
Redirection	0.07	0.27	0.56	0.93	6.64**
Non-intervention	0.67	1.36	0.41	0.69	0.78

$^*p < .05$; $^{**}p < .01$.

As shown in Table 3, the reported quality of mothers' prior relationships with siblings was a significant factor in their selection of conflict management techniques. Results of a MANOVA performed on the four conflict management techniques (Authoritarian, Collaborative Problem-solving, Redirection and Non-intervention) revealed an effect for maternal sibling history ($F(4,49)$ $= 4.80, p < .01$). Univariate ANOVAs performed on each of the four conflict management strategies (see Table 3) indicated that mothers in the negative sibling history group were less likely than those in the positive group to endorse Authoritarian strategies on the questionnaire. Maternal sibling history was also related to the use of Redirection in the laboratory observations. Mothers with more negative recollections of sibling relations used more redirective approaches when responding to children's conflicts.

Maternal sibling history was not a significant factor in the utilization of Collaborative Problem-solving or Non-intervention. This was surprising, as mothers who recalled positive sibling experiences were expected to use Collab-

orative Problem-solving to a greater degree. No effects were found for paternal sibling history on fathers' selection of conflict management techniques.

In summary, in comparison to mothers who reported relatively favorable sibling experiences, mothers with perceived negative sibling histories were more likely to report engaging in less differential treatment of their children, to attribute difficulties in their children's relationship to general conflict in the home, and to use fewer Authoritarian and more Redirection strategies when responding to sibling conflict.

Correlational analyses were conducted next to assess whether engagement in the above parenting strategies was indeed associated with the quality of sibling relationships among offspring. First, greater concerns among negative sibling history mothers about how conflict in the home may affect sibling relationships was positively correlated with sibling interaction quality ($r = .44$, $p < .05$). In addition, maternal reports of differential treatment of siblings was negatively correlated with the quality of sibling interaction ($r = -.38, p < .05$); the avoidance of differential treatment was predictive of more positive sibling relations. A trend was also found linking maternal use of Redirection in the laboratory with sibling relationship quality ($r = .27, p < .10$). Unexpectedly, mothers' reported use of Authoritarian strategies on the questionnaire was not significantly correlated with the quality of sibling interaction ($r = -.19$, NS).

These findings led us to examine whether these correlations between parental child-rearing strategies and children's sibling interaction quality would also hold for families in which mothers reported positive sibling experiences ($N = 27$). Non-significant correlations were found between sibling interaction quality and: (1) reports of differential treatment of siblings; (2) concerns about conflict in the home; (3) the observed use of redirectional strategies in the laboratory; and (4) the reported use of authoritarian parenting strategies.

We next addressed the question of whether mothers reporting negative sibling histories had particular goals for their children's relationship that, in turn, might be linked to the quality of the children's sibling relationship. Two parallel univariate ANOVAs were conducted to evaluate the statistical effect of maternal sibling history (2 levels) on maternal goals for closeness and conflict. The results were uniformly non-significant. That is, mothers held similar goals for the occurrence of closeness and conflict in their children's relationship regardless of their perceived sibling history. Similar non-significant findings were obtained when paternal reports were examined.

Finally, we addressed whether parental goals for children's sibling relationships were significantly related to their selection of child-rearing behaviors. Correlational analyses revealed that mothers in the negative sibling history group who scored higher on the Parental Goals for Closeness Scale were more likely to use Collaborative Problem-solving to help resolve children's conflicts in the laboratory ($r = .43, p < .01$). Interestingly, a negative correlation was found between Collaborative Problem-solving and Goals for Closeness among mothers reporting a positive sibling history ($r = -.41, p < .05$). Thus, higher goals for closeness among these mothers was associated with lower frequencies of Collaborative Problem-solving. In addition, the use of Non-intervention in the laboratory observation was negatively correlated with Goals for Closeness among mothers reporting a positive sibling history ($r = -.38, p < .05$). Mothers in this group were more likely to intervene in their children's conflicts if they reported placing greater emphasis on closeness between their children.

The final set of analyses examined whether maternal sibling history was associated with characteristics of the children. As expected, children's age, age span and gender did not co-vary significantly with parental sibling history. We then turned our attention to the children's behavioral characteristics, measured by maternal reports on the CBCL. As shown in Table 4, children in the present sample did not significantly differ from normative samples in internalizing, externalizing and total behavior problems as their mean T-scores fell in the average range (Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1974). However, mothers were more likely to rate firstborn children as demonstrating more of these characteristics than secondborn children ($t(56) = 4.86$, 3.81 and 7.38, $p < .001$, for internalizing, externalizing and total behavior problems, respectively).

TABLE 4
Children's characteristics in accordance with paternal sibling history ($N = 56$)

| | Paternal sibling history | | | | |
| | Positive ($N = 27$) | | Negative ($N = 29$) | | |
	M	**SD**	*M*	**SD**	*F*(1,54)
Firstborn child					
Internalizing	53.23	10.66	56.12	11.05	0.88
Externalizing	50.04	7.36	57.36	9.95	8.65**
Total behavior problems	50.12	9.05	54.96	11.06	2.80*
Secondborn child					
Internalizing	46.27	11.38	49.52	10.44	1.13
Externalizing	47.81	11.21	49.56	9.66	0.36
Total behavior problems	42.62	11.86	45.20	9.68	0.72*

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

A series of univariate ANOVAs were conducted to examine the relationship between reported maternal sibling history (2 levels) and internalizing, externalizing and total behavior problems for firstborn and secondborn children, respectively. The results were uniformly non-significant indicating that maternal sibling history had little bearing on mothers' reports of the behavioral characteristics of first or secondborn children. However, when the identical analyses were conducted with fathers' data (see Table 4) we found that fathers who reported negative sibling histories had firstborn children who were rated as having more externalizing behavior problems than children of fathers who reported positive sibling histories. Thus, for fathers, a positive sibling history was associated with more beneficial outcomes for firstborn children as measured by mothers' responses on the CBCL.

We then assessed the degree to which these behavioral characteristics were associated with sibling relationship quality. Correlational analyses failed to reveal significant correlations between any of the CBCL variables for either first or secondborn children and the quality of the sibling relationship. Thus, although children of fathers who had more unhappy sibling relationships tended to have more behavioral difficulties as reported by mothers, this did not appear to relate to the overall quality of children's sibling interactions. Thus,

there was little support for the hypothesis that sibling relationship quality across generations may be linked via child characteristics.

Discussion

The results of this study indicate that there is not a simple, linear relationship between individuals' childhood sibling relationships and experiences, and the quality of their children's sibling relationships. Children of parents who recalled negative sibling relationships did not necessarily develop negative relationships themselves, nor were children whose parents recalled positive sibling relationships guaranteed to have positive relationships.

It was striking that mothers who reported more negative sibling relations during childhood were most likely to have offspring who interacted more positively with one another. This effect may appear to be counter-intuitive as the body of research on intergenerational linkages has largely emphasized consistencies across generations in the occurrence of harsh parenting techniques (Simons et al., 1991), child abuse (Egeland et al., 1988), adolescent pregnancy (Furstenberg et al., 1987), among other problems. As Caspi & Elder (1988: 218) state, often 'problems beget problems'. However, as noted in the introduction, these same studies also report instances of discontinuity in parenting behaviors and beliefs across generations. Some individuals find ways to avoid the problems they became intimately acquainted with during childhood. The challenge, then, is to identify the factors that predict when dysfunctional patterns of behavior will be perpetuated or discontinued across the generations.

Rather than viewing the obtained results as counter-intuitive, we see our findings as consistent with those of Putallaz et al. (1991). In this latter study, mothers who recalled having peer relationships during childhood that were marked with anxiety and loneliness had more socially competent children in comparison to mothers who recalled getting along well with peers or having been rejected by peers. Relative to the other groups, mothers reporting anxious and lonely childhood peer relations took the most active role in their children's development and voiced the strongest intentions to help their children experience more positive relationships with peers.

The present findings parallel those of Putallaz et al. (1991) as the intergenerational discordance of poor sibling relationships was best predicted by mothers' selection of more effective child-rearing strategies. As discussed below, mothers who reported negative sibling histories were more likely to use techniques that were associated with more positive sibling interactions, such as redirection techniques, and tended to limit their use of authoritarian parenting behaviors and the differential treatment of siblings. They were also more sensitive to the potentially deleterious effects of conflict in the home.

Whereas Putallaz et al. (1991) found that the nature of mothers' goals

and intentions for their children's peer relationships was an important factor in predicting children's competence with peers, a similar effect for maternal goals for children's sibling relationships was not found in the current study. However, as discussed below, the measure of parental goals used in the present study may not have been sensitive enough to subtle variations in this construct. Most parents, regardless of parental sibling history, reported that they wanted their children to get along better with one another. Thus, the role of parental goals in shaping the quality of children's relationships merits further study.

In contrast to Putallaz et al. (1991), who examined intergenerational processes as they pertained to mothers only, the present study included both mothers and fathers. Stronger associations between the generations were found for mothers than fathers. This finding is also consistent with previous research. Simons et al. (1991) found that their model of the intergenerational transmission of harsh parenting was more representative of the experiences of women than men. Furthermore, Simons et al. (1992) demonstrated that adolescent boys and girls learn different messages from their parents' child-rearing practices. Parents' supportive parenting was strongly related to girls' (but not to boys') beliefs about how specific parenting behaviors can have an impact on children's development. In contrast, parental beliefs about the efficacy of harsh discipline was closely related to the discipline beliefs of boys, but not girls. Simons et al. suggested that these differential findings may relate to gender differences in children's anticipatory socialization for assuming the role of parent. Taken together, these findings suggest that issues pertaining to rearing siblings across generations may be more salient for women than men.

As stated above, mothers who reported negative sibling histories were more likely to select child-rearing techniques that were associated with more positive sibling interactions. For example, negative sibling history mothers were less likely to report treating their children differentially. This finding is noteworthy given the results of Stocker et al. (1989) and Brody et al. (1992) who have shown that differential treatment contributes to negative sibling interactions. In the present study, the correlation between maternal reports of differential treatment of siblings and children's sibling interaction quality was also significant. Thus, mothers, may avoid perpetuating unhappy sibling relationships across generations by reducing differential treatment of siblings.

Mothers who reported negative sibling histories appeared to be quite sensitive to the deleterious effects of open conflict on children's relationships. In comparison to mothers who recalled positive sibling experiences, negative sibling history mothers reported greater concerns about how conflict or the expression of anger in the home may have harmful effects on their children's sibling relationship. Furthermore, maternal concern about conflict in the home was associated with more positive interactions among the offspring of negative sibling history mothers. The damaging effects of inter-adult anger on children's adjustment have been well documented by Cummings et al. (1991) and others. The present results serve to extend

take into account the child-rearing strategies adopted by parents. Little support was found for alternate models that included children's characteristics or family status variables. However, limitations in the measure of parental goals for children's sibling relationships suggest that this construct warrants further investigation.

Through this study, we have tried not only to learn how parental childhood experiences with siblings relate to the quality of sibling relationships among their offspring, but also how parental behaviors and beliefs may moderate this association. Clearly, this was an ambitious task, and the current study represents only a first step toward achieving these goals. The limitations of this study need to be recognized in order to better design future research. First, this study assessed only two dimensions of parental goals for children's relationships regarding the extent to which parents wished for greater closeness and less conflict in their children's relationship. Clearly there is more to it than this. For example, we know very little about the specific standards that parents hold for their children's interactions with siblings, and how these standards are developed. Future research should explore the relevance of these and other components of parental belief systems to the establishment of harmonious sibling relations, and examine to what degree these expectations are shaped by parents' experiences with siblings. In addition, the variation in the Parental Goals for Closeness scale was rather constrained, and may have produced attenuated correlations with other variables.

Second, the present emphasis on how parental variables relate to children's sibling relationships necessarily overlooked bidirectional influences. The contributions that young siblings make, both to the quality of their own relationship, and to the parenting variables, need to be explicitly addressed in future research.

A third limitation of this research was the reliance on retrospective methods for assessing the quality of parental sibling history. Belsky et al. (1990) suggest that parents make many of their decisions about childrearing on the basis of their perceptions of childhood events, and that veridical information is probably less relevant than these possibly distorted perceptions. Nonetheless, prospective studies that include both observational and self-report components are clearly needed to validate the results of the current research and to allow for the elucidation of causative rather than correlational relationships. When self-report methods are used, care should be taken to counterbalance the order in which parents are asked about their own and their children's sibling relationships. This should help detect possible response biases.

Finally, the context in which the observations of sibling and parent–sibling interaction were conducted might also be limiting factors. There appears to be relative agreement in the research literature that observations of family interaction should be conducted in the most natural context possible (usually the home). Rates of sibling interaction have been found to be depressed in laboratory settings as opposed to the home context as children tend to interact more frequently with a parent than a

sibling in an unfamiliar laboratory (Abramovitch et al., 1979). Thus, more robust correlations between the dyadic sibling interaction and parent–sibling interaction might have been obtained if both relationships were observed in the home context. However, it is also important to balance considerations of naturalistic data collection with a concern for reducing method variance; that is, significant correlations between parent–sibling and sibling–sibling interaction may be due to a similarity in the observational context, and not to similarities in underlying interpersonal processes (Bank et al., 1989). This issue merits further consideration in future research.

In summary, parental socialization of children's sibling relationships may represent an important example of intergenerational discontinuity in which individuals actively avoid perpetuating dysfunctional patterns of parenting across generations. Similar to the results for the intergenerational transmission of child abuse, marital instability and adolescent pregnancy, we have found that individuals are not locked into poor patterns of family interaction. There is hope. The present results suggest that women in particular may be more aware of the implications of negative sibling experiences, and try new techniques to change the course of history. However, there was a significant degree of variability associated with these findings. Although improved sibling relations among offspring were evident in many families in this study, this was not a universal finding. Additional research is needed to discover other factors that influence the quality of sibling relationships in families.

Appendix: Coding System for Sibling Interaction Quality

I.   *Positive conversation.* Five codes were used to describe the content and quality of the siblings' conversation, and indicated the occurrence of the successful exchange of information, the exploration of similarities and differences, self-disclosure and verbal imitation.

II.   *Positive activities.* Six codes described specific activities engaged in by the siblings. These activities represented varying levels of involvement and ranged from uninvolved (e.g. never found anything to do), to parallel play and shared fantasy play. Complementary activities such as teaching and caregiving were also included.

III. *Positive affect.* Eleven codes recorded instances of positive affect displayed by one or both of the siblings, e.g. affectionate statements, laughter, excitement, approval, comfort and positive teasing.

IV.   *Repair and maintenance of the interaction.* Four codes were used to categorize the siblings' attempts to resolve conflicts or disagreements, to clarify messages, and to sustain their play interactions.

V.   *Negative communication.* Four codes recorded difficulties the siblings had in exchanging information or in simply conversing in a connected fashion.

VI.   *Negative activities.* Four codes were used to record unsuccessful initiations of joint play, or shared fantasy play. Instances of ignoring one another were also recorded.

VII. *Negative affect.* These 11 codes denoted prohibitions, conflict, threats,

anger, whining and crying, insults, criticism, physical aggression, sadness, negative teasing, bossiness or other negative affects.

VIII. *Negative repair and maintenance.* These six codes were used to record instances where children had difficulty sustaining their interaction, e.g. were unable to stay in the play room together, to clarify messages or to manage conflicts.

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Stereotypes and Social Cognition

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Are stereotypes intrinsically erroneous? Do they have pragmatic value? What constitutes an adequate social judgement? These and other questions are answered in this ambitious book, which both advances a novel perspective and provides a coherent overview of key arguments and empirical developments in research on stereotypes.

Following a definition of stereotypes, the authors cover a wide range of literatures and theoretical perspectives to present a comprehensive critique of the subject. The text - which has a preface by Susan Fiske - reviews the classical work on psycho-dynamic and authoritarian theories through to contemporary sociocultural research. Additionally, the authors offer a close analysis of key theoretical approaches including social identity theory, social cognition and self-categorization theory.