

**PARENTAL COGNITIONS IN DISCIPLINARY SITUATIONS:
THE ROLE OF SELF-SERVING BIAS**

BY

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in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
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Abstract

Using Weiner's (1995) attribution model, the present study tested whether maternal causal assessments and responses to child misconduct would differ dependent on whether they were presented with misbehaviour committed by their own child or that of a hypothetical child. It was suspected that due to maternal perceived competence being threatened by their own child's misbehaviour, their assessment of their child's actions would likely reflect a self-serving bias. The sample was comprised of 54 mothers of preschoolers. Mothers were administered a Parental Disciplinary Beliefs Questionnaire (modelled after Scarr, Pinkerton, & Eisenberg's (1991) Parental Discipline Interview), which assessed their perceptions of maternal and child causality, responsibility, and control, child intentionality, maternal anger, and disciplinary strategy choice in response to each of five types of child misbehaviour. Each mother was randomly assigned to one of two groups. Mothers in the Own Child group were asked to respond as if the misbehaving child was their own; mothers in the Hypothetical Child group were asked to respond as if the misbehaving child was unknown to them. Mothers' perceptions of maternal causality and responsibility varied significantly with their relationship to the target child. However, no group differences were found on mothers' perceptions of child causality, child responsibility, maternal control, child control, or intentionality. Regardless of their relationship to the target child, most mothers claimed they would be angry with the child but would likely deal with the child through inductive methods of discipline. The findings partially support the notion of self-serving bias, but raise a number of theoretical questions regarding the meaning of control and the need for specificity in identifying inferred external causes.

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Table of Contents

	Page
Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Table of Contents	iv
List of Tables	viii
List of Figures	ix
Chapter I	
Introduction	1
Theoretical Background	3
Parents' attributions and responses to child misconduct	7
Attributions of intentionality	9
Attributions of responsibility	10
Parental attributions and affective responses	11
Parental attributions and disciplinary responses	13
Perceived parenting competence	14
Self-serving bias	18
The research question	21
Purpose	23
Hypotheses	23
Hypothesis 1	23
Hypothesis 2	23
Hypothesis 3	24
Hypothesis 4	24

Hypothesis 5	24
Hypothesis 6	24
Chapter II	
Method	25
Subjects	25
Inclusion and exclusion criteria	25
Demographic characteristics	25
Classification groups	28
Measure	28
Classification measure	28
Dependent measure	29
Parental disciplinary beliefs questionnaire for the	
'Own Child' group	29
Parental disciplinary beliefs questionnaire for the	
'Hypothetical' Child group	31
Procedures	32
Data analysis	34
Hypothesis 1	34
Hypothesis 2	34
Hypothesis 3	35
Hypothesis 4	35
Hypothesis 5	35
Hypothesis 6	35
Type I error	36

Chapter III

Results	37
Preliminary analysis	37
Test of hypothesis 1 - Locus of causality	38
Test of hypothesis 2 - Controllability	38
Test of hypothesis 3 - Intentionality	44
Test of hypothesis 4 - Responsibility	44
Test of hypothesis 5 - Anger	48
Test of hypothesis 6 - Disciplinary response	48
Discussion	48
Maternal and child responsibility	52
Locus of causality	54
Maternal control	54
Child control and intentionality	55
Maternal anger and disciplinary strategies	56
Limitations of the present study	57
Directions for future research	61
Conclusion	63
Endnote	65
References	66
Appendices	77
Appendix A - Introductory letter	77
Appendix B - Director's consent form	78
Appendix C - Recruitment letter to day-care parent	79

Appendix D - Demographic questionnaire	80
Appendix E - Consent form	82
Appendix F - Parental disciplinary beliefs questionnaire for the 'Own Child' group	83
Appendix G - Parental disciplinary beliefs questionnaire for the 'Hypothetical Child' group	94
Appendix H - Thank you letter	105
Appendix I - Feedback letter	106

List of Tables

	Page
1. Sample characteristics	26
2. Mann-Whitney U-test Results	39

List of Figures

	Page
1. Percent frequency scores for ratings of child causality by the Own Child and Hypothetical Child groups	40
2. Percent frequency scores for ratings of maternal causality by the Own Child and Hypothetical Child groups	41
3. Percent frequency scores for ratings of child control by the Own Child and Hypothetical Child groups	42
4. Percent frequency scores for ratings of maternal control by the Own Child and Hypothetical Child groups	43
5. Percent frequency scores for ratings of intentionality by the Own Child and Hypothetical Child groups	45
6. Percent frequency scores for ratings of child responsibility by the Own Child and Hypothetical Child groups	46
7. Percent frequency scores for ratings of maternal responsibility by the Own Child and Hypothetical Child groups	47
8. Percent frequency scores for ratings of maternal anger by the Own Child and Hypothetical Child groups	49
9. Percent frequency scores for ratings of power-assertive discipline by the Own Child and Hypothetical Child groups	50
10. Percent frequency scores for ratings of inductive discipline by the Own Child and Hypothetical Child groups	51

CHAPTER I

Introduction

One of the primary components of the parenting role is the socialization and regulation of children's behaviour. In an attempt to accomplish these parenting tasks, parents may use a multitude of child-rearing methods, such as inductive reasoning or power-assertive methods of discipline, or a combination thereof (Dix, Ruble, & Zambarano, 1989). Inductive methods of child-rearing involve reasoning with the child, explaining to the child what is appropriate or inappropriate about certain behaviours, and negotiating solutions when discrepancies arise. Such methods are used primarily when parents assume that their children lack the knowledge needed to make better behaviour choices (Dix, Ruble, & Zambarano, 1989). However, circumstances such as the child's limited cognitive ability or the nature of the child's misdeed (Holden, Coleman, & Schmidt, 1995) and limited parental skills (Grusec, Hastings, & Mammone, 1994) may result in parental use of more authoritarian child-rearing techniques. That is, in an attempt to maintain the child's safety or regain control over the situation, parents may use or add power-assertive methods of discipline (Dix, Ruble, & Zambarano, 1989).

Power-assertive discipline can take a variety of forms (e.g., spanking, slapping, grabbing, yelling, verbal threats, or derogatory comments) which may range in degree of intensity. The most devastating and drastic forms of power-assertive discipline have been referred to as 'child abuse' (Steinmetz, 1987), the ramifications of which can lead to severe injury, such as permanent physical or psychological damage or even death (Institute for the Prevention of Child Abuse, 1990). Regardless of the form, the degree of intensity, or the frequency with which

power-assertive methods are administered, they have been associated with higher probabilities of depression, violence, criminal activity, and abusive parenting in later life (Straus, 1994).

Despite these negative consequences of power-assertive discipline, such methods are not uncommonly used by North American parents. For example, between 70% and 90% of American parents spank their children at least periodically (Wauchope & Straus, 1990). As it is generally in children's best interest to reduce parents' reliance on these methods, research on parenting practices has sought increasingly to determine what motivates parents' disciplinary strategies. With a better understanding of the determinants of parents' disciplinary decisions, attempts can be made to reduce those that result in negative consequences for children. Research efforts have focused on a variety of factors that may predict disciplinary actions, such as cultural norms (Straus, 1994), intergenerational transmission (Holden & Zambarano, 1992), one's parenting history (Patterson & Reid, 1984), parents' child-rearing beliefs (Dix, Ruble, & Zambarano, 1989), parental characteristics (Dix, Reinhold, & Zambarano, 1990, Wauchope & Straus, 1990), child characteristics (Dix, Ruble, Grusec, & Nixon, 1986), and the nature of and timing of the misdeed (Holden, Coleman, & Schidt, 1995). Although findings in these areas have been informative, they have been limited in their ability to explain why parents may act in a manner which is contrary to their experiences, or why their disciplinary methods may differ across situations or children.

Given that parents' responses to child misconduct may vary from child to child (Dix, Ruble, & Zambarano, 1989) or from situation to situation (Grusec & Kuczynski, 1980), a central factor regulating parents' disciplinary actions may be

parents' assessment of the causes of children's misbehaviour. Although causal attributions have been a focus of many studies of adult behaviour (Weiner, 1985; Weiner, 1980a), less is known about their implications for parent-child interactions as this has only recently begun to be explored.

In the present study, parents' causal attributions were assessed as predictors of parents' emotional and behavioural responses to child misbehaviour. Previous research efforts have shown that attributions are important but methodological inconsistencies limit the utility of these findings. In particular, studies have been inconsistent in their labelling of the target child. In other words, while some researchers have asked parents to respond to imagined scenarios involving their own children, others have asked parents to respond to the behaviour of unknown hypothetical children. Such a methodological difference among studies in this area may introduce serious confounds and limit the consistency and generalizability of findings, as self-serving biases may operate differently in these two conditions. The purpose of the present study was to investigate this question and assess the need for more consistent measurement across studies of parental attributions and disciplinary responses.

Theoretical Background

According to Weiner's Attribution Theory, people possess a basic need to explain the causes of events which occur around them (Weiner, 1986). How one explains the occurrence of an event may involve making inferences about the motives and traits of those involved in the event, or about the properties inherent in the social situation itself (Dix & Grusec, 1985). It is only through this causal understanding that one can act to produce a more desirable outcome by altering

what originally caused the event to occur. Weiner (1979) proposed a specific model to explain how causal attributions affect emotion and behaviour. These causal beliefs and subsequent reactions depend not on reality, but on "how events are seen through the eyes of the evaluator" (Weiner, 1986, p.2). Weiner would contend that how one personally assesses the cause of another's behaviour or a particular event will determine one's emotional response and, in turn, one's behavioural reaction to it. In other words, behaviour is a consequence of causal inferences and affect.

According to the model, the attribution process begins with an initial assessment of the event to determine if the outcome is positive or negative. This initial appraisal is followed by an emotional response. For example, after hitting a home run, or being asked out on a date, feelings of happiness may occur. In a similar manner, after missing a goal, or being rejected by peers, frustration or sadness may be experienced. These emotions are said to be "outcome dependent-attribution independent" (Weiner, 1986, p.121), due to being determined by the perceived nature of the outcome and not by the perceived cause of that outcome.

Upon completion of this initial appraisal of the event, causal inferences will be drawn, especially if the outcome was negative, unexpected or important (Weiner, 1986). The attribution(s) made to explain why the event occurred will generate a different set of emotions. These emotions are said to be "attribution dependent" (Weiner, 1986, p.121), because they are determined by the perceived cause(s) of the outcome. It is these emotions that will lead to a behavioural response.

The particular impact that a causal attribution will have is determined by its location on each of three dimensions; locus of causality, controllability, and stability. These dimensions represent three bipolar continua: internal-external, controllable-uncontrollable, and stable-unstable. The model suggests that, following one's perception of an event, the location of the inferred cause along each of these continua will predict the emotional and behavioural response to the event (Weiner, 1979, 1986).

The first dimension of Weiner's model, locus of causality, refers to whether the event occurred due to factors within the individual (e.g., effort, self control), or due to situational influences (e.g., task difficulty, peer influences). When an outcome is believed to be caused by factors within the individual, the cause is said to have an internal locus. While if an event is caused by external forces, the cause is said to have an external locus (Weiner, 1986).

The second dimension of Weiner's model, controllability, refers to the degree to which the causal factor is perceived to be under the control of the actor in the situation. Such inferences determine to some degree whether the perceiver believes that the actor's actions were intended and whether the actor should be held responsible for the outcome. An outcome believed to be caused by controllable factors, such as effort, is believed to be more a result of the intentions of the actor than an outcome that is attributed to chance or accidental factors, such as luck (Weiner, 1979, 1986).

The third dimension is the stability of the cause. Inferences about a cause's stability affect reactions by determining expectations about the recurrence of the event's outcome. When an outcome is believed to be caused by a stable factor,

such as a personality trait or intelligence level, it is expected to recur. However, when an outcome is attributed to an unstable factor, such as luck or chance, its recurrence is less expected (Weiner, 1979, 1986).

Researchers have applied Weiner's model to many types of behaviour, including achievement motivation (Nicholls, 1975; Nicholls, 1976; Weiner, 1985; Weiner, 1986; Weiner & Kukla 1970); helping (Folkes, 1985; Meyer & Mulherin, 1980; Piliavin, Rodin & Piliavin, 1969; Weiner, 1980a; Weiner, 1980b); aggression (Averill, 1983; Betancourt & Blair, 1992; Ferguson & Rule, 1983); and illness and addictions (Barrowclough, Johnston, Tarrier, 1994; Medvene & Krauss, 1989; Rivers Sarata, Dill & Anagnostopulous, 1990; Weiner, 1988). In general, the findings have supported Weiner's hypothesis regarding the relationships among attributions, affect and behaviour.

For instance, a study by Weiner (1980a) illustrated how attributions of responsibility determined whether or not subjects helped a confederate who had fallen on the floor in the subway. In one condition, the victim smelled of liquor and carried a concealed liquor bottle, while in a second condition the victim carried a black cane, implying the presence of a physical disability. The study revealed that when the confederate was viewed as being partly responsible for the outcome (i.e., in the alcohol condition), less sympathy and consequently less help was given than when the confederate was not seen as being responsible for the outcome (i.e., in the cane condition). This study revealed that emotional and behavioural responses were dependent on the particular attributions the subjects made. Similar response trends were demonstrated by the research conducted in the areas of achievement, aggression, illness and addictions.

Recently, a number of researchers have applied the attribution model to the study of parent-child interaction. Two prominent researchers in this area are Theodore Dix and Daphne Bugental. Dix and his colleagues (Dix & Grusec, 1985; Dix & Reinhold, 1991; Dix, Reinhold, & Zambarano, 1990; Dix, Ruble, Grusec, & Nixon, 1986; Dix, Ruble, & Zambarano, 1989) have focused primarily on the attributions parents make for their children's misbehaviour and how they influence parental responses. Bugental's work has reflected an interest in the inferences parents make regarding parenting outcomes - particularly perceived power relations and their effects on the manner in which parents and children interact (Bugental, 1987; Bugental, 1991; Bugental et al., 1993; Bugental, Blue, & Cruzcosa, 1989; Bugental, Blue, & Lewis, 1989; Bugental, Mantyla, & Lewis 1989; Bugental & Shennum, 1984). In the following section, a review of this research will be provided and the relevance of the attribution model for understanding parental disciplinary behaviour will be demonstrated.

Parents' Attributions and Responses to Child Misconduct

Over the past decade, a renewed interest in parental cognition has led to research evidence linking parents' thoughts to their behaviours (Goodnow & Collins, 1990; Sigel, McGillicuddy-DeLisi, & Goodnow, 1991). While earlier efforts have focused on global attitudes and beliefs about child-rearing (e.g., Baumrind, 1973), more recent studies have examined specific thoughts or beliefs that parents hold during particular parent-child interactions. Recently, cognitive research has expanded into the area of parental disciplinary practices, in search of the mechanisms underlying disciplinary behaviours. Specifically, researchers have become interested in the role that parents' attributions play in their approaches to

disciplining children (Bugental, Blue, Cruzcoza, 1989; Bugental, Mantyla, & Lewis, 1989; Bugental & Shennum, 1989; Dix & Grusec, 1985; Dix, Reinhold, 1991; Dix Reinhold & Zambarano, 1990; Dix, Ruble, Grusec & Nixon, 1986; Dix, Ruble, Zambarano, 1989; Johnston & Patenaude, 1992).

Weiner's attribution theory would predict that the nature of parents' reactions to child misconduct will depend on the location of their causal inferences along the dimensions of locus of causality, controllability, and stability. When negative actions are thought to be internally caused and under the control of the actor, the perceiver of the event tends to be more focussed on and critical of the actor (Meyer & Muherin, 1980; Weiner, 1979, 1980). Parents assess child misbehaviour primarily by determining whether the behaviour reflects the child's intentions/dispositions or constraints on the child's ability to control the behaviour due to situational pressures or developmental limitations (Dix & Grusec, 1985). Weiner's model would predict that parents will become more upset and react more intensely to the child when they make internal-controllable inferences (e.g., intent, disposition) about the child's misbehaviour, and become less upset and reactive when outcomes are attributed to external-uncontrollable forces (e.g., situational constraints) or to internal-uncontrollable factors (e.g., developmental levels).

Dix and his colleagues (Dix & Grusec, 1985; Dix & Lochman, 1990; Dix & Reinhold, 1991; Dix, Reinhold, & Zambarano, 1990; Dix, Ruble, Grusec, & Nixon, 1986; Dix, Ruble, & Zambarano, 1989) have conducted extensive research on how parents' attributions influence their responses to child misbehaviour. Their findings have provided support for Weiner's model, suggesting that disciplinary responses may rest on conclusions about the child's intentions and responsibility for the

misbehaviour. This section will introduce and define the concepts of intentionality and responsibility, and provide a discussion of their relationship to parents' emotional reactions and disciplinary responses to child misconduct.

Attributions of Intentionality

A parent's assessment of intention involves determining if the effect of the misbehaviour was desired by the child (motivation) and whether the child had control over the outcome. According to Dix, Ruble, Grusec, and Nixon (1986), in order for control on the part of the child to be assumed, the parent must conclude that: 1) the child understood the effects of the behaviour, 2) the child had the ability to produce the outcome when desired, and 3) the child was not influenced by external forces. In other words, when the parent views the child as competent, and assumes the child has sufficient knowledge, ability and control, this leads to the perception that the child acted intentionally (Dix & Grusec, 1985; Dix & Reinhold, 1991; Dix, Ruble, Grusec, & Nixon, 1986; Dix, Ruble & Zambarano, 1989; Grusec & Mammone, 1995). Such conclusions about intention have been found to lead to beliefs that the child's negative disposition (e.g., selfishness, stubbornness) caused the misbehaviour (Dix & Grusec, 1985; Dix, Ruble, Grusec, & Nixon; 1986; Dix, Ruble, & Zambarano, 1989; Jones & Davis, 1965). If, however, the parent believes that the necessary knowledge or ability is absent, or that the child's behaviour is controlled by external forces, the parent is inclined to view the outcome as unintentional, reflecting developmental or situational constraints over the child's ability to control the behaviour.

Attributions of Responsibility

Closely related to the notion of intention is that of responsibility. Parental judgements of the child's responsibility for his or her actions may be also dependent on the causal attributions parents make for the child's behaviour. That is, thoughts progress from causal attributions to inferences about the child's accountability for the outcome (Jones & Davis, 1965). Children who are perceived to be acting intentionally (an internal-controllable attribution) also tend to be held more responsible for their actions and are considered to be more worthy of blame for their misbehaviour than children who are perceived to be acting unintentionally (Dix, Ruble & Zambarano, 1989; Finchman & Jasper, 1980; Heider, 1959; Shaver, 1985).

In order for responsibility to be assigned, certain causal conclusions must be drawn. The assignment of a cause's locus plays an important role in the judgement of responsibility. As already mentioned, this causal dimension refers to whether the event occurred due to factors within the individual or as a result of situational influences (Weiner, 1979, 1986). For example, if while playing ball in the house a child breaks a vase, the parent is likely to hold the child responsible for the outcome if the parent believes that the child's actions caused the vase to break. By definition, responsibility implies personal involvement, thus conclusions about internal causality are necessary but not sufficient for the assignment of responsibility (Weiner, 1995). In the same example, if the child who had broken the vase was pushed by a sibling, causing loss of control of the ball, the outcome may not be viewed as being the child's responsibility. Although it may be true that the child brought the ball into the house and decided to bounce the ball near the vase,

the child may not have been aware of or in control of the sibling's behaviour. Perception of responsibility is intimately linked to freedom of choice; the belief that the actor had control over the behaviour must be present (Weiner, 1995).

Research efforts aimed at understanding parental disciplinary actions have led to evidence supporting the relationship between attributions, emotions, and behaviour, proposed by Weiner's attribution theory (Weiner, 1979, 1986). Of particular importance are the attributions of intention and responsibility, which would appear to play a profound role with regard to the disciplinary decisions parents make. Studies by Dix and his colleagues (Dix & Lochman, 1990; Dix, Reinhold, & Zambarano, 1990; Dix, Ruble, Grusec, & Nixon, 1986) have consistently indicated that when child misbehaviour is perceived as being intentional (i.e., the child has sufficient knowledge, ability, and control to avoid the misconduct), parents become more upset and are inclined to use power-assertive discipline more than inductive reasoning. When the child is blamed for negative behaviour, this tends to promote negative affect and the belief that forceful parental responses are appropriate and necessary (Dix & Lochman, 1990; Dix, Ruble, & Zambarano, 1989). These disciplinary actions appear to be related to the affect experienced by the parent which, in turn, is related to the causal attributions made.

Parental Attributions & Affective Responses

According to Weiner's attribution theory, the particular attributions that parents make will influence their emotional states (Weiner, 1979, 1986). Studies focusing on parental disciplinary responses have found that parents become most upset when attributions of intention, negative disposition, and responsibility on the part of the child are made (Dix & Grusec, 1985; Dix & Reinhold, 1991; Dix,

Reinhold, & Zambarano, 1990; Dix, Ruble, Nixon, & Grusec, 1985). These inferences imply the degree of control the parent attributes to the child. When the parent perceives the child as having adequate knowledge and ability to behave in an appropriate manner, yet chooses to not do so, the parent is likely to experience negative emotions (e.g., anger, disappointment, embarrassment). Dix & Reinhold (1991) found support for this relationship between attributions and emotions. In their study, manipulation of the immediacy of the disobedience created the illusion that children who showed delayed disobedient responses were less knowledgeable and were less able to act appropriately. As a result, parents assessed immediate disobedience more negatively than delayed disobedience. That is, they held children who disobeyed immediately to be more responsible for their behaviour, thought they acted more intentionally, attributed their behaviour more often to negative dispositions, and displayed more negative affect. In short, parents who perceived the child as being more responsible for and in control of the behaviour became more upset with the outcome of child misbehaviour.

Other studies have taken a naturalistic approach to assessing the relationship between attribution and emotion by focusing on the influence age differences have on parents' perceptions of responsibility. Findings of these studies suggest that parents hold children less responsible (Fincham & Roberts, 1985) and become less upset (Dix, Ruble, Grusec, & Nixon, 1986) when they are young, because they are presumed to have limited control over their misbehaviour. However, with age, children are thought to have increased knowledge about right and wrong, and a greater sense of control and ability over their behaviour (Dix & Grusec, 1985; Dix, Ruble, Grusec, & Nixon, 1986). Because parents expect and infer that children

become increasingly responsible for their actions and increasingly capable of acting in intentional ways, parents become more upset when older children misbehave (Dix & Grusec, 1985; Dix, Ruble, & Zambarano, 1989; Dix, Ruble, Grusec, & Nixon, 1986).

Parental Attributions & Disciplinary Responses

Weiner's model would predict that parents' attributions for child misbehaviour will influence their disciplinary responses primarily through their effect on parents' emotional states. The heightened state of arousal parents experience during a disciplinary episode seems to sensitize them to the need to react to the misbehaviour (Dix & Grusec, 1985; Dix, Reinhold, & Zambarano, 1990; Dix, Ruble, Grusec, & Nixon, 1986). Rubin and Mills (1992), for example, found that intense negative emotions, such as anger or embarrassment are associated with parents' choices to use coercive or power-assertive discipline. Dix and Reinhold (1991) found that attributions of intent and responsibility on the part of the child not only cause parents to become more upset, but also cause them to develop a strong desire to express their disapproval. However, parents who perceive the child as acting unintentionally, or who do not hold the child responsible for the behaviour, become less upset and feel that expressing their disapproval is unwarranted.

It has also been demonstrated that parents gauge the forcefulness of their disciplinary responses on the basis of their appraisal of the child's competence and responsibility (Dix, Ruble, & Zambarano, 1989). When parents infer that the child intended the negative outcome, they hold the child responsible for the misbehaviour and consider the child to be deserving of punishment. Dix, Ruble, and Zambarano (1989) found that inferences made about intent and responsibility were strongly

related to mothers' preferences for power-assertive versus inductive discipline.

When mothers perceived children as competent and responsible for their behaviour, they preferred to use forceful intervention techniques. Because competent children were assumed to already possess the knowledge and ability to act appropriately, power-assertive methods were chosen to pressure them into amending the negative intentions that were assumed to exist (Dix & Grusec, 1985). This study also found that when competence and responsibility were not inferred, parents preferred to use inductive methods. In the latter case, the children were believed to lack knowledge about right and wrong and to be developmentally unable to act differently.

Therefore, efforts to impart information and skills to these children were believed by mothers to be more effective than harsh control tactics (Dix & Grusec, 1985).

It is apparent that attributions for child misbehaviour influence parents' emotional responses and their disciplinary choices. The perception that the child is competent leads to the belief that the child acted intentionally and is therefore held responsible for the behaviour. These causal conclusions intensify the parent's reactions to the child. Further, such attributions may also indicate the degree to which parents feel that they can control child-rearing outcomes. If so, parents' sense of competence may influence their disciplinary decisions, providing further evidence for the relationship between attributions, emotions and disciplinary behaviours.

Perceived Parenting Competence

Parents' self-efficacy or parenting competence, as defined by Grusec, Hastings, & Mammone (1994), refers to "parents' expectations about their ability to effectively influence their children's behaviour" (p.5). In a disciplinary situation,

parenting competence is revealed by the level of control a parent can exercise over the child and the type of behaviour the child exhibits (compliant, noncompliant). Parents will evaluate their level of competence based on the immediate response of the child and how they handle the general situation (Deslavo, Zurcher, & Grotevant, 1986). Parents who possess a high sense of competence tend to be more confident in the parenting role, crediting themselves with the ability to modify or influence their children's behaviour. When a parental response to child misconduct results in compliance with parents' wishes, this feeling of competence is reinforced. However, when a child does not comply, the parent's ineffective approach may lead to feelings of incompetence and a search for why the child-rearing episode ended the way it did (Day, Factor, & Szkiba-Day, 1994).

In a series of studies, Bugental and her colleagues (Bugental, 1991; Bugental et al., 1993; Bugental, Blue, & Cruzcosa, 1989; Bugental, Blue, & Lewis, 1990; Bugental, Mantyla, & Lewis, 1989; Bugental & Shennum, 1984) demonstrated an association between parenting competence and parents' assessment and response to child misbehaviour. General beliefs about control are critical sources of influence with regard to the perceiver's appraisal of potentially stressful situations (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Although definitive conclusions cannot be made as to whether perceptions of parenting competence are the result of or the cause of the attributions parents make for child misconduct, parents who possess low perceived parenting competence believe that their children have relatively greater control over child-rearing outcomes (especially negative ones) than they do (Bugental et al., 1993). These parents tend to ascribe blame or responsibility to the child, concluding that the child's misbehaviour was an intentional act (Barkley, Anastopoulous,

Guevremon, & Fletcher, 1992; Mash & Johnston, 1983; Murphy & Alexander, 1991). Parents with low parenting competence are also more inclined to judge the child as being more difficult or as having greater behaviour problems than parents who possess a high sense of competence (Bugental, Blue, & Cruzcosa, 1989; Bugental, Blue, & Lewis, 1990; Day, Factor, & Szkiba-Day, 1994).

In addition, parenting competence is associated with parents' emotional response. Like Weiner, Bugental (1987) theorized that attributions reflecting powerlessness and blame would likely lead to a variety of negative affects when parents are confronted with child misbehaviour. If the child's incompetence or aversive characteristics are seen as being under the child's voluntary control, negative reactions will likely occur. For example, parents who believe that they have little control over child-rearing outcomes may experience anxiety when faced with a difficult or unresponsive child. Similarly, parents who attribute blame to the child may respond with anger, due to the perception that the child is in control of the behaviour. Lewis and Bugental (1991) found that low parenting competence reflected parents' vulnerability to feeling upset, helpless and ineffective when dealing with a difficult child. Their inability to modify the child's behaviour resulted in parents interpreting the behaviour as a threat to their sense of competence, leading to increased arousal and negative affect (Bugental, 1987; Bugental, Blue, & Cruzcosa, 1989; Day, Factor, & Szkiba-Day, 1994; Grusec & Mammone, 1995).

As Weiner's model would predict, a heightened state of arousal will influence a parent's disciplinary response to child misconduct (Weiner, 1979, 1986). The emotional state elicited by the perception of parenting competence seems to influence the parents' ability to process information and effectively respond to

disciplinary situations. Bugental and her colleagues (Bugental, 1991; Bugental, Mantyla & Lewis, 1989; Bugental & Shennum, 1984) found that when faced with a difficult or misbehaving child, parents who possess a high sense of competence become less emotionally aroused and are more likely to engage in solution-focused thinking than parents who perceive themselves as having little power or control over child-rearing outcomes. The latter experience more negative affect, are less solution-focused, and are less able to alter the child's behaviour.

Bugental et al. (1993) ascertained that parents who perceived themselves as being unable to influence their child's behaviour have difficulty acquiring new information that may assist with their disciplinary tasks. These parents tend to focus on their heightened state of emotional arousal rather than alternate solutions to child misconduct. Despite its ineffectiveness in altering the child's behaviour, parents with low perceived control continue to use power-assertive discipline (e.g., spanking, pushing, slapping) in an attempt to gain control (Bugental, Blue, & Cruzcosa, 1989). This inverse relationship between parents' use of power-assertive disciplinary styles and perceived parenting competence seems to hold irrespective of the parents' or the child's age, family stress, or child history (Day, Factor, Szkiba-Day, 1994). These findings are consistent with those of other studies that have demonstrated that internal-controllable inferences for child misconduct (e.g., intention, disposition, responsibility) lead to the use of assertive methods of discipline (Dix & Lochman, 1990; Dix, Ruble, Grusec, & Nixon, 1986; Johnston & Patenaude, 1994). Unfortunately, such maladaptive parental responses tend to exacerbate the child's non-responsive behaviour, reaffirming the parents' low sense of competence (Day, Factor, & Szkiba-Day, 1994). The child's continuing

noncompliance in the face of parental efforts to alter it also serves to confirm the parent's attributions of intentionality, blame and responsibility to the child.

The research on perceived parenting competence reviewed in this section provides further evidence for the relationship found in the attribution literature between cognition, affect and behaviour response. Moreover, it raises a question about the factors underlying variations in perceived parenting competence. According to attribution theory, one such factor may be self-protection (Folkman, 1984). By placing responsibility for negative child-rearing outcomes onto their children, parents protect themselves from ridicule or from taking responsibility for the outcome. The following section will illustrate how a self-serving bias is relevant to the parental disciplinary experience.

Self-Serving Bias

Heider (1958) proposed that people tend to perceive events in ways that protect and enhance their sense of competence and that validate their beliefs and values. Typically, people will strive to maintain a positive self-image and attempt to enhance their feelings of competence (Brown, 1986; Campbell, 1984). Thus, parents may make a variety of attributions for child misconduct that place themselves in a favourable light. For example, parents may attribute child misbehaviour to external causes or may believe that factors internal to the child caused the outcome. In either case, parents may project blame for negative child-rearing outcomes away from themselves and, in doing so, preserve their sense of competence. This tendency to make attributions that protect or enhance one's perception of self, has been called a "self-serving bias" (Dix & Grusec, 1985, p. 213). As Weiner's theory points out, the particular attributions one makes will

influence one's response to an event (Weiner, 1979). Thus, it could be hypothesised that the form the self-serving bias takes (i.e., the parent makes attributions which are external or internal to the child) will influence how the parent responds to the child.

Within the attribution and parenting literature, much evidence can be found for variations in the self-serving bias. Due to their emotional involvement with their children and their role as socializers, parents may make external attributions for child misconduct in an attempt to cast their children in the best light. Although perceptual differences exist, mothers will tend to make positively biased attributions in an attempt to maintain a positive image of themselves and valued others, such as family members (Dix & Grusec, 1985; Goldberg, 1981; Lau, & Russel, 1980; Gretarsson & Gelfand, 1988). They may attribute their children's successes and positive characteristics to internal, stable, factors inherent in their children's personalities, and view failures or negative behaviours as due to external, unstable factors such as fatigue or task difficulty (Dix & Grusec, 1985; Gretarsson & Gelfand, 1988). In other words, children are often given credit for their successes and excused for their failures. In this way, children can be judged as primarily good and their problem behaviours as changeable, and parents can view themselves as competent. In such cases, parents are likely to become less upset by their children's misbehaviour and less inclined to use power-assertive methods of discipline (Dix & Reinhold, 1991). Efforts may be made to impart information and skills to the child as a means of coping with the external forces that are perceived to be operating (Dix & Grusec, 1985).

Alternatively, a self-serving bias may be reflected in parents' making attributions to the child's characteristics as a means of dismissing their own responsibility for the child's negative behaviour. When a child is doing poorly, parental claims of little control over the child's predicament, whether realistic or not, may serve to protect feelings of competence. For instance, mothers' tendencies to claim little control over their children's poor academic achievement, as opposed to their claims of control over average or gifted achievement, illustrate the existence of an attribution bias (Himelstein, Graham, & Weiner, 1991). As mentioned earlier, when negative child behaviour continues despite parental efforts to change it, parents' perceived sense of competence is jeopardized (Gross et al., 1994; Lewis-Abney, 1993; Mash & Johnston, 1983, 1989). When children act in ways that are contrary to parents' expectations, parents may attribute the child's actions to deficits in the child's character rather than to limitations in their parenting skills. Gretarsson and Gelfand (1988) found that, by viewing difficult children as continually impaired, parents were relieved of responsibility for the child's condition and for improving it. In this way, parents' perceived sense of competence could be protected.

Although such attributional patterns initially protect the parent's perceived sense of competence, perpetual placing of blame onto the child has been associated with abusive parental responses (Azar et al., 1984; Bugental, Blue, & Cruzcosa, 1989; Bugental, Mantyla, & Lewis, 1989). By viewing control of negative child-rearing outcomes as being located within the child, parents actually give themselves a bigger challenge with regard to altering the child's behaviour. Thus, they may

resort to desperate means in an attempt to exert more power than they perceive the child to have.

The Research Question

This review of the literature has demonstrated that child misbehaviour potentially jeopardizes parents' perceived competence and may generate causal attributions that preserve parental self-image. If self-serving biases have such an impact on parents' attributions, it is important that they be taken into account by researchers designing studies in this area. Weiner (1995) has argued that when an event is personally relevant or important, one's assessment and response to it may be altered. That is, "the more one is 'involved' in the situation and the more significant or consequential the context, then the greater the contribution of emotions relative to thought in determining behaviour" (Weiner, 1995, p. 176). When the perceiver's personal involvement is high, as in self-perception or in an evaluation of one's own child, cognitive processes may differ from those associated with events that are of less personal importance (Howard-Pitney, Borgida, & Omoto, 1986; Wood, Kallgren, & Preisler, 1985).

Unfortunately, researchers have largely neglected to control for this variable in investigations of parents' perceptions of and responses to disciplinary situations. For instance, in some studies presenting parents with vignettes of child misbehaviour, the vignettes describe hypothetical children who merely resemble the parents' own children (Dix & Grusec, 1985; Dix & Reinhold, 1991; Dix, Ruble, Grusec, & Nixon, 1986; Dix, Ruble, & Zambarano, 1989), while in other studies, parents are instructed to imagine that the target child is actually their own (Dix & Grusec, 1985; Dix, Ruble, Grusec, & Nixon, 1986; Dix, Ruble, & Zambarano,

1989). In a study by Dix, Reinhold, & Zambarano (1990), parents were initially asked to respond to questions related to a hypothetical misbehaving child. However, some of the questions requested parents to imagine themselves as the target child's parent. By changing the relationship between the parent and the target child, these questions took on a personal flavor, which may have altered parents' responses. Further evidence for this methodological problem can be found in a study by Dix, Ruble, Grusec, & Nixon (1986). Not only did these researchers fail to control for the relationship between the parent and the target child, but they also neglected to test whether differences found between parents' responses to scenarios describing hypothetical children and real children were significant. Examination of the data reveals that parents gave higher ratings of intentionality, external locus and controllability on the part of the child when the target child was their own than when it was a hypothetical child. These parents also indicated that they would become more upset and felt it was more important to respond to the child when the target child was their own. However, these differences were not addressed by the researchers, so their statistical significance is unknown.

Due to the need to preserve one's sense of competence, parents' explanations of and responses to child misbehaviour may vary as a function of their relationship to the child. For example, Halverson & Waldrop (1970) found that mothers change their behaviour as a function of whether the child with whom they are interacting is their own or not. Mothers in this study used significantly more positive encouraging statements with others' children and significantly more negative sanctions with their own. They tended to be more assertive and controlling when their own children misbehaved or failed at a task than when unrelated children

did so. Even when studies have controlled for the relationship between the parent and the target child, no known effort has been made to determine whether significant differences in cognition, affect or disciplinary responses exist between the two conditions (e.g., Dix & Grusec, 1985; Dix, Ruble, & Zambarano, 1989).

Purpose

The purpose of the present study was to attempt to determine whether mothers' attributions, affect, and responses to child misconduct differed according to whether they were asked to respond to misbehaviour committed by their own child or that committed by a hypothetical child. Such differences would have both theoretical and methodological implications, as they would provide evidence of the role of self-serving biases in maternal cognition and behaviour, and therefore, of the need to control for this variable (i.e., the mother-child relationship) in studies of maternal beliefs and behaviour.

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1

It was expected that mothers asked to respond to a description of their own child's misbehaviour would be more likely to attribute the cause of the misbehaviour to factors within the child and less likely to attribute the cause to maternal factors than mothers asked to respond to a hypothetical child's misbehaviour.

Hypothesis 2

Mothers asked to respond to a description of their own child's misbehaviour would be more likely to attribute control to the target child and less likely to attribute control to the parent than mothers asked to respond to a hypothetical child's misbehaviour.

Hypothesis 3

As attributions of control and intention are related (Dix, Ruble, Grusec, & Nixon, 1986), mothers asked to respond to a description of their own child's misbehaviour would be more likely to perceive the target child's misbehaviour as intentional than mothers asked to respond to a hypothetical child's misbehaviour.

Hypothesis 4

On the basis of evidence reviewed above, indicating that attributions of intent and responsibility are closely linked (Dix, Ruble, & Zambarano, 1989), mothers asked to respond to a description of their own child's misbehaviour would be more likely to hold the target child responsible and less likely to hold the parent responsible for the misbehaviour, than mothers asked to respond to a hypothetical child's misbehaviour. ¹

Hypothesis 5

As the attributional dimensions of internality, controllability and intentionality are related to affective responses (Dix, Ruble, Grusec, & Nixon, 1986), it was expected that mothers asked to respond to a description of their own child's misbehaviour would report more anger than mothers asked to respond to a hypothetical child's misbehaviour.

Hypothesis 6

As attribution and affect are related to behavioural response (Weiner, 1995), it was expected that mothers asked to respond to a description of their own child's misbehaviour would be more likely to say they would use power-assertive methods over inductive methods of discipline in response to the misbehaviour than mothers asked to respond to a hypothetical child's misbehaviour.

CHAPTER II

Method

Subjects

Inclusion / Exclusion Criteria

Participation was restricted to mothers of preschoolers (three to five years of age) who had never been clinically diagnosed with any mental or physical conditions extending beyond typical childhood ailments or developmental limitations. Each mother in the study had at least one child who fit this description. The mean age of the target children was 4.3 years ($SD = .67$). This age range was selected on the basis of research findings demonstrating that parents of preschoolers most frequently use power-assertive methods of discipline (Institute for the Prevention of Child Abuse, 1990; Straus, 1994). Mothers were also required to speak English fluently, thus minimizing misinterpretation of the measures. Mothers were recruited from three populations - undergraduate students enrolled in introductory psychology courses at the University of Manitoba and the University of Winnipeg, mothers accessing day-care facilities at the University of Manitoba, and mothers participating in Y-Neighbours programs offered throughout Winnipeg.

Demographic Characteristics

The sample was comprised of 54 mothers; 53.7% were undergraduate students enrolled in introductory psychology courses at the University of Manitoba and the University of Winnipeg, while the remaining 46.3% were not engaged in any academic pursuits, but were involved in Y-Neighbours programs or utilized day-care facilities at the University of Manitoba (see Table 1). The mean age of the mothers was 30.5 years ($SD = 6.28$). The majority of mothers were married (63%)

Table 1

Sample Characteristics

Characteristic	Percentage of the sample ^a
Recruitment status	
Student	53.7
Non - student	46.3
Maternal age	
18 - 28 years	40.9
29 - 39 years	52.0
40 - 50 years	7.5
Marital status	
Married	63.0
Living with partner	7.4
Separated or divorced	11.1
Single (never married)	18.5
Level of education	
Partial high school	3.7
High school graduate	37.0
Partial diploma or degree	14.8
College or university graduate	38.9
Graduate degree	5.6

(table continues)

Characteristic	Percentage of the sample
Annual family income	
Under \$20,000	29.6
\$20,000 - \$39,999	26.0
\$40,000 - \$59,999	18.6
\$60,000 - \$79,999	13.0
\$80,000 - \$90,000 and above	13.0
Maternal relationship to child	
Adopted or step-child	7.4
Biological	92.6
Daily child-care arrangements	
Mother	29.6
Day-care	27.8
Kindergarten	5.6
Nanny	3.7
Relatives	1.9
Combination (i.e., parent and other source)	31.5

*N = 54

and most had some university education (59.3%). The modal annual family income was less than \$20,000 (range: less than \$20,000 to \$90,000 and above). This marginal income may be explained by the large number of students, single mothers, and separated or divorced mothers which comprised the sample. The majority (53%) of families had two children. Ninety-three percent of the target children were biologically related to their mothers. The primary child-care arrangements varied between families, with many of the mothers sharing child-care responsibilities with some other source of help, such as their relatives, daycare centres, or kindergartens (31.5%).

Classification Groups

Mothers were divided into two treatment groups, the "Own Child" and the "Hypothetical Child" groups, which were distinguished by mothers' relationships with the target children. Mothers of the Own Child group were related to the target children, while mothers of the Hypothetical Child group were not. Assignment of mothers to the two groups controlled for the effects of education; the sample was divided by recruitment status (i.e., student, non-student), and then randomly assigned within these groups to either treatment group.

Measure

Classification Measure

The Demographic Questionnaire required each mother to respond to general questions about her socio-economic status, education level, occupation, age, marital status, primary language, number, gender, and ages of the children in her family, whether any of her children had been clinically diagnosed with a physical or a mental condition, whether she or others are the primary care-givers during the day,

and her relationship to the target child (e.g., biological mother, adopted/step mother, other)(see Appendix D). The data collected through this questionnaire were used to monitor and confirm that the eligibility criteria had been satisfied, to describe the sample, and to determine whether the two groups of mothers were equivalent on these potentially confounding variables.

Dependent Measures

Parental Disciplinary Beliefs Questionnaire (PDBQ) for the Own Child Group.

Mothers' attributions, affect and disciplinary responses were measured by means of the PDBQ, which was a modified version of the Parental Discipline Interview (PDI: Scarr, Pinkerton, & Eisenberg, 1991)(see Appendix F). The PDI was developed in 1979 to assess parental disciplinary styles used with young children of two to five years of age. It consists of a series of ten vignettes describing typical child misbehaviour; five vignettes are appropriate for children aged 12 to 36 months, and five are appropriate for children aged 37 to 60 months. The situations are designed to evoke a wide variety of parenting responses. According to the authors, the PDI has been used in several large studies over the past two decades and has been found to be a reliable and valid measure (Scarr, Pinkerton, & Eisenberg, 1991).

In the present study, the five PDI vignettes pertaining to the 37 to 60 month age range (i.e., peer aggression, running into traffic, refusal to dress, a public tantrum, and being unsettled at bedtime) were presented in random order in a paper-&-pencil format. The open-ended questions used in the PDI were replaced by eight four-point rating scales, which followed each vignette. The scales asked mothers to indicate the degree to which: 1) the misbehaviour was caused by factors internal to the child, 2) the misbehaviour was caused by the mother's own

behaviour, 3) the child had control over the misbehaviour, 4) the mother had control over the misbehaviour, 5) the child acted intentionally, 6) the child was responsible for the misbehaviour, 7) the mother was responsible for the misbehaviour, and 8) the mother would be angry with the child's misbehaviour.

These scales were followed by a forced-choice item asking subjects to indicate in order of preference, the three out of eight randomly-ordered strategies they would most likely use in response to the misbehaviour. The strategies offered were: 1) explain why the behaviour is wrong, 2) distract the child, 3) show the child a better way of behaving, 4) negotiate with the child, 5) spank the child, 6) ignore the child, 7) yell at the child to stop, and 8) warn about punishment, a 'time out' or withdrawal of privileges if the behaviour continues. Each mother's first response was used for the purpose of data analysis. Modelled after coding standards for the PDI, the first four disciplinary strategies were collapsed into an "Inductive" category, while the final four disciplinary strategies were collapsed into a "Power-Assertive" category. Frequencies of endorsement of each of these two molar categories were used in the data analysis.

Each mother in the Own Child group was instructed to imagine that her own child was performing the behaviours indicated in the scenarios. In cases where two or more preschool-aged children existed in the family, mothers in the Own Child group were instructed to focus on their oldest preschooler. This method was used to minimize confounding due to parenting experience.

Several techniques were used to assist mothers of the Own Child group with relating the target child to their own child. First, the target child's name was printed on the questionnaire form for all vignettes and questions. Second, scenarios

presented to the Own Child group were personalized by using 'you', 'your child', and '(the child's name)' as key terms. For instance, a vignette illustrating a child running into traffic was worded as,

You are outside with your family. When you are not looking, (the child's name) runs into the street, falls down and starts to cry. You pick her/him up and s/he doesn't seem to be hurt (emphasis added here).

As in the vignettes, specific wording was used to personalize the rating scales and the forced choice item. For example, the child control scale was worded as, "How much control do you have over (the child's name)'s misbehaviour in this situation?" (emphasis added here).

In addition, as no psychometric data were available for the PDBQ, a pilot study involving ten mothers (five per group) was conducted in order to eliminate ambiguous wording.

Parental Disciplinary Beliefs Questionnaire (PDBQ) for the Hypothetical Child group. The PDBQ administered to the Hypothetical Child group was identical to that presented to the Own Child group with four exceptions (see Appendix G). First, mothers in this group were asked to imagine a hypothetical child misbehaving as described in the vignettes. Second, the hypothetical children used in the vignettes did not possess the same names as the mothers' own children. However, the age and the gender of each hypothetical child was matched with a target child in the Own Child group in order to minimize any confounding effects of child age or gender. Third, the measure was depersonalized through the use of 'the child' and '(the hypothetical child's name)' as key terms. For instance, a vignette illustrating a child running into traffic was worded as,

***(The hypothetical child's name)'s* mother is outside with her family. When she is not looking, *(the hypothetical child's name)* runs into the street, falls down and starts to cry. She picks her/him up and s/he doesn't seem to be hurt (emphasis added here).**

Fourth, similar wording was used to depersonalize the rating scales. For example, the child control scale was worded as "How much control does *the child's* mother have over *(the hypothetical child's name)'s* misbehaviour in this situation?" (emphasis added here).

Procedure

Introductory letters explaining the purpose and nature of the study (see Appendix A) and Director Consent Forms (see Appendix B) were mailed to the Universities of Manitoba and Winnipeg, day-care centres, and the YM/YWCA (founder of the Y-Neighbours program) requesting consent to access mothers participating in their programs. Once written authorization was received, telephone calls were placed to the respective directors in order to arrange contact with the mothers.

Mothers enrolled in introductory psychology courses and Y-Neighbours programs were contacted via presentations made by the researcher. During these presentations, the purpose of the study and the eligibility criteria were described. That is, mothers were told that the purpose of the study was to gain a better understanding of how mothers perceive and respond to child behaviour. Mothers were also informed that the population of interest was mothers of preschool children between three and five years of age. Mothers who met the criteria and were interested in participating in the study were encouraged to sign their names and telephone numbers on a form so that they could be contacted later by the researcher.

Mothers who utilized the day-care facilities at the University of Manitoba received identical information via letters which were distributed at the centres (see Appendix C). Interested mothers were asked to complete the bottom portion of the letters to indicate their willingness to participate and how they could be contacted. Completed forms were returned to the centres and picked up by the researcher.

All mothers who replied were contacted by telephone by the researcher who further explained the study, answered questions, and made arrangements for their participation. Mothers chose either to attend one of the pre-arranged research sessions at the University of Manitoba or the University of Winnipeg or to have the research package mailed to them. The research package included a consent form, a Parental Disciplinary Beliefs Questionnaire, a thank you letter and a stamped return envelope.

During the telephone conversation, mothers were asked to complete the demographic questionnaire (see Appendix D). Standardized questions were read by the researcher to each participant and responses were recorded. Once the preliminary screening was completed and each of the mothers was assigned to one of the two treatment groups (i.e., Own Child, Hypothetical Child), the study commenced. Mothers were first instructed to read and complete a Consent Form (see Appendix E). Then, they were given one hour to complete their respective version of the PDBQ.

In exchange for the time mothers donated to the study, course credit was given to those students who contributed, while a small gift (e.g., a book mark) was given to the children of the non-student participants. Following their participation in the study, mothers were given a letter thanking them for their participation,

informing them that the specific findings of the study would be forwarded to them, and providing information about how to contact the researcher if they had further questions about the project (see Appendix H). When the study was completed, a Feedback Form stating the purpose and findings of the research project was mailed out to each participant (see Appendix I).

Data Analysis

For each hypothesis tested, the scores obtained on each scale were summed across the five scenarios in order to increase the power of the test to detect differences between the responses of the Own Child group and those made by the Hypothetical Child group.

Hypothesis 1

It was predicted that mothers in the Own Child group would be more likely to perceive child factors and less likely to perceive maternal factors as being the cause of their child's misbehaviour than mothers in the Hypothetical Child group. To test this hypothesis, one-tailed Mann-Whitney U tests were conducted on both the child causation and mother causation scores.

Hypothesis 2

It was expected that mothers in the Own Child group would be more likely to attribute control to the child and less likely to attribute control to the parent than would mothers in the Hypothetical Child group. To test this hypothesis, one-tailed Mann-Whitney U tests were conducted on the child control and the mother control scores.

Hypothesis 3

It was predicted that mothers in the Own Child group would perceive their child's misbehaviour as being more intentional than mothers in the Hypothetical Child group. To test this hypothesis, a one-tailed Mann-Whitney U test was conducted on the intentionality scores.

Hypothesis 4

It was expected that mothers in the Own Child group would hold their children more responsible for misbehaviour and the parent less responsible for misbehaviour than mothers in the Hypothetical Child group. To test this hypothesis, one-tailed Mann-Whitney U tests were conducted on the child responsibility and the mother responsibility scores.

Hypothesis 5

It was predicted that mothers in the Own Child group would become more angry with child misconduct than mothers in the Hypothetical Child group. Group differences on anger scores were assessed using a one-tailed Mann-Whitney U test.

Hypothesis 6

It was expected that mothers in the Own Child group would prefer power-assertive disciplinary strategies over inductive methods of discipline more than mothers in the Hypothetical Child group. To test this hypothesis, a one-tailed Mann-Whitney U test was conducted on the frequencies with which these types of strategies were selected by members of each of the two groups. Only one test was conducted, as the two categories of responses were mutually dependent.

Type I error rate

Due to an increased risk of Type 1 error resulting from multiple U tests, a Bonferroni Correction was used. The overall significance level was set at $\alpha = .05$ and was divided by the number of tests conducted (i.e., nine), resulting in an alpha level of .006 for each individual test.

CHAPTER III

Results

Preliminary Analyses

The study aimed to examine whether maternal causal assessments of and responses to child misbehaviour varied with regard to the maternal relationship to the target child. In order to isolate the potential effect of the mother-child relationship, efforts were made to ensure that the two groups of mothers (i.e., the Own Child group and the Hypothetical Child group) were demographically equivalent. Information gathered via the Demographic Questionnaire was used to assess group differences. A variety of two-tailed non-parametric and parametric statistical procedures were used; Mann-Whitney U tests, Chi-Square tests, and t-tests. The significance level was set at $\alpha = .05$.

The preliminary analyses revealed that the two groups of mothers were equivalent on the various dimensions tested. The mean ages of mothers in the Own Child group ($M = 31.48$, $SD = 5.66$) and the Hypothetical Child group ($M = 29.59$, $SD = 6.83$) did not differ significantly, $t(52) = 1.11$, $p = .27$. The groups also did not vary with regard to marital status, $\chi^2(4, N = 54) = 4.12$, $p = .39$; maternal education, $U = 298.00$, $p = .22$; maternal relationship to the target children, $\chi^2(1, N = 54) = 1.08$, $p = .30$; or maternal recruitment status $\chi^2(1, N = 54) = .08$, $p = .79$. The groups were also equivalent on annual family incomes, $U = 337.00$, $p = .63$; family composition, $t(52) = .79$, $p = .33$; and ages of the target children, $t(52) = .10$, $p = .92$. Mothers in both groups utilized a variety of child-care arrangements, but they did not differ significantly with regard to these arrangements, $\chi^2(5, N = 54) = 4.93$, $p = .43$.

Test of Hypothesis 1 - Locus of Causality

The first hypothesis predicted that mothers in the Own Child group would be more likely to attribute the cause of child misbehaviour to factors within the child and less likely to attribute the cause to maternal factors than mothers of the Hypothetical Child group. Two Mann-Whitney U tests were conducted on child causation and mother causation scores, respectively. While scores on the child causation scale did not differ between the groups, $U = 321.0$, $p = .22$, the group difference on the mother causation scale was statistically significant, $U = 206.0$, $p < .006$ (see Table 2). Figures 1 and 2 illustrate the distributions of the groups' scores on the child and maternal causality scales. The majority of mothers, regardless of their group affiliation, rated causation as being partially due to the target child's mother and partially due to the target child. However, mothers of the Hypothetical Child group placed greater emphasis on child misbehaviour being caused by something within or about the target child's mother than did mothers of the Own Child group.

Test of Hypothesis 2 - Control

The second hypothesis predicted that mothers of the Own Child group would be more likely to attribute control to the target child and less likely to attribute control to the parent than mothers of the Hypothetical Child group. Both groups of mothers indicated that they believed the child and the child's mother had some degree of control over the misbehaviour (see Figures 3 & 4). Two Mann-Whitney U tests revealed no significant group differences on the child control, $U = 345.5$, $p = .63$, or maternal control scores, $U = 302.0$, $p = .14$ (see Table 2). Thus, the hypothesis was not supported.

Table 2

Mann-Whitney U-test Results

Dependent Variables	<u>Group Mean Rank</u>		<u>Group Medians</u>		U	p-value
	Own	Hypothetical	Own	Hypothetical		
Child Causality	29.11	25.89	14.00	13.50	321.0	.22
Maternal Causality	21.63	33.37	10.00	11.50	206.0*	.003
Child Control	26.80	28.20	14.00	14.50	345.5	.63
Maternal Control	25.19	29.81	13.00	13.00	302.0	.14
Child Intent	25.52	29.48	13.00	14.00	311.0	.83
Child Responsibility	28.15	26.85	14.00	14.00	347.0	.38
Maternal Responsibility	21.44	33.56	11.00	13.00	201.0*	.002
Maternal Anger	29.15	25.85	12.00	11.00	320.0	.22
Disciplinary Response ^a	29.41	25.59	2.00	1.00	313.0	.18

Note. The higher the mean rank score, the stronger the maternal belief.

^aDisciplinary Response scores refer to power-assertive methods of discipline.

* $p < .006$.

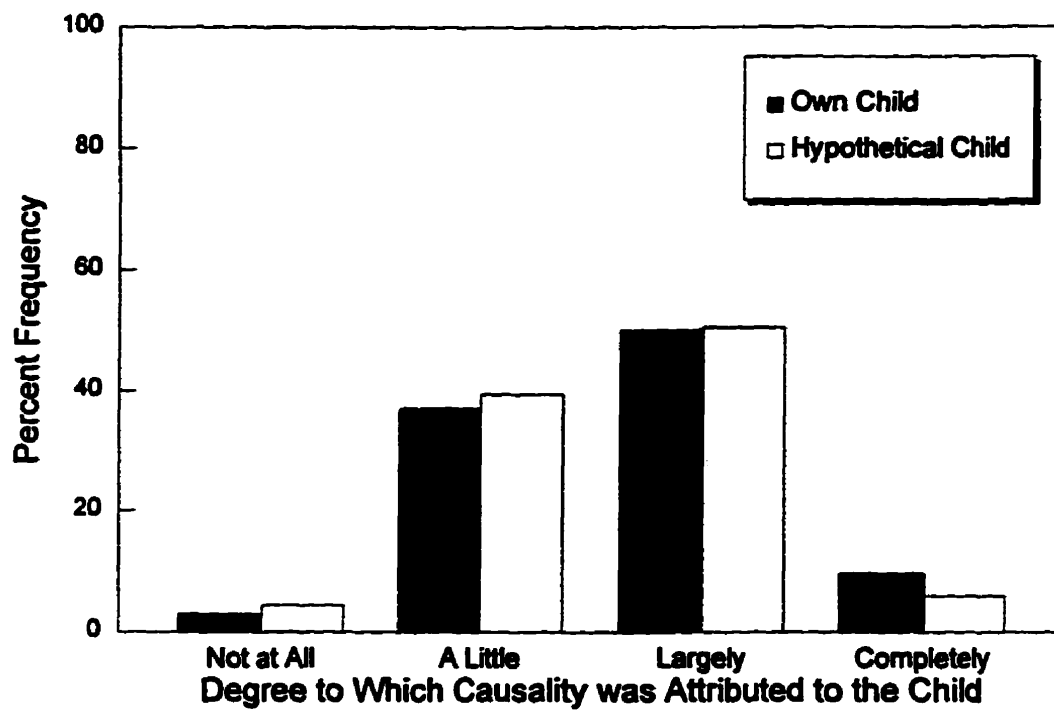


Figure 1. Percent frequency scores for ratings of child causality by the Own Child and Hypothetical Child groups.

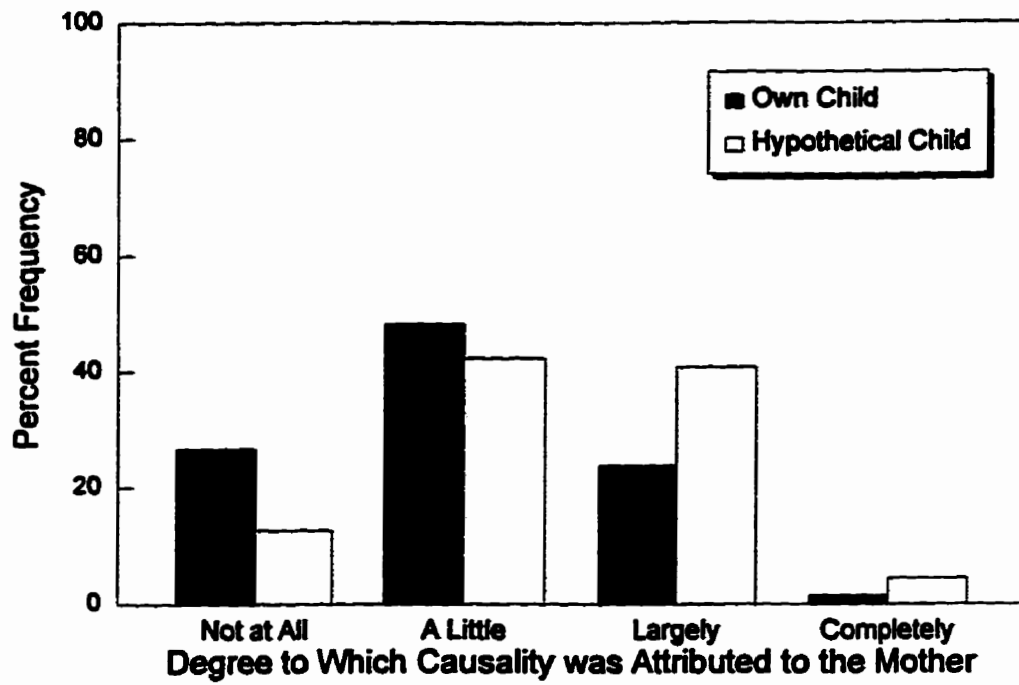


Figure 2. Percent frequency scores for ratings of maternal causality by the Own Child and Hypothetical Child groups.

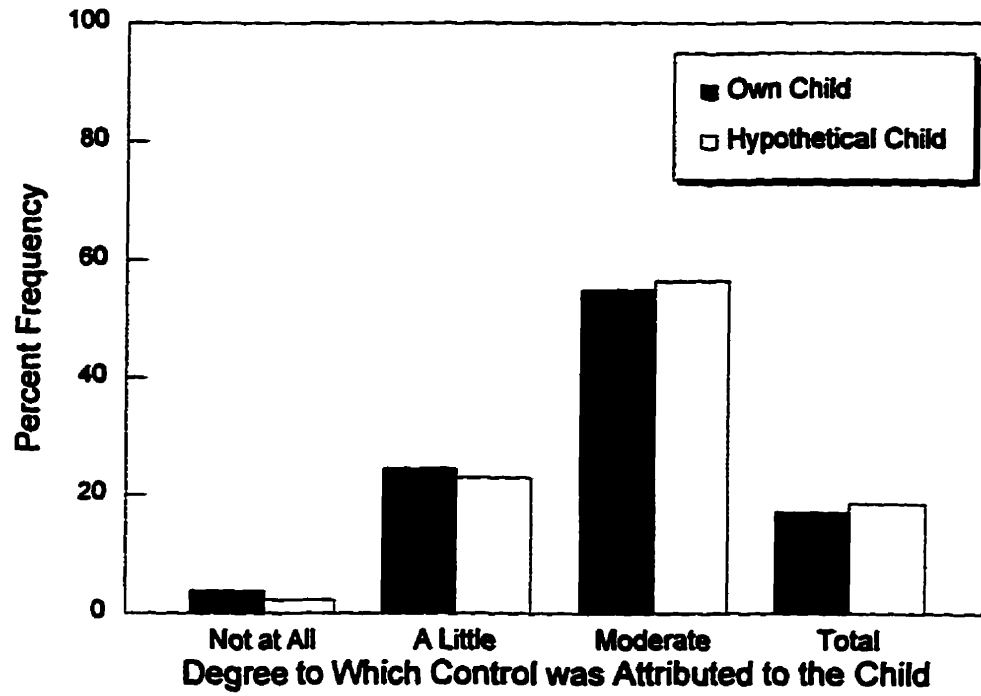


Figure 3. Percent frequency scores for ratings of child control by the Own Child and Hypothetical Child groups.

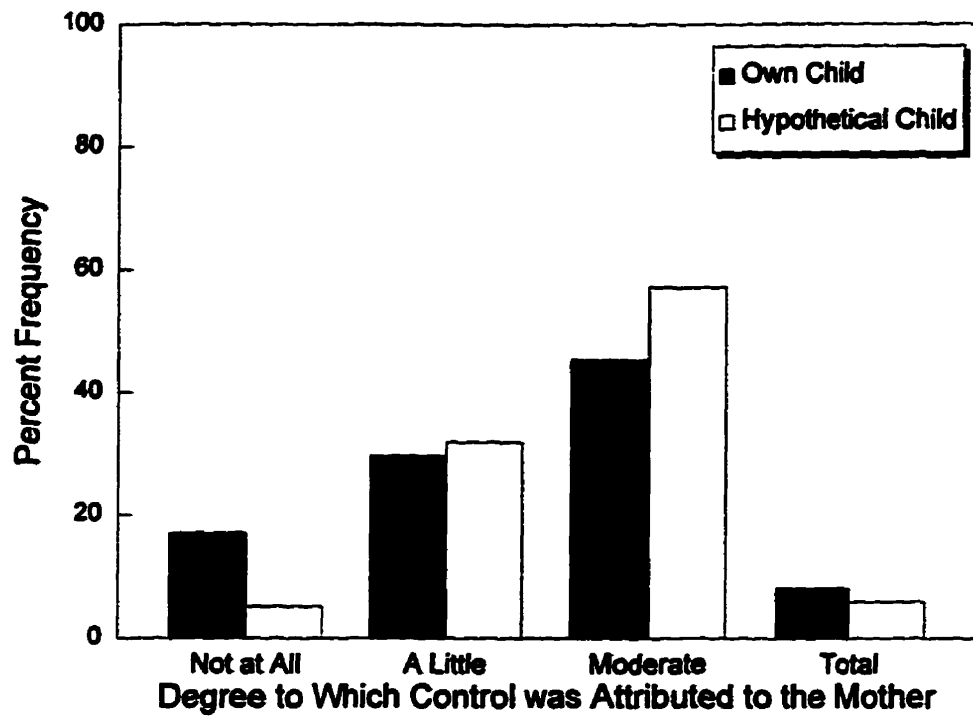


Figure 4. Percent frequency scores for ratings of maternal control by the Own Child and Hypothetical Child groups.

Test of Hypothesis 3 - Intentionality

Mothers of the Own Child group were expected to perceive child misbehaviour as being more intentional than mothers of the Hypothetical Child group. The majority of mothers in both groups believed that the child acted intentionally to some degree (see Figure 5) and no significant difference was found between groups' ratings, $U = 311.0$, $p = .83$ (see Table 2). The third hypothesis was not supported.

Test of Hypothesis 4 - Responsibility

The fourth hypothesis predicted that mothers in the Own Child group would hold the target children more responsible and the parent less responsible for misbehaviour than mothers in the Hypothetical Child group. To test this hypothesis, two Mann-Whitney U tests were conducted. No significant group differences were found on the child responsibility scale, $U = 347.0$, $p = .63$ (see Table 2). Among both groups of mothers, the majority viewed the child as bearing some degree of responsibility for misbehaviour (see Figure 6). However, a significant difference was found between the two groups of mothers on the maternal responsibility scale, $U = 201.0$, $p < .006$. The majority of mothers assigned partial responsibility to the parent. However, mothers in the Own Child group were most likely to view the mother as "a little" responsible (54%), while mothers in the Hypothetical Child group were most likely to view the mother as "largely" responsible (54%) (see Figure 7). As predicted then, members of the Hypothetical Child group held mothers more responsible for the children's misbehaviour than did members of the Own Child group. Therefore, this hypothesis was partially supported.

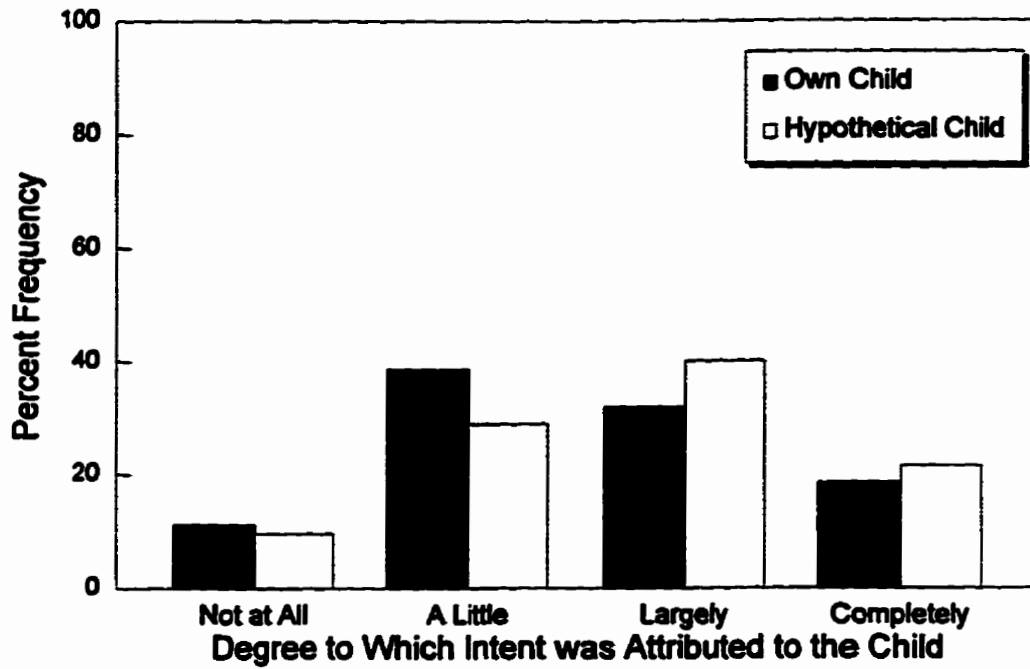


Figure 5. Percent frequency scores for ratings of child intentionality by the Own Child and Hypothetical Child groups.

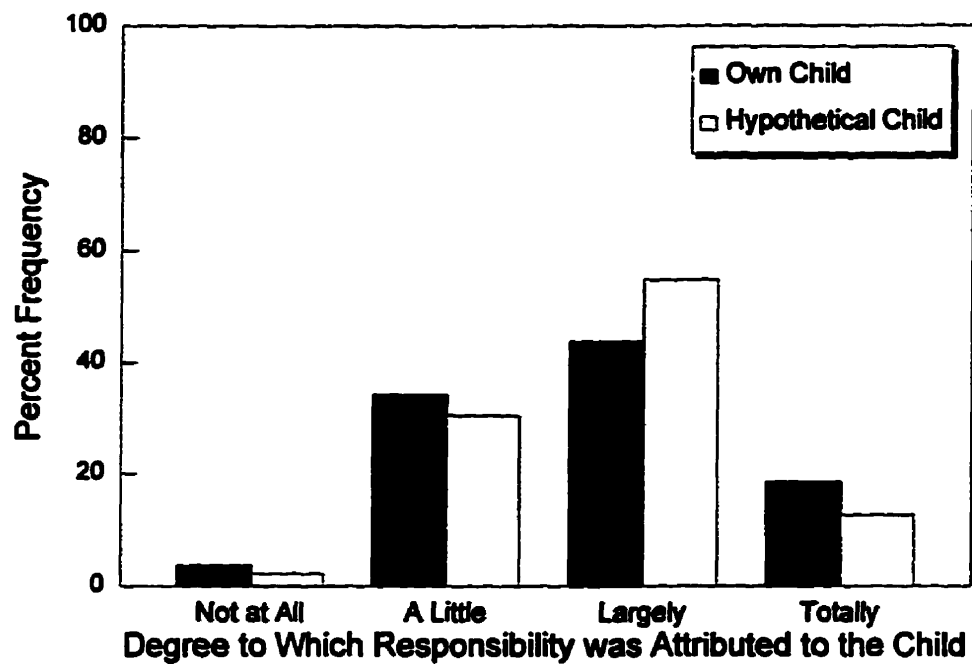


Figure 6. Percent frequency scores for ratings of child responsibility by the Own Child and Hypothetical Child groups.

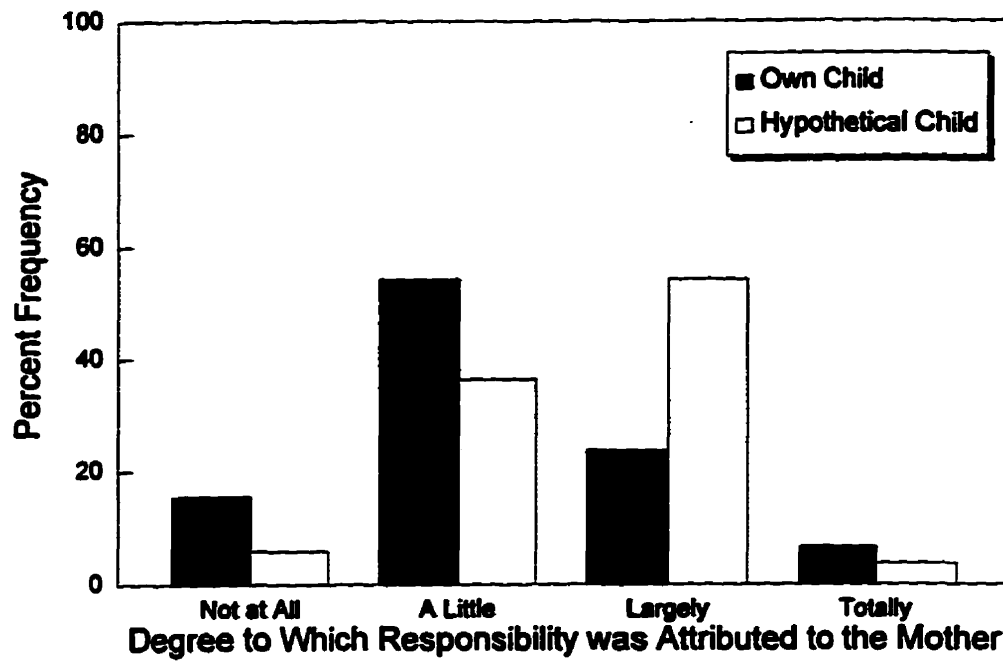


Figure 7. Percent frequency scores for ratings of maternal responsibility by the Own Child and Hypothetical Child groups.

Test of Hypothesis 5 - Anger

The fifth hypothesis predicted that mothers of the Own Child group would become more angry with child misconduct than mothers of the Hypothetical Child group. The majority of mothers in both the Own Child and the Hypothetical Child groups indicated that they felt moderate amounts of anger in response to child misbehaviour (see Figure 8), and no significant difference was found between the two groups' ratings on the anger scale, $U = 320.0$, $p = .22$ (see Table 2). Therefore, this hypothesis was not supported.

Test of Hypothesis 6 - Disciplinary Response

It was expected that mothers of the Own Child group would be more likely to recommend power-assertive strategies over inductive methods of discipline than mothers of the Hypothetical Child group. A Mann-Whitney U test was conducted to test for group differences. In both groups, mothers indicated a greater preference for inductive over power-assertive methods of discipline (see Figures 9 & 10) and no significant differences were found between the two groups of mothers, $U = 313.0$, $p = .18$ (see Table 2). Thus the hypothesis was not supported.

Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to determine whether mothers' causal perceptions of and responses to child misbehaviour varied with their relationships to the target children. It was expected that self-serving biases would be more strongly evident when mothers were asked to assess and respond to misbehaviour committed by their own children, than when they were asked to assess and respond to misbehaviour committed by hypothetical children. Although the findings

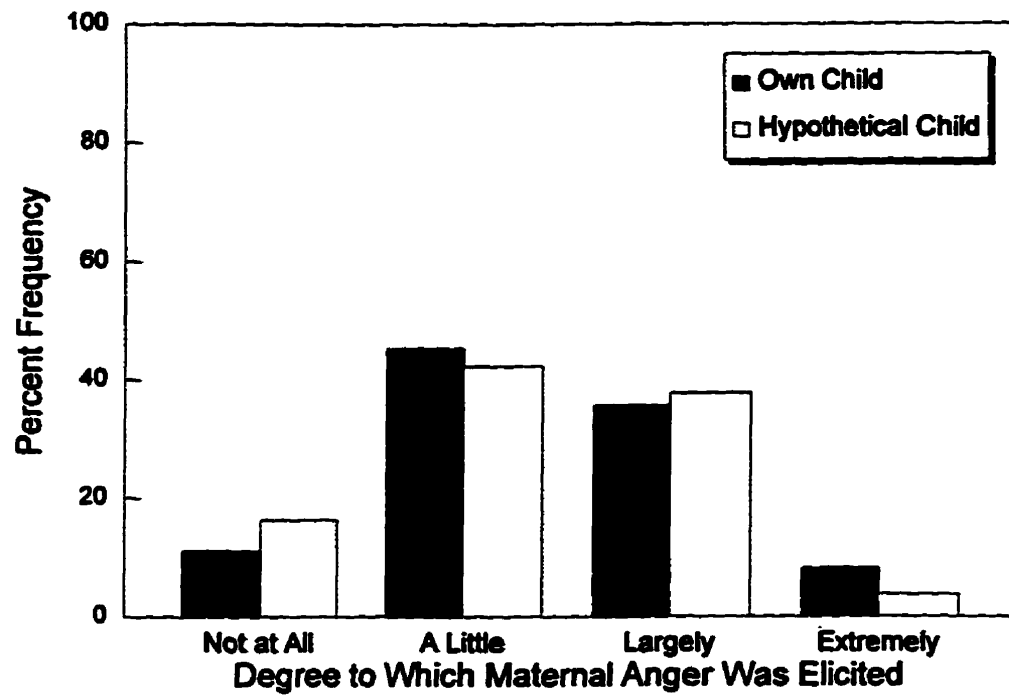


Figure 8. Percent frequency scores for ratings of maternal anger by the Own Child and Hypothetical Child groups.

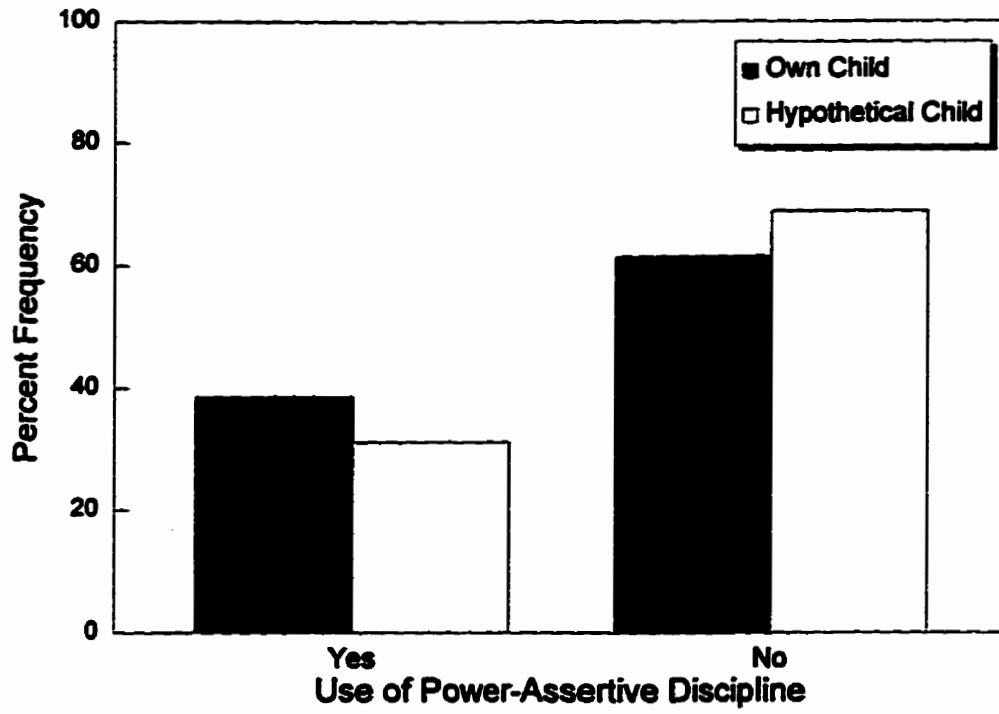


Figure 9. Percent frequency scores for ratings of power-assertive discipline by the Own Child and Hypothetical Child groups.

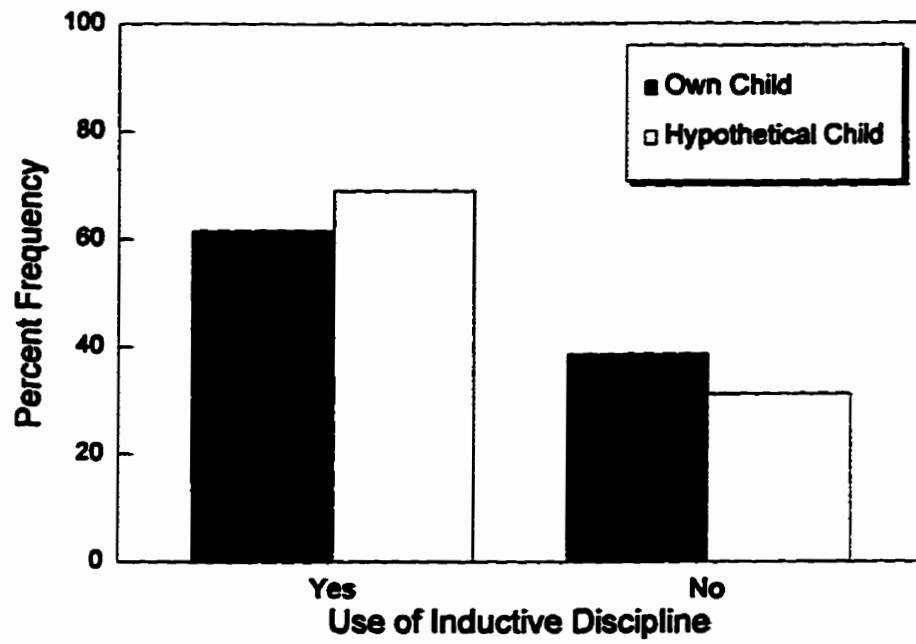


Figure 10. Percent frequency scores for ratings of inductive discipline by the Own Child and Hypothetical Child groups.

did not yield strong evidence supporting this prediction, they helped to isolate issues which may be key to understanding self-serving biases.

Maternal & Child Responsibility

The data indicated that, in general, mothers viewed the child and the parent as being partially responsible for the occurrence of misbehaviour. However, mothers in the Own Child group attributed less responsibility to the parent than did mothers of the Hypothetical Child group. These findings may provide evidence for the existence of self-serving biases, that is, the tendency to make attributions which protect or enhance one's self-image (Dix & Grusec, 1985). Previous findings have suggested that because parents' ability to manage child behaviour is directly related to their sense of competence (Grusec, Hastings, & Mammone, 1994), parents are motivated to relinquish responsibility by searching for alternate explanations for the occurrence of child misbehaviour (Dix & Grusec, 1985; Himmelstein, Graham, & Weiner, 1991). In the present study, mothers' responses to their own children's misbehaviour appeared to reflect this projection of responsibility. Among mothers who were not personally related to the target children, parenting competence should not have been threatened by the occurrence of child misbehaviour. As expected, these parents held the child's mothers responsible for the misbehaviour to a greater degree than did parents who were related to the target children. These findings provide evidence of self-serving bias and suggest that findings of attribution research may be confounded in studies where this variable is not controlled.

Interestingly, mothers from both groups held the child responsible for misbehaviour to a similar degree. As the preservation of a parent's sense of competence requires the parent to externalize responsibility, it was expected that

mothers who took little responsibility for behavioural transgressions would project responsibility onto their children, while mothers who were not threatened by an unknown child's misbehaviour would have little need to project responsibility onto the child. This hypothesis, however was not supported. There are three possible reasons for this finding. First, it is possible that in preserving their sense of parenting competence, mothers in both groups may have externalized responsibility (i.e., attributed it to the child) to some degree. This would mean that attributions of responsibility to the child do not distinguish these groups of mothers and that weaker attributions of responsibility to the mother are not necessarily accompanied by stronger attributions of responsibility to the child. Second, externalizing of responsibility is not limited to attributions to the child. Other external factors, such as peer taunting or task difficulty, were not considered in this study. Third, "mitigating circumstances" (Weiner, 1995, p. 9) may moderate judgements of others' responsibility. For example, a parent may not hold a child fully responsible for hitting a peer (internal-controllable cause) if the child did not recognize that the behaviour was wrong (mitigating circumstance). However, if the parent had taught the child that the behaviour was inappropriate (internal-controllable cause) but the message was given inconsistently, the parent may view responsibility as being shared between the parent and the child. According to the present findings, one of the primary factors distinguishing the two groups of mothers was their perceptions of maternal responsibility, suggesting that this factor plays a more significant role than child responsibility in perceptions of parenting competence.

Locus of Causality

Weiner (1995) stated that the judgement of responsibility was closely linked to perceptions of locus of causality. By definition, responsibility implies personal involvement (labelled "personal causality" by Weiner, 1995, p. 6). Therefore, it is not surprising that maternal perceptions of causality were found to distinguish the two groups of mothers in the present study. Mothers who were presented with their own child's misbehaviour perceived the parent as playing less of a causal role than mothers who were presented with misbehaviour committed by an unknown child. This finding provided further support for the existence of self-serving bias.

Mothers' perceptions of child causality also reflect their perceptions of responsibility. Target children were judged to be partially responsible for the misbehaviour and as contributing to the cause of the misbehaviour. The degree to which the child was viewed as causing the misbehaviour did not differ between the two groups of mothers. This finding suggests that perceptions of maternal and child causality are not mutually dependent, but vary independently in magnitude (Weiner, 1995). It appears that perceptions of maternal causality, rather than child causality, reflect the existence of self-serving bias. As in the case of the responsibility dimension, the maternal role appears to be the primary component of these cognitive biases.

Maternal Control

Weiner (1995) has also stated that the perception of responsibility is ultimately linked to freedom of choice. In attributing misbehaviour to a particular cause, the perceiver must conclude that the actor was in control of the cause before responsibility can be assigned. However, the findings of the present study

indicated that mothers viewed the parent and the child as sharing control of the misbehaviour and that attributions of maternal control and child control did not differ between groups.

The findings regarding perceptions of maternal control were surprising. According to Weiner's (1995) model, judgement of responsibility requires conclusions about personal causality and causal controllability. Yet, despite group differences in inferences about maternal responsibility and maternal causality, no significant group differences emerged in inferences about maternal control. This apparent inconsistency may suggest that inferences of responsibility, causality, and control are perceived as being qualitatively different by mothers responding to child misbehaviour. For example, in the case of a child hitting a peer, the parent of the child may be held responsible for the misbehaviour through inadequate socialization despite being unable to stop its occurrence in a particular situation (i.e., control it). That is, perceptions of control may apply to the immediate situation, while inferences of responsibility and causality may be more directly linked to the child-rearing role in general and represent a greater threat to parenting competence. Thus, group differences on maternal control may not have been found due to its greater relevance to the immediate situation than to more general and long-term child-rearing approaches.

Child Control & Intentionality

It was predicted that mothers responding to their own children's misbehaviour would perceive the child as being in greater control of the misbehaviour than mothers responding to hypothetical children's misbehaviour, and that they would be more likely to conclude that the child acted intentionally.

Mothers responding to misbehaviour committed by unknown children were expected to feel less threatened by such behaviour and, consequently, to perceive the child's mother as being in greater control of the misbehaviour and the child as acting less intentionally.

The results of the study did not reveal significant group differences on either the child control or intentionality scales. Both groups of mothers attributed a certain degree of control to the child and most believed the child's behaviour to be intentional. Once again, the findings suggest that self-serving bias is not evident with respect to the child related variables, as mothers' responses were similar both on ratings of child control and intent regardless of maternal relationship to the child.

Maternal Anger & Discipline Strategy

It was predicted that mothers responding to their own child's misbehaviour would become more angry and would be more likely to prefer power-assertive over inductive disciplinary strategies than mothers responding to unknown children. However, the findings of the present study did not support this hypothesis.

Findings of previous studies have demonstrated a relationship between parental affect and discipline strategy on the one hand, and attributions of child responsibility and intent on the other (Dix & Grusec, 1985; Dix & Reinhold, 1991; Dix, Reinhold, & Zambarano, 1990; Dix, Ruble, Grusec, & Nixon, 1986). Parental affect and response have also been linked to perceived control (Bugental, Blue, & Cruzcosa, 1989; Bugental, Blue, & Lewis, 1990; Bugental & Shunnum, 1984). Thus, previous literature had identified child responsibility and intent and parental control as predictors of parental affect and behavioural response. It may be speculated that because the first three of these variables did not distinguish the

groups in the present study, perhaps this is why the latter two did not differ between groups. If maternal anger is associated with the child's role, but the child's role is not viewed differently according to the mother's relationship to the child, it could be expected that her anger levels would also not differ. Similarly, if perceptions of parental control do not differ in the two conditions, one may speculate that anger and behaviour would also not differ. In other words, maternal anger and disciplinary responses may be linked primarily to cognitive dimensions that are not affected by self-serving biases and, therefore, do not differ between the conditions examined in the present study.

Limitations of the Present Study

The present study helped to shed light on the role of self-serving biases operating in situations of child misbehaviour. By controlling for the mother-child relationship, a methodological problem with previous parenting research was addressed. Two particular strengths of the present study were 1) the effort made to match groups on child age and sex, as well as maternal demographic characteristics, and 2) the standardization of measures across groups. However, due to several limitations of the present study, caution in generalizing its findings is warranted.

First, as the sample was restricted to mothers of preschoolers between three and five years of age who had never been clinically diagnosed with any physical or mental ailments, generalizability of the results is limited. It cannot be concluded that the findings would be similar among mothers of children from different age groups, from clinical populations, or among different informants (i.e., fathers).

Second, as mothers are more inclined to use power-assertive discipline with male than female children (Durrant & Rose-Krasnor, 1995b; Rose-Krasnor, Durrant, & Broberg, 1997; Wauchope & Straus, 1992), the gender of the target child may have influenced mothers' responses to child misconduct. Although the treatment groups were matched on this variable, within-group variations may have masked between-group differences.

Third, as a small sample of child misbehaviour was presented to the participants, findings cannot be generalized to all forms of child misbehaviour. The use of vignettes also introduces concerns of construct validity and external validity. That is, can vignettes accurately depict real occurrences of child misconduct, and are questionnaire responses comparable to maternal responses in real-life situations? Further, although the scenarios selected for inclusion in the PDI were those identified by parents as being the most frustrating and thus, were expected to evoke a wide range of emotions and disciplinary responses, these scenarios are confounded on several dimensions. For example, the scenarios presented both public (e.g., tantrum) and private transgressions (e.g., refusal to dress). Public misconduct may have been deemed a greater threat to parenting competence than misbehaviour in a private setting due to the presence of witnesses. The scenarios also confounded conventional transgressions (e.g., refusal to get dressed) and moral transgressions (e.g., hitting a peer), two classes of child misconduct which may elicit different cognitive, affective, and behavioural responses.

Fourth, as the present study examined a specific manifestation of self-serving bias, group differences may have remained undetected. Research has

demonstrated that due to parents' emotional involvement with their children and their role as socializers, they may make external attributions for child misconduct in an attempt to maintain a positive image of themselves and their loved ones (Dix & Grusec, 1985). For example, parents may view failure as being due to task difficulty - an external cause which may be countered by imparting information and skills to the child (Gretarsson & Gelfand, 1988). In doing so, they can maintain a positive impression of their child while believing the child's problem behaviour to be changeable, and continue to view themselves as competent parents. In the present study, attributional options were restricted to those internal to the parent and internal to the child. Thus, the degree to which mothers viewed situational factors as causes of misbehaviour was not assessed and this form of self-serving bias was not examined. Although understanding consistency of parenting approaches is of value, variations in forms of self-serving bias highlights the importance of understanding parents' flexibility across situations (Grusec & Goodnow, 1994).

Fifth, "anger" may have inaccurately depicted maternal affect in the face of child misconduct. For example, scenarios illustrating child defiance (e.g., refusal to get dressed) primarily may have elicited frustration or annoyance. Public misconduct (e.g., tantrums) may have elicited more embarrassment than anger. Misbehaviour jeopardizing the child's physical well-being (e.g., running into traffic) predominantly may have evoked fear. Further, as anger typically carries negative connotations, especially in relation to children, some mothers may have been reluctant to report feeling this emotion.

Sixth, mothers participating in the study were relatively well educated, suggesting the potential for greater exposure to various parenting strategies and

issues surrounding child-care. Approximately one-half of the participants were also involved in Y-Neighbour programs, which address many parenting topics. It is possible that mothers were introduced to some of the concepts investigated in the present study and that these academic experiences influenced not only their current child-rearing practices but also their responses to the questionnaires.

Finally, the psychometric properties of the Parental Disciplinary Beliefs Questionnaire are unknown. Although the authors of the PDI claim that it has proven to be a reliable and valid measure (Scarr, Pinkerton, & Eisenberg, 1991), systemic research would be required in order to assess the properties of the PDBQ. For example, while the use of standardized response options likely enhanced reliability, the limited number of attributional options offered may have decreased the measure's validity. The PDBQ also presented participants with limited response options as a means of finding group differences. However, the results suggested that four-point scales may have been too restrictive. As most responses fell in the two middle response categories, with the use of six-point or eight-point scales these mid-range responses may have been further distinguished and the greater variance would have made detection of group differences more likely. Further, the use of self-report introduced the issue of social desirability. That is, mothers' responses may have reflected what they believed to be socially acceptable and not how they would actually think about and respond to child misconduct. The low frequency in reporting power-assertive discipline may reflect the effect of social desirability.

Directions for Future Research

A number of methodological and theoretical questions arose from the present study. First, given the current limitations of the **Parental Disciplinary Beliefs Questionnaire**, it would be important to redesign the measure in order to enhance its reliability and validity. For example, it would be beneficial to systematically examine or control for the effects of the private/public distinction and different domains of behavioural transgressions. Therefore, research is needed on the psychometric properties of the PDBQ and a valid, reliable adaptation needs to be developed. It may also be useful to use an interview format to explore the types of scenarios which evoke the thoughts, feelings and behaviours of interest, as well as to clarify participants' beliefs. In addition, the establishment of rapport may decrease the effects of social desirability.

Second, the present study did not support the predicted relationship between parental responsibility, causality and controllability. Mothers' perceptions of parental responsibility and causality reflected the existence of a self-serving bias, while perceptions of parental control did not. This raises an important question as to whether maternal responsibility, causality and control are interpreted differently by mothers, suggesting that responsibility and causality relate more to behaviour in parenting competence while control relates more to the immediate situation. Grusec and Goodnow (1994) suggest that understanding flexibility of parenting approaches is just as important as understanding their consistency across situations. For example, parental control may vary with respect to parents' goals in disciplinary situations. Parents may not act to control or change children's non-compliant behaviours if they perceive these behaviours as contributing to the development of

autonomy. However, if the parenting goal is the internalization of certain rules and values, control may be used to promote these lessons. Future research needs to explore the basis of maternal perceptual decisions, and shed light on whether these factors contribute to the presence or absence of self-serving biases.

Third, the present study revealed that regardless of their relationship to the target child, mothers attributed some degree of causality to the child. This finding raises the question, to what degree is the attribution of child causality a manifestation of self-serving bias? Mothers' projection of causality onto the child (an external source) may serve to protect their sense of competence. Attributing some degree of blame to the child may also be healthy and adaptive, as it may help the child to internalize responsibility and develop empathy for those who are effected by the misbehaviour (Grusec & Goodnow, 1994). Further research is needed to clarify whether this externalizing of causality reflects a self-serving bias or simply illustrates parents' acknowledgement of the child's role and need to socialize the child.

Fourth, the present findings suggested that the maternal and child roles were not mutually dependent; thus, mothers in the Own Child group may have blamed something other than the child when they assumed relatively little responsibility for the occurrence of child misbehaviour. Perhaps mothers were more inclined to blame situational causes, such as task difficulty or peer taunting, enabling them to maintain positive images of themselves and their children. Future research should take into account the variety of ways self-serving biases may manifest, by designing studies which consider not only the projection of causal attributions between family members, but also attributions to external sources.

Fifth, further research is needed to assess the validity of attribution models for children of different age groups and competencies, as well as for various forms of child misconduct. Finally, the roles played by gender (parent and child) and culture in parents' beliefs and behaviours need to be explored. Research on fathers' beliefs is severely lacking, as are systematic studies of the effects of religion and ethnicity on parenting beliefs and practices. For example, given the high level of immigration to Canada, it would be important to study cultural differences in beliefs about child misbehaviour and the conflicts they may produce in immigrant families.

Conclusion

The findings of the present study suggest that mothers' causal assessments of and responses to child misconduct vary with respect to their relationship to the child, but only with regard to their parenting role. Self-serving biases were noted in mothers' perceptions of maternal causality and maternal responsibility. Thus, it would appear that these causal inferences pose a significant threat to parenting competence when one's own child misbehaves. Surprisingly, beliefs about maternal control did not reflect self-serving bias, suggesting that perceptions of maternal control may relate more to the immediate cause of the transgression and less to the parent's general sense of competence. Inferences of child intent, child control, and maternal anger, did not appear to manifest self-serving biases, nor did mothers' disciplinary responses.

If mothers tend to project maternal causality and responsibility away from themselves in situations where their own children misbehave, and to blame parents in situations where unknown children misbehave, then some interesting implications for those who deal with children and their families are apparent. For example, in

education or day-care settings, professionals are exposed to a vast array of child misbehaviour and may be quick to judge the child's parent as being the cause of those behaviours. Such a focus on the child's upbringing may lead to the exclusion of alternate explanations, such as a physical/mental limitation or social/emotional issues, and jeopardize the child's healthy development and rapport with the parents.

Recent public debate about parental responsibility for the behaviour of young offenders has highlighted the importance of research on self-serving bias in beliefs about misbehaviour. While the public-at-large calls for compensation by parents for their children's criminal actions, reflecting their judgement of other parents as largely responsible for their children's behaviour, parents of young offenders argue that the child bears primary responsibility for the behaviour and should be required to shoulder it. Such debates indicate the importance of considering the issues examined in the present study, as they have significant implications for social conflict and public policy. As parents learn to identify more objectively where the cause of, control of, and responsibility for child misbehaviour lies, they can deal more effectively with these situations. In this way, their parenting abilities can be enhanced and their children can benefit.

1. While as previously mentioned, self-serving biases may be seen in parents' tendencies to make external attributions for child misconduct (i.e., blame the child or some situational factor), the current literature has focused primarily on parents' perceptions of themselves and their children (Dix & Grusec, 1986; Gretarsson & Gelfand, 1988). For the purpose of the present study, measures of self-serving bias were limited to the parent and the child in an attempt to replicate previous findings. In order to assess parents' beliefs across various types of child misbehaviour, it was necessary to standardize causal categories which would not be possible in cases of situational variables. Further, the inclusion of additional variables would increase the number of hypotheses and statistical tests conducted thereby increasing further the probability of Type I error.

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APPENDIX A**Introductory Letter**

Dear Director,

As a graduate student in the Family Studies Department at the University of Manitoba, I am currently conducting a study of parental beliefs about the nature of preschoolers' behaviour and their responses to it. I am looking for mothers of children between 3 and 5 years of age who may be interested in participating in this study. Mothers will be asked to complete two questionnaires which will take no more than one hour of their time. The first questionnaire (i.e., Demographic Questionnaire) focuses on general information about the mothers and their families. This information is used to describe the general population of subjects who participated in the project. The second questionnaire (Parental Beliefs Questionnaire) is comprised of five scenarios describing different forms of child behaviour. Mothers are asked to read each scenario and then answer the questions that follow. Informed consent will be obtained from all participants and confidentiality of their responses will be assured. In addition, mothers will receive feedback on the findings when the study is complete.

I am conducting this study under the supervision of my advisor Dr. Joan E. Durrant, Ph.D., C.Psych. The project has been approved by the Ethics Review Committees at the University of Manitoba and at the University of Winnipeg.

I would like to ask for your help in finding mothers who may be interested in participating. I am willing to explore various ways of reaching mothers until we find one that you are comfortable with and that is least disruptive to your groups. Perhaps if a general invitation to participate and contact information is extended to the mothers by the group leaders or through a posting at your organization, this may minimize any inconvenience and help preserve confidentiality.

I would be happy to meet with you to answer any of your questions and to go over the questionnaires before you make a decision. You can reach me at 586-9983 (a message can be left). If I have not heard from you I will be in contact with you within the week.

Respectfully yours,

Karen Leah Rees, B.A., M.Sc. Candidate

APPENDIX B**Director's Consent Form**

I agree to participate in the research investigation "Parental Cognitions in Disciplinary Situations", which is being conducted by Karen Leah Rees, B.A., M.Sc. Candidate of the University of Manitoba. My participation will be limited to providing access to the mothers in my program. The project has been explained to me to my satisfaction and I have taken all steps necessary before providing this consent.

I understand that all parental responses will be kept confidential. I further understand that if the results of this study are published, neither the program nor the mothers will be identified in any way. If I have any question, I may contact Karen Leah Rees at 586-9983.

Signature of Program Director

Print Your Name

Date

Name of Program

APPENDIX C**Recruitment Letter to Day-Care Parents****Tantrums . Assertiveness . Defiance . Curiosity . ?****Are child-rearing situations viewed in different ways?**

You are invited to participate in a study that is looking at mothers' (of preschool children, ages 3-5 years) perceptions of child behaviour.

Questionnaires can be completed in the comfort of your home, and should take no more than one hour of your time.

Participation is voluntary and confidentiality is assured.

If you would like further information about the study, please contact Karen Leah Rees (Master's student in the Department of Family Studies) at 586-9983 (a message can be left).

If you are interested in participating, please complete this form and return it to the Child Development Centre.

Mother's Name

Telephone Number

Best Times To Reach You At

APPENDIX D

Demographic Questionnaire

Parent ID: _____ Date: _____

In order to better understand and compare parental responses to different situations of child behaviour, I require some information about yourself and your family.

Your age: _____

Current marital status:

 married divorced separated remarried living with partner widowed single

other:(please specify)_____

Do you speak English fluently? Yes No

Your highest level of education: _____ (grade or degree completed)

Your current occupation: _____

The total income of your household for 1995 before taxes and deductions:

 under 20,000 35,000-39,999 55,000-59,999 75,000-79,999 20,000-24,999 40,000-44,999 60,000-64,999 80,999-84,999 25,000-29,999 45,000-49,999 65,000-69,999 85,000-89,999 30,000-34,999 50,000-54,999 70,000-74,999 90,000 & over

Number of children living in your home: _____

Please list the following information about the children living in your home. In order of age, start with the youngest child on line 1 and end with your oldest child.

First Name	Birthdate (dd/mm/yy)	Gender (M/F)	Your Relationship to Child	Current Child-Care Arrangements
1. _____	_____	_____	_____ Adopted/Step _____ Biological	_____ Mother; _____ Father; _____ Relatives; _____ Nanny; _____ Daycare Center _____ Kindergarten; _____ Other _____
Condition: _____ Yes / _____ No				
2. _____	_____	_____	_____ Adopted/Step _____ Biological	_____ Mother; _____ Father; _____ Relatives; _____ Nanny; _____ Daycare Center _____ Kindergarten; _____ Other _____
Condition: _____ Yes / _____ No				
3. _____	_____	_____	_____ Adopted/Step _____ Biological	_____ Mother; _____ Father; _____ Relatives; _____ Nanny; _____ Daycare Center _____ Kindergarten; _____ Other _____
Condition: _____ Yes / _____ No				
4. _____	_____	_____	_____ Adopted/Step _____ Biological	_____ Mother; _____ Father; _____ Relatives; _____ Nanny; _____ Daycare Center _____ Kindergarten; _____ Other _____
Condition: _____ Yes / _____ No				
5. _____	_____	_____	_____ Adopted/Step _____ Biological	_____ Mother; _____ Father; _____ Relatives; _____ Nanny; _____ Daycare Center _____ Kindergarten; _____ Other _____
Condition: _____ Yes / _____ No				

APPENDIX E

Consent Form

I _____, consent to participate in a research study being conducted by Karen Leah Rees, entitled "Parental Cognitions in Disciplinary Situations." The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of how parents think about and respond to child behaviour. I understand that my involvement will take no more than 1 hour of my time. I will be asked to complete a demographic questionnaire about my family. I will also be asked to read descriptions of situations involving child behaviour and to answer questions about certain aspects of these events. My participation is completely voluntary and I may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. I am also aware that my responses will be kept strictly confidential, and my identity will not be revealed.

If I have any questions or would like further information about the study, I may contact Karen Leah Rees at the Department of Family Studies, University of Manitoba, (phone: 474-9225 or 474-8344). Messages can be left.

Signature _____ Date _____

Home Address: _____
(include postal code)

Phone # _____

Best Times To Contact Me _____

Investigator _____ Date _____

APPENDIX F**Parental Disciplinary Beliefs Questionnaire
for Own Child Group
(adapted from Scarr, Pinkerton, & Eisenberg, 1991)**

I am interested in how you think about children's behaviour. While you read the following stories, imagine your child in each of the situations. Please answer the questions that follow each scenario, by circling the number on each scale that matches your response.

(THE CHILD'S NAME) and a neighbour's child are playing together. (YOUR CHILD) asks to play with a toy, but the other child refuses. (THE CHILD'S NAME) becomes angry, hits the playmate, and takes the toy.

1a. How much do you believe that (THE CHILD'S NAME)'s behaviour in this situation is due to her/his own characteristics?

1	2	3	4
not at all	a little	largely	completely

b. How much do you believe that (THE CHILD'S NAME)'s behaviour in this situation due to your behaviour as a parent?

1	2	3	4
not at all	a little	largely	completely

2a. How much control do you believe (THE CHILD'S NAME) has over his/her behaviour in this situation?

1	2	3	4
absolutely no control	a little control	a moderate amount of control	total control

b. How much control do you believe that you have over (THE CHILD'S NAME)'s behaviour in this situation?

1	2	3	4
absolutely no control	a little control	a moderate amount of control	total control

3. To what degree do you believe that (THE CHILD'S NAME) behaved this way on purpose?

1	2	3	4
not at all	a little	largely	completely

4a. To what degree do you believe that (THE CHILD'S NAME) was responsible for her/his behaviour in this situation?

1	2	3	4
not at all responsible	a little responsible	largely responsible	totally responsible

b. To what degree do you believe that you were responsible for (THE CHILD'S NAME)'s behaviour in this situation?

1	2	3	4
not at all responsible	a little responsible	largely responsible	totally responsible

5. How angry would you be with (THE CHILD'S NAME)'s behaviour if you saw her/him behave this way?

1	2	3	4
not at all angry	a little angry	largely angry	extremely angry

6. Please rank in order of preference (1 =first choice, 2=second choice, 3=last choice) the three the disciplinary strategies you would be most likely to use in this situation.

- _____ explain why the behaviour is wrong
- _____ spank my child
- _____ distract my child
- _____ yell at my child to stop
- _____ ignore my child
- _____ show my child a better way of behaving
- _____ negotiate with my child
- _____ warn about consequences if the behaviour continues
(i.e., punishment, withdrawal of privileges, or a 'time out')

You are outside with your family. When you are not looking, (THE CHILD'S NAME) runs into the street, falls down and starts to cry. You pick her/him up and s/he doesn't seem to be hurt.

1a. How much do you believe that (THE CHILD'S NAME)'s behaviour in this situation is due to her/his own characteristics?

1	2	3	4
not at all	a little	largely	completely

b. How much so you believe that (THE CHILD'S NAME)'s behaviour in this situation due to your behaviour as a parent?

1	2	3	4
not at all	a little	largely	completely

2a. How much control do you believe (THE CHILD'S NAME) has over his/her behaviour in this situation?

1	2	3	4
absolutely no control	a little control	a moderate amount of control	total control

b. How much control do you believe that you have over (THE CHILD'S NAME)'s behaviour in this situation?

1	2	3	4
absolutely no control	a little control	a moderate amount of control	total control

3. To what degree do you believe that (THE CHILD'S NAME) behaved this way on purpose?

1	2	3	4
not at all	a little	largely	completely

4a. To what degree do you believe that (THE CHILD'S NAME) was responsible for her/his behaviour in this situation?

1	2	3	4
not at all responsible	a little responsible	largely responsible	totally responsible

b. To what degree do you believe that you were responsible for (THE CHILD'S NAME)'s behaviour in this situation?

1	2	3	4
not at all responsible	a little responsible	largely responsible	totally responsible

5. How angry would you be with (THE CHILD'S NAME)'s behaviour if you saw her/him behave this way?

1	2	3	4
not at all angry	a little angry	largely angry	extremely angry

6. Please rank in order of preference (1 = first choice, 2 = second choice, 3 = third choice), the three disciplinary strategies you would be most likely to use in this situation.

- ___ explain why the behaviour is wrong
- ___ distract my child
- ___ spank my child
- ___ ignore my child
- ___ yell at my child to stop
- ___ show my child a better way of behaving
- ___ negotiate with my child
- ___ warn about consequences if the behaviour continues
(i.e., punishment, withdrawal of privileges, or a 'time out')

(THE CHILD'S NAME) refuses to get dressed in the morning, when you are in a hurry to get out of the house. (THE CHILD'S NAME) will not put on the clothes and refuses to let you dress her/him. S/he fusses, whines, and throws her/himself on the floor.

1a. How much do you believe that (THE CHILD'S NAME)'s behaviour in this situation is due to her/his own characteristics?

1	2	3	4
not at all	a little	largely	completely

b. How much do you believe that (THE CHILD'S NAME)'s behaviour in this situation due to your behaviour as a parent?

1	2	3	4
not at all	a little	largely	completely

2a. How much control do you believe (THE CHILD'S NAME) has over his/her behaviour in this situation?

1	2	3	4
absolutely no control	a little control	a moderate amount of control	total control

b. How much control do you believe that you have over (THE CHILD'S NAME)'s behaviour in this situation?

1	2	3	4
absolutely no control	a little control	a moderate amount of control	total control

3. To what degree do you believe that (THE CHILD'S NAME) behaved this way on purpose?

1	2	3	4
not at all	a little	largely	completely

4a. To what degree do you believe that (THE CHILD'S NAME) was responsible for her/his behaviour in this situation?

1	2	3	4
not at all responsible	a little responsible	largely responsible	totally responsible

b. To what degree do you believe that you were responsible for (THE CHILD'S NAME)'s behaviour in this situation?

1	2	3	4
not at all responsible	a little responsible	largely responsible	totally responsible

5. How angry would you be with (THE CHILD'S NAME)'s behaviour if you saw her/him behave this way?

1	2	3	4
not at all angry	a little angry	largely angry	extremely angry

6. Please rank in order of preference (1 = first choice, 2 = second choice, 3 = third choice) the three disciplinary strategies you would be most likely to use in this situation.

- _____ explain why the behaviour is wrong
- _____ distract my child
- _____ yell at my child to stop
- _____ spank my child
- _____ ignore my child
- _____ show my child a better way of behaving
- _____ negotiate with my child
- _____ warn about consequences if the behaviour continues
(i.e., punishment, withdrawal of privileges, or a 'time out')

You are shopping in the store and (THE CHILD'S NAME) is with you. (THE CHILD'S NAME) sees something s/he likes and asks if s/he can have it. you say NO, but (THE CHILD'S NAME) demands to have it and starts crying and screaming.

1a. How much do you believe that (THE CHILD'S NAME)'s behaviour in this situation is due to her/his own characteristics?

1	2	3	4
not at all	a little	largely	completely

b. How much do you believe that (THE CHILD'S NAME)'s behaviour in this situation due to your behaviour as a parent?

1	2	3	4
not at all	a little	largely	completely

2a. How much control do you believe (THE CHILD'S NAME) has over his/her behaviour in this situation?

1	2	3	4
absolutely no control	a little control	a moderate amount of control	total control

b. How much control do you believe that you have over (THE CHILD'S NAME)'s behaviour in this situation?

1	2	3	4
absolutely no control	a little control	a moderate amount of control	total control

3. To what degree do you believe that (THE CHILD'S NAME) behaved this way on purpose?

1	2	3	4
not at all	a little	largely	completely

4a. To what degree do you believe that (THE CHILD'S NAME) was responsible for her/his behaviour in this situation?

1	2	3	4
not at all	a little	largely	totally
responsible	responsible	responsible	responsible

b. To what degree do you believe that you were responsible for (THE CHILD'S NAME)'s behaviour in this situation?

1	2	3	4
not at all	a little	largely	totally
responsible	responsible	responsible	responsible

5. How angry would you be with (THE CHILD'S NAME)'s behaviour if you saw her/him behave this way?

1	2	3	4
not at all	a little	largely	extremely
angry	angry	angry	angry

6. Please rank in order of preference (1 = first choice, 2 = second choice, 3 = third choice), the three disciplinary strategies you would be most likely to use in this situation.

- _____ explain why the behaviour is wrong
- _____ spank my child
- _____ ignore my child
- _____ distract my child
- _____ yell at my child to stop
- _____ show my child a better way of behaving
- _____ negotiate with my child
- _____ warn about consequences if the behaviour continues
(i.e., punishment, withdrawal of privileges, or a 'time out')

(THE CHILD'S NAME) refuses to quiet-down after being put to bed. S/he screams and cries until your nerves are frayed.

1a. How much do you believe that (THE CHILD'S NAME)'s behaviour in this situation is due to her/his own characteristics?

1	2	3	4
not at all	a little	largely	completely

b. How much do you believe that (THE CHILD'S NAME)'s behaviour in this situation due to your behaviour as a parent?

1	2	3	4
not at all	a little	largely	completely

2a. How much control do you believe (THE CHILD'S NAME) has over his/her behaviour in this situation?

1	2	3	4
absolutely no control	a little control	a moderate amount of control	total control

b. How much control do you believe that you have over (THE CHILD'S NAME)'s behaviour in this situation?

1	2	3	4
absolutely no control	a little control	a moderate amount of control	total control

3. To what degree do you believe that (THE CHILD'S NAME) behaved this way on purpose?

1	2	3	4
not at all	a little	largely	completely

4a. To what degree do you believe that (THE CHILD'S NAME) was responsible for her/his behaviour in this situation?

1	2	3	4
not at all responsible	a little responsible	largely responsible	totally responsible

b. To what degree do you believe that you were responsible for (THE CHILD'S NAME)'s behaviour in this situation?

1	2	3	4
not at all responsible	a little responsible	largely responsible	totally responsible

5. How angry would you be with (THE CHILD'S NAME)'s behaviour if you saw her/him behave this way?

1	2	3	4
not at all angry	a little angry	largely angry	extremely angry

6. Please rank in order of preference (1 = first choice, 2 = second choice, 3 = third choice), the three disciplinary strategies you would be most likely to use in this situation.

- _____ explain why the behaviour is wrong
- _____ distract my child
- _____ spank my child
- _____ ignore my child
- _____ yell at my child to stop
- _____ show my child a better way of behaving
- _____ negotiate with my child
- _____ warn about consequences if the behaviour continues
(i.e., punishment, withdrawal of privileges, or a 'time out')

APPENDIX G**Parental Disciplinary Beliefs Questionnaire for
Hypothetical Child Group
(adapted from Scarr, Pinkerton, & Eisenberg, 1991)**

I am interested in how you think about preschool children's behaviour.

Please read the following scenarios and answer the questions that follow each story, by circling the number on each scale that best represents how you would think in that situation.

(THE HYPOTHETICAL CHILD'S NAME) and a neighbourhood's child are playing together. (THE HYPOTHETICAL CHILD'S NAME) asks to play with a toy, but the other child refuses. (THE HYPOTHETICAL CHILD'S NAME) becomes angry, hits the playmate, and takes the toy.

1a. How much do you believe that (THE HYPOTHETICAL CHILD'S NAME)'s behaviour in this situation is due to his/her own characteristics?

1	2	3	4
not at all	a little	largely	completely

b. How much do you believe that (THE HYPOTHETICAL CHILD'S NAME)'s behaviour in this situation due to the behaviour of (THE HYPOTHETICAL CHILD'S NAME)'s mother?

1	2	3	4
not at all	a little	largely	completely

2a. How much control do you believe (THE HYPOTHETICAL CHILD'S NAME) has over his/her behaviour in this situation?

1	2	3	4
absolutely no control	a little control	a moderate amount of control	total control

b. How much control do you believe that (THE HYPOTHETICAL CHILD'S NAME)'s mother has over (THE HYPOTHETICAL CHILD'S NAME)'s behaviour in this situation?

1	2	3	4
absolutely no control	a little control	a moderate amount of control	total control

3. To what degree do you believe that (THE HYPOTHETICAL CHILD'S NAME) behaved this way on purpose?

1	2	3	4
not at all	a little	largely	completely

4a. To what degree do you believe that (THE HYPOTHETICAL CHILD'S NAME) was responsible for her/his behaviour in this situation?

1	2	3	4
not at all responsible	a little responsible	largely responsible	totally responsible

b. To what degree do you believe that (THE HYPOTHETICAL CHILD'S NAME)'s mother was responsible for (THE HYPOTHETICAL CHILD'S NAME)'s behaviour in this situation?

1	2	3	4
not at all responsible	a little responsible	largely responsible	totally responsible

5. How angry would you be with (THE HYPOTHETICAL CHILD'S NAME)'s behaviour if you saw her/him behave this way?

1	2	3	4
not at all angry	a little angry	largely angry	extremely angry

6. Please rank in order of preference (1 = first choice, 2 = second choice, 3 = third choice), the three disciplinary strategies you would be most likely to use in this situation.

- _____ explain why the behaviour is wrong
- _____ distract the child
- _____ spank the child
- _____ ignore the child
- _____ yell at the child to stop
- _____ show the child a better way of behaving
- _____ negotiate with the child
- _____ warn about consequences if the behaviour continues
(i.e., punishment, withdrawal of privileges, or a 'time out')

(THE HYPOTHETICAL CHILD'S NAME)'s mother is outside with her family. When she is not looking, (THE HYPOTHETICAL CHILD'S NAME) runs into the street, falls down and starts crying. (THE HYPOTHETICAL CHILD'S NAME)'s mother picks her/him up and s/he doesn't seem to be hurt.

1a. How much do you believe that (THE HYPOTHETICAL CHILD'S NAME)'s behaviour in this situation is due to her/his own characteristics?

1	2	3	4
not at all	a little	largely	completely

b. How much do you believe that (THE HYPOTHETICAL CHILD'S NAME)'s behaviour in this situation due to the behaviour of (THE HYPOTHETICAL CHILD'S NAME)'s mother?

1	2	3	4
not at all	a little	largely	completely

2a. How much control do you believe (THE HYPOTHETICAL CHILD'S NAME) has over his/her behaviour in this situation?

1	2	3	4
absolutely no control	a little control	a moderate amount of control	total control

b. How much control do you believe that (THE HYPOTHETICAL CHILD'S NAME)'s mother has over (THE HYPOTHETICAL CHILD'S NAME)'s behaviour in this situation?

1	2	3	4
absolutely no control	a little control	a moderate amount of control	total control

3. To what degree do you believe that (THE HYPOTHETICAL CHILD'S NAME) behaved this way on purpose?

1	2	3	4
not at all	a little	largely	completely

4a. To what degree do you believe that (THE HYPOTHETICAL CHILD'S NAME) was responsible for her/his behaviour in this situation?

1	2	3	4
not at all responsible	a little responsible	largely responsible	totally responsible

b. To what degree do you believe that (THE HYPOTHETICAL CHILD'S NAME)'s mother was responsible for (THE HYPOTHETICAL CHILD'S NAME)'s behaviour in this situation?

1	2	3	4
not at all responsible	a little responsible	largely responsible	totally responsible

5. How angry would you be with (THE HYPOTHETICAL CHILD'S NAME)'s behaviour if you saw her/him behave this way?

1	2	3	4
not at all angry	a little angry	largely angry	extremely angry

6. Please rank in order of preference (1 = first choice, 2 = second choice, 3 = third choice), the three disciplinary strategies you would be most likely to use in this situation.

- ___ explain why the behaviour is wrong
- ___ distract the child
- ___ spank the child
- ___ ignore the child
- ___ yell at the child to stop
- ___ show the child a better way of behaving
- ___ negotiate with the child
- ___ warn about consequences if the behaviour continues
(i.e., punishment, withdrawal of privileges, or a 'time out')

(THE HYPOTHETICAL CHILD'S NAME) refuses to get dressed in the morning, when her/his mother is in a hurry to get out of the house. (THE HYPOTHETICAL CHILD'S NAME) will not put on the clothes and refuses to let her/his mother help her/him. S/he fusses, whines, and thrown her/himself on the floor.

1a. How much do you believe that (THE HYPOTHETICAL CHILD'S NAME)'s behaviour in this situation is due to her/his own characteristics?

1	2	3	4
not at all	a little	largely	completely

b. How much do you believe that (THE HYPOTHETICAL CHILD'S NAME)'s behaviour in this situation due to the behaviour of (THE HYPOTHETICAL CHILD'S NAME)'s mother?

1	2	3	4
not at all	a little	largely	completely

2a. How much control do you believe (THE HYPOTHETICAL CHILD'S NAME) has over his/her behaviour in this situation?

1	2	3	4
absolutely no control	a little control	a moderate amount of control	total control

b. How much control do you believe that (THE HYPOTHETICAL CHILD'S NAME)'s mother has over (THE HYPOTHETICAL CHILD'S NAME)'s behaviour in this situation?

1	2	3	4
absolutely no control	a little control	a moderate amount of control	total control

3. To what degree do you believe that (THE HYPOTHETICAL CHILD'S NAME) behaved this way on purpose?

1	2	3	4
not at all	a little	largely	completely

4a. To what degree do you believe that (THE HYPOTHETICAL CHILD'S NAME) was responsible for her/his behaviour in this situation?

1	2	3	4
not at all responsible	a little responsible	largely responsible	totally responsible

b. To what degree do you believe that (THE HYPOTHETICAL CHILD'S NAME)'s mother was responsible for (THE HYPOTHETICAL CHILD'S NAME)'s behaviour in this situation?

1	2	3	4
not at all responsible	a little responsible	largely responsible	totally responsible

5. How angry would you be with (THE HYPOTHETICAL CHILD'S NAME)'s behaviour if you saw her/him behave this way?

1	2	3	4
not at all angry	a little angry	largely angry	extremely angry

6. Please rank in order of preference (1 = first choice, 2 = second choice, 3 = third choice), the three disciplinary strategies you would be most likely to use in this situation.

- ___ explain why the behaviour is wrong
- ___ distract the child
- ___ spank the child
- ___ ignore the child
- ___ yell at the child to stop
- ___ show the child a better way of behaving
- ___ negotiate with the child
- ___ warn about consequences if the behaviour continues
(i.e., punishment, withdrawal of privileges, or a 'time out')

(THE HYPOTHETICAL CHILD'S NAME) and her/his mother are shopping in a store. (THE HYPOTHETICAL CHILD'S NAME) sees something s/he likes and asks if s/he can have it. (THE HYPOTHETICAL CHILD'S NAME)'s mother says NO, but (THE HYPOTHETICAL CHILD'S NAME) demands to have it and starts crying and screaming.

1a. How much do you believe that (THE HYPOTHETICAL CHILD'S NAME)'s behaviour in this situation is due to her/his own characteristics?

1	2	3	4
not at all	a little	largely	completely

b. How much do you believe that (THE HYPOTHETICAL CHILD'S NAME)'s behaviour in this situation due to the behaviour of (THE HYPOTHETICAL CHILD'S NAME)'s mother?

1	2	3	4
not at all	a little	largely	completely

2a. How much control do you believe (THE HYPOTHETICAL CHILD'S NAME) has over his/her behaviour in this situation?

1	2	3	4
absolutely no control	a little control	a moderate amount of control	total control

b. How much control do you believe that (THE HYPOTHETICAL CHILD'S NAME)'s mother has over (THE HYPOTHETICAL CHILD'S NAME)'s behaviour in this situation?

1	2	3	4
absolutely no control	a little control	a moderate amount of control	total control

3. To what degree do you believe that (THE HYPOTHETICAL CHILD'S NAME) behaved this way on purpose?

1	2	3	4
not at all	a little	largely	completely

4a. To what degree do you believe that (THE HYPOTHETICAL CHILD'S NAME) was responsible for her/his behaviour in this situation?

1	2	3	4
not at all responsible	a little responsible	largely responsible	totally responsible

b. To what degree do you believe that (THE HYPOTHETICAL CHILD'S NAME)'s mother was responsible for (THE HYPOTHETICAL CHILD'S NAME)'s behaviour in this situation?

1	2	3	4
not at all responsible	a little responsible	largely responsible	totally responsible

5. How angry would you be with (THE HYPOTHETICAL CHILD'S NAME)'s behaviour if you saw her/him behave this way?

1	2	3	4
not at all angry	a little angry	largely angry	extremely angry

6. Please rank in order of preference (1 = first choice, 2 = second choice, 3 = third choice), the three disciplinary strategies you would be most likely to use in this situation.

- _____ explain why the behaviour is wrong
- _____ distract the child
- _____ spank the child
- _____ ignore the child
- _____ yell at the child to stop
- _____ show the child a better way of behaving
- _____ negotiate with the child
- _____ warn about consequences if the behaviour continues
(i.e., punishment, withdrawal of privileges, or a 'time out')

(THE HYPOTHETICAL CHILD'S NAME) refuses to quiet-down after being put to bed. S/he screams and cries until her/his mother's nerves are frayed.

1a. How much do you believe that (THE HYPOTHETICAL CHILD'S NAME)'s behaviour in this situation is due to her/his own characteristics?

1	2	3	4
not at all	a little	largely	completely

b. How much do you believe that (THE HYPOTHETICAL CHILD'S NAME)'s behaviour in this situation due to the behaviour of (THE HYPOTHETICAL CHILD'S NAME)'s mother?

1	2	3	4
not at all	a little	largely	completely

2a. How much control do you believe (THE HYPOTHETICAL CHILD'S NAME) has over his/her behaviour in this situation?

1	2	3	4
absolutely no control	a little control	a moderate amount of control	total control

b. How much control do you believe that (THE HYPOTHETICAL CHILD'S NAME)'s mother has over (THE HYPOTHETICAL CHILD'S NAME)'s behaviour in this situation?

1	2	3	4
absolutely no control	a little control	a moderate amount of control	total control

3. To what degree do you believe that (THE HYPOTHETICAL CHILD'S NAME) behaved this way on purpose?

1	2	3	4
not at all	a little	largely	completely

4a. To what degree do you believe that (THE HYPOTHETICAL CHILD'S NAME) was responsible for her/his behaviour in this situation?

1	2	3	4
not at all responsible	a little responsible	largely responsible	totally responsible

b. To what degree do you believe that (THE HYPOTHETICAL CHILD'S NAME)'s mother was responsible for (THE HYPOTHETICAL CHILD'S NAME)'s behaviour in this situation?

1	2	3	4
not at all responsible	a little responsible	largely responsible	totally responsible

5. How angry would you be with (THE HYPOTHETICAL CHILD'S NAME)'s behaviour if you saw her/him behave this way?

1	2	3	4
not at all angry	a little angry	largely angry	extremely angry

6. Please rank in order of preference (1 = first choice, 2 = second choice, 3 = third choice), the three disciplinary strategies you would be most likely to use in this situation.

- _____ explain why the behaviour is wrong
- _____ distract the child
- _____ yell at the child to stop
- _____ spank the child
- _____ ignore the child
- _____ show the child a better way of behaving
- _____ negotiate with the child
- _____ warn about consequences if the behaviour continues
(i.e., punishment, withdrawal of privileges, or a 'time out')

APPENDIX H**Thank you Letter**

Dear Parent,

I would like to take this time to thank you for participating in the study entitled "Parental Cognitions in Disciplinary Situation." Your participation has allowed me to obtain a better understanding of parents' views of children's misbehaviour and their ways of managing such behaviour. Your time and effort has been greatly appreciated. In the near future, information will be sent to you regarding the specific findings of this study. If you have any questions or concerns please contact me at:

**Department of Family Studies
Faculty of Human Ecology
University of Manitoba
ph. 474-9225 or 474-8344 (messages can be left)**

Sincerely,

Karen Leah Rees, B.A., M.Sc. Candidate

APPENDIX I**Feedback Letter**

Dear Parent,

Not too long ago you participated in a study entitled, "Parental Cognitions in Disciplinary Situations". I wish to thank you once again for your participation and to share with you the results of the study.

The purpose of the study was to examine the ways in which mothers think about children's misbehaviour. Many studies have demonstrated that when parents believe that their children are misbehaving on purpose and can control their behaviour, they are likely to become angry and punish the child. On the other hand, when parents believe that their children are not trying to be bad but are simply in the process of learning how to control themselves, they are less likely to become angry and more likely to instruct or model for the child.

Few studies, however, have examined how much parents themselves take responsibility for their children's behaviour. I am particularly interested in how parents think about their own role in difficult situations. In this study, I wanted to find out whether parents think differently about the parental role when it is their child who is misbehaving versus another parent's child who is misbehaving. We have all watched children having tantrums in grocery stores and developed our theories about how that parent should handle the situation differently! I expected that parents would hold other parents largely responsible for their children's misbehaviour, but would see themselves as less responsible for their own children's misbehaviour. I administered exactly the same questionnaire to two groups of mothers of preschoolers. All of the mothers read the same situations and responded to the same questions. The only difference was that one group's questionnaire said that it was "your child" performing the misbehaviour and the other group's questionnaire said that it was someone else's child performing the misbehaviour. Mothers were assigned randomly to the two groups and the groups did not differ on any demographic characteristics.

I found as expected, that mothers assigned more responsibility to other parents for children's misbehaviour than they assumed themselves. That is interesting because it suggests that we consider different factors when we are handling our own children's misconduct than when we see other children misbehaving.

I hope that you found your participation in this study to be an interesting experience. Thank you again for your time and effort.

Sincerely,

**Karen Leah Rees, B.A., M.Sc. Candidate
Department of Family Studies
Faculty of Human Ecology
University of Manitoba**