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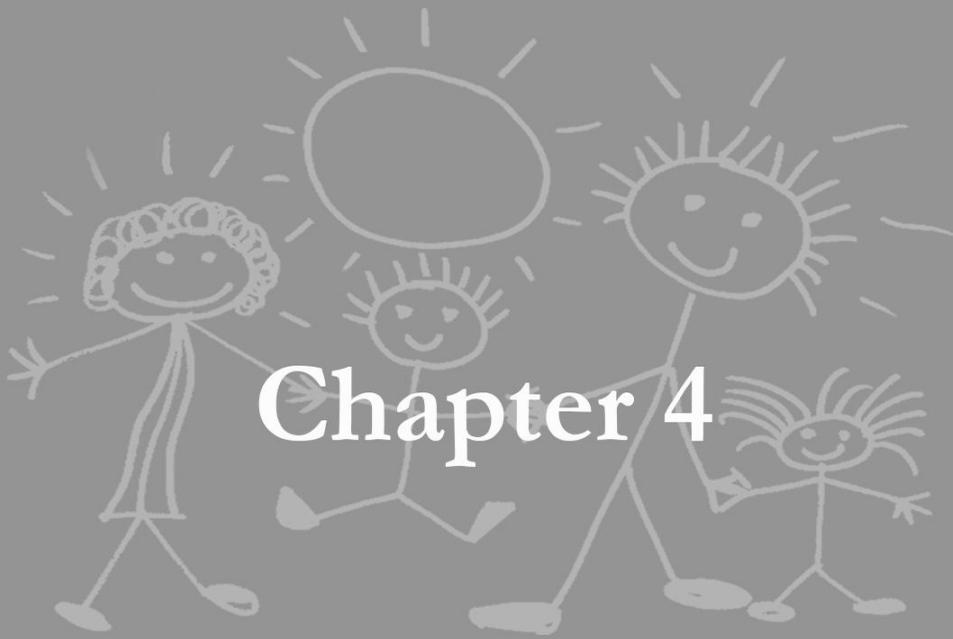


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# Chapter 4

## **Sibling Discipline and Support**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study examined toddlers' discipline and support towards their infant siblings in a parental limit-setting situation, as well as associations with inhibitory control, empathy, and child gender. In a sample of 373 families sibling discipline and support were observed during parental limit setting at two home visits, one with mother and one with father and the two children. Toddlers' inhibitory control was measured with a computerized Go/NoGo task and toddlers' empathy with reports of both parents. Most of the toddlers disciplined and almost half of them supported their younger siblings. Sibling discipline and support were positively correlated. Empathy was positively related to sibling discipline for boys, whereas for girls empathy was positively related to sibling support. Sibling discipline and support were not related to inhibitory control or gender of the younger sibling. Our study is the first to investigate sibling discipline and support, and provides evidence for gender differences in the behavioral manifestation of empathy in interactions between siblings in the context of parental limit setting.

*Keywords:* Sibling discipline, sibling support, empathy, inhibitory control, gender

## INTRODUCTION

For firstborn children the birth of a sibling is a major transition that many of them experience when they are 2 to 3 years old. When it happens, firstborns not only experience a decrease in parental attention, but they also have to learn to interact with a younger sibling. How toddlers interact with their younger sibling may depend on the specific situation (Garner, Jones, & Palmer, 1994; Morrongiello, Schmidt, & Schell, 2010). For example, interactions between siblings during play can be reciprocal (Howe, Rinaldi, Jennings, & Petrakos, 2002), whereas in challenging situations the older sibling may take the lead and help the younger one (Howe, Recchia, Della Porta, & Funamoto, 2012; Morrongiello et al., 2010). The aim of our study was to examine toddlers' discipline and support towards their younger sibling in a limit-setting situation, as well as associations with inhibitory control, empathy, and child gender.

Parental limit setting and discipline constitute a challenge for young children as they have to inhibit impulses and self-regulate to comply (Kochanska, Coy, & Murray, 2001). Whereas infants generally lack the cognitive and self-regulation skills to understand and to comply with parental rules, toddlers are beginning to develop the necessary skills to respond appropriately to parental limit setting (Kochanska et al., 2001). In addition, toddlers start to understand the consequences of moral transgressions and show protest when faced with such transgressions by others (Vaish, Missana, & Tomasello, 2011). Because of their more advanced developmental level in these areas, toddlers may try to discipline their younger sibling and prevent or correct noncompliant behavior. Further, because toddlers are also beginning to understand the emotions of others and develop prosocial behaviors (Kochanska & Aksan, 2006), they may show supportive behaviors in a discipline situation by helping the younger sibling to complete the task successfully or provide comfort in case of distress.

Several normative developments during toddlerhood make the study of sibling discipline during this period particularly interesting. During the toddler years, children start to internalize moral and conventional rules, and shift from requiring supervision to be compliant to self-regulated or committed compliance (Kochanska & Aksan, 2006). This process is referred to as conscience development, which is composed of three mechanisms: moral emotion, moral conduct, and moral cognitions. Moral emotion (i.e.,

feeling guilty after a transgression) and moral conduct (i.e., being compliant in the absence of external control) emerge around the age of 2 years (Kochanska, 1993; Kochanska & Aksan, 2006). Moral cognition, which refers to a child's ability to understand rules and the consequences of violation of these rules, emerges somewhat later, around the age of 3 years (Kochanska & Aksan, 2006; Vaish et al., 2011). A study with 2- and 3-year-old children showed that 3-year-olds protested when a hand puppet destroyed a picture or sculpture belonging to another puppet, whereas 2-year-olds did not (Vaish, et al., 2011). This finding may also be relevant to situations in which a younger sibling misbehaves and does not comply with parental rules, and suggests that toddlers might protest and try to correct their siblings' behavior by explaining parental rules or interfering, verbally or physically, with the noncompliant behavior (Howe et al., 2012). Both explaining parental rules and interfering with a sibling's noncompliant behavior can be referred to as sibling discipline.

Sibling discipline may be influenced by several child characteristics: the older sibling's inhibitory control and empathy, and gender of both siblings may play a role. Inhibitory control starts to develop during toddlerhood and increases with age (Kochanska, Murray, Jacques, Koenig, & Vandegest, 1996; Williams, Ponesse, Schachar, Logan, & Tannock, 1999). Several studies indicate that during early childhood girls outperform boys in inhibitory control and self-regulation, which in turn makes them more compliant than boys (Kochanska et al., 1996; Kochanska et al., 2001). The ability to regulate and control behavioral impulses as represented by inhibitory control is important for rule understanding and compliance (Kochanska et al., 2001), and individual differences in toddlers' inhibitory control have been found to be related to other-oriented behaviors and the motivation to imitate parental behaviors (Forman, Aksan, & Kochanska, 2004; Kochanska & Aksan, 2006; Rhoades, Greenberg, & Domitrovich, 2009). Being able to inhibit behavioral responses enables children to direct their attention and behavior towards others (Rhoades et al., 2009), which in turn may allow them to focus more on the behaviors of their younger siblings and to act upon them if they feel that rules are being violated. Moreover, toddlers with better self-regulation skills have been found to be more willing to imitate behaviors modeled by their mothers (Forman et al., 2004). During parental limit setting, imitating parental behavior could take the form of disciplining a sibling. Thus, higher levels of

inhibitory control would be expected to be associated with more sibling discipline.

A second characteristic that is also likely to be relevant to sibling discipline is toddlers' ability to understand others' emotions. Empathy has been related to better teaching skills in older siblings towards their younger brothers and sisters, because it enables older siblings to adapt their behavior to the younger ones (Howe et al., 2012). Parents may enhance the development of empathy by referring to the responsibility of older siblings towards their younger brother or sister by asking them to watch over or take care of the younger sibling (Morrongiello et al., 2010), or by explaining the younger sibling's emotions and lack of skills (Cassidy, Fineberg, Brown, & Perkins, 2005). Older siblings' understanding of their younger siblings' lack of skills to comply with parental rules and their understanding of how to interfere with this noncompliance, may enable them to discipline and support their younger siblings. Moreover, empathy has been related to understanding the importance of being compliant with rules and the consequences of violating these rules (Groenendyk & Volling, 2007; Kochanska & Aksan, 2006). Since rule understanding is a requirement for sibling discipline, this suggests that higher levels of empathy would relate to more sibling discipline.

A third child characteristic that could be related to sibling discipline is child gender. Previous studies found gender differences in sibling caregiving and teaching behaviors (Dunn, Deater-Deckard, & Pickering, 1999; Klein & Zarur, 2002). From early childhood boys and girls display differences in their behavioral development. For example boys show more aggression than girls (i.e., Alink et al., 2006) whereas girls have better self-regulation skills and are more compliant than boys (i.e., Kochanska et al., 2001), suggesting that girls would show more sibling discipline than boys. In addition, gender differences in children are best understood when the gender of the children they are interacting with is also taken into account (Maccoby, 1998), indicating that the gender combination of the siblings could influence sibling discipline. Sibling gender combination has indeed been linked to individual differences in sibling interactions. A study on teaching strategies in preschool children towards their younger siblings indicated that teaching occurred most often in brother-brother interactions (Klein & Zarur, 2002). Other studies found that school-aged girls more often than boys displayed teaching behaviors towards their younger siblings (Brody, Stoneman, MacKinnon, & MacKinnon, 1985;

Cicirelli, 1976), and that teaching by older siblings was more often directed towards younger sisters than towards younger brothers. Other studies on sibling teaching, however, found no differences between sisters and brothers (Azmitia & Hesser, 1993; Howe & Recchia, 2009).

When faced with their younger siblings' distress in response to parental limit-setting, toddlers may not only show disciplinary but also supportive and comforting behaviors towards their young siblings. Such sibling support has been previously observed in other situations, i.e. during naturalistic home observations and an adapted strange situation procedure designed to evoke separation distress in the younger siblings (Garner et al., 1994; Howe & Ross, 1990). Similar to sibling discipline, sibling support may be related to inhibitory control, empathy, and gender.

First, inhibitory control enables toddlers to regulate their own emotions when observing a younger sibling in distress. This emotional regulation will prevent that toddlers become overwhelmed by their own emotions and in turn allows them to interpret the emotions of their sibling and act upon these emotions (Kochanska et al., 2001; Rhoades et al., 2009). Second, empathy enables toddlers to understand why younger siblings are distressed during parental limit setting and how they could comfort their siblings, for example by redirecting their siblings' attention away from the task or soothing them (Hughes, White, Sharpen, & Dunn, 2000; Roth-Hanania, Davidov, & Zahn-Waxler, 2011; Zahn-Waxler, Robinson, & Emde, 1992). Third, studies on gender differences in sibling support show inconsistent results. Some studies found no differences between sisters and brothers in sibling caregiving (Dunn & Kendrick, 1981; Garner et al., 1994), while other studies have shown that older sisters show more interaction and more nurturing behavior with their younger sibling than older brothers, especially when the younger sibling is a sister (Blakemore, 1990; Kier & Lewis, 1998; Dunn et al., 1999). These differences in nurturing between boys and girls may arise from gender-differentiated parenting, with parents stimulating nurturing behavior more often in girls than in boys (Hastings, McShane, Parker, & Ladha, 2007). In addition, children from around the age of 3 years develop a preference for their same-sex parent, which could lead toddlers to imitate the behavior of their same-sex parent (Bussey & Bandura, 1999). Since mothers show higher levels of sensitive parenting than fathers (Hallers-Haalboom et al., 2014; Lovas, 2005) and are often the primary caregiver of young children

(Fagan & Barnett, 2003; Yeung, Sandberg, Davis-Kean, & Hofferth, 2001), girls may be more likely to imitate parental nurturing behaviors than boys are.

Although most children experience the birth of a younger sibling during their toddler years (Volling, 2012), studies concerning hierarchical sibling interactions, like teaching and caregiving, often focus on middle childhood (e.g. Howe et al., 2012; Morrongiello et al., 2010). Further, discipline situations are particularly salient in young children's daily lives, but sibling interactions in such settings seem to have escaped researchers' attention. In this study we examined toddlers' discipline and support towards their 1-year-old siblings in a parental limit-setting context, and associations with child inhibitory control, empathy, and gender. Because no previous studies have addressed sibling discipline and support in the context of parental limit setting, we based our hypotheses on the literature concerning other hierarchical sibling interactions, in particular teaching and caregiving. We expected that discipline and support would be positively related, and that both would be associated with toddlers' inhibitory control and empathy. Since previous studies on gender differences in sibling interactions show inconsistent results, we did not have a directed hypothesis on the effect of gender differences in sibling discipline and support.

## METHOD

### Sample

The sample was recruited in the context of the longitudinal study *Boys will be Boys?* examining the influence of gender-differentiated socialization on the socio-emotional development of boys and girls in the first years of life. This paper reports on data from the first wave. Families with two children in the Western region of the Netherlands were selected from municipality records. Families were eligible for participation if at the time of recruitment the second-born child was around 12 months of age and the first born child was between 2.5 and 3.5 years old. Exclusion criteria were single parenthood, severe physical or intellectual handicaps of parent or child, and parents being born outside the Netherlands or not speaking the Dutch language. Eligible families were invited by mail to participate between April 2010 and May 2011; 31% ( $n = 390$ ) of the 1,249 families agreed to participate. The participating families did not differ from the non-participating families on age, educational level of both parents, and degree of urbanization of the place of residence

(all  $ps > .11$ ). Furthermore, for the analyses of this paper, families were excluded if neither parent had completed the questionnaire about toddlers' empathy ( $n = 17$ ), resulting in a final sample of 373 families. If a questionnaire was completed by one of the parents, these scores were used as the best estimate of the missing parent's scores. The distribution of sibling gender constellations was as follows: 102 boy-boy (27%), 86 girl-girl (23%), 94 boy-girl (25%), and 91 girl-boy (25%).

At the time of the first visit toddlers were, on average, 3.0 years old ( $SD = 0.3$ ) and their younger siblings were exactly 12 months old ( $SD = 0.0$ ). Mothers were aged between 25 and 46 years ( $M = 33.9$ ,  $SD = 3.9$ ) and fathers were between 26 and 63 years of age ( $M = 36.8$ ,  $SD = 5.0$ ). Most participating parents were married or had a registered agreement (93%), and the remaining 7% lived together without any kind of registered agreement. With regard to educational level, most of the mothers (81%) and fathers (77%) had a high educational level (academic or higher vocational schooling).

### **Procedure**

Each family was visited twice within a period of approximately two weeks, once for observation of the mother and the two children and once for observation of the father and the two children. The order of father and mother visits was counterbalanced. After the two visits families received a gift of 30 Euros and small presents for the children. Before each home visit both parents were asked to individually complete a set of questionnaires. During the home visits parent-child interactions and sibling interactions were filmed, and toddlers and parents completed computer tasks. All visits were conducted by pairs of trained graduate or undergraduate students. Informed consent was obtained from all participating families. Ethical approval for the study was provided by the Research Ethics Committee of the Institute of Education and Child Studies of Leiden University.

### **Measures**

**Sibling Discipline and Support.** Sibling discipline and support were measured in a 4-minute disciplinary *don't* context (Kochanska et al., 2001). The parent was asked to put a set of attractive toys on the floor in front of both children, and to make sure the children did not play with or touch the toys. After 2 minutes, both siblings were allowed to play for another 2

minutes only with an unattractive stuffed animal. Sibling discipline and support were coded every time toddlers initiated a task-related response towards their younger siblings, unless the responses occurred within a 2-second interval. Two types of responses were coded as sibling discipline: verbal discipline (e.g., ‘no’, ‘you’re not allowed to touch them yet’) and physical interference (e.g., holding the child or moving the toys out of reach). Furthermore, comforting or distracting behaviors (i.e. cuddling or starting a game with the younger sibling) were coded as sibling support. Sibling discipline and sibling support were not coded when the parent instructed the toddler to respond to the infant’s behavior. The two disciplinary episodes within the same family, one with mother and one with father present, were coded by different coders to guarantee independence among ratings. The mean intraclass correlations (single rater, absolute agreement,  $n = 30$ ) for all pairs of the six coders was .83 (range .78 to .90) for verbal discipline, .81 (range .71 to .94) for physical discipline, and .83 (range .76 to .87) for sibling support. Sibling discipline and sibling support were correlated between the two visits, verbal:  $r(370) = .25, p < .01$ ; physical:  $r(370) = .14, p < .01$ ; support:  $r(370) = .09, p < .10$ , and showed no mean-level differences between visits ( $ps > .22$ ). We therefore computed a combined mean score for the three scales. Moreover, verbal and physical sibling discipline were highly correlated,  $r(373) = .73, p < .01$ , and showed no mean-level differences ( $p = .79$ ), so we combined them in a mean score. This led to two subscales: sibling discipline (verbal discipline and physical intervention) and sibling support (distraction and comforting behaviors).

We also coded parental discipline (i.e., active verbal or physical interference) in response to noncompliance of the younger sibling (i.e., reaching for or touching the forbidden toys). Neither of these variables were related to sibling discipline or sibling support. We therefore did not include parental discipline and noncompliance of the younger sibling as covariates in our analyses.

**Inhibitory Control.** To measure toddlers’ inhibitory control an adapted version of the Cat-Mouse task (Simpson & Riggs, 2006), a computerized Go/NoGo task for 3-year-old children, was administered during either the first or the second visit (counterbalanced). To make this task applicable for 2.5-year-olds the inter-trial interval was increased from 1.5s to 3s during the practice session, providing the children with more time to

understand the task. The experimenter explained that the child had to catch all the mice that appeared on the screen (Go stimuli) by pressing a red button. The child was told not to catch the cats that appeared on the screen (NoGo stimuli). The task consisted of a practice session, in which five mice and five cats were presented (in alternating order), and a test session, in which 30 mice and 10 cats were displayed in random order. Only during the practice session was the child given feedback. After the practice session the experimenter repeated the instructions for the child. Commission errors (responses to NoGo stimuli) were used as a measure for a lack of inhibitory control (Groot, De Sonnevle, Stins, & Boomsma, 2004). To generate a measure for inhibitory control we computed the inverse sum score of the commission errors.

**Child Empathy.** Empathy in the toddler was measured with the subscale Empathic, Prosocial Response to Another's Distress from the My Child Questionnaire (MCQ; Kochanska, 2002). Both fathers and mothers indicated whether they considered any of the 13 empathic responses (e.g., 'Promptly notices others' feelings') on a 5-point scale to be typical of their oldest child. Because fathers' and mothers' scores were significantly correlated,  $r(346) = .38, p < .01$ , but mean levels differed significantly ( $p < .01$ ), we computed combined standardized mean scores. The internal consistencies for the combined (standardized) scale was .76 (Cronbach's Alpha).

### **Data-Analysis**

All measures were inspected for possible outliers that were defined as values more than 3.29 *SD* below or above the mean (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2012). Outliers were winsorized to make them no more extreme than the most extreme value that fell within the accepted range conform a normal distribution (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2012). Sibling discipline and sibling support were positively skewed, and an inverse transformation was used for analyses (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2012). All other measures were normally distributed. To assess the relation between sibling discipline and child characteristics we conducted hierarchical regression analyses. In the first step characteristics of both siblings were entered. In the second step two-way interactions between child gender and empathy, and inhibitory control were entered. Variables were centered before the computation of interaction terms.

## RESULTS

Toddlers disciplined and/or supported their younger siblings in 282 families (76%): sibling discipline was observed in 237 families (64%) and sibling support in 165 families (44%). Sibling discipline and sibling support were positively interrelated, and both were positively related to empathy and inhibitory control (Table 1). In addition, toddlers displayed more support when they were older. Relations with gender were not significant, although a trend ( $p < .10$ ) was found towards a pattern of higher levels of both sibling discipline and sibling support for toddler girls.

Table 1.

*Summary of Means, Standard Deviations and Correlations for All Variables*

	1	2	3	4	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1. Sibling discipline					3.25	4.82
2. Sibling support	.24**				0.89	1.55
3. Age	.06	.21**			3.00	0.30
4. Empathy	.10*	.10*	.11*		0.01	0.87
5. Inhibitory control	.12*	.10*	.17*	.03	-3.39	2.98

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$

In order to investigate multivariate relations between child characteristics and sibling discipline and support, we conducted two hierarchical regression analyses. The hierarchical regression analysis predicting sibling discipline showed that more discipline was predicted by higher levels of sibling support and empathy. However, the relation between empathy and sibling discipline was moderated by child gender. To explore the interaction effect, separate regressions were conducted for boys and girls (Figure 1, panel A). Boys who were more empathic exhibited more discipline towards their younger sibling, while for toddler girls no relation between empathy and discipline was found. The main effects of gender of both siblings, toddler age, and inhibitory control were not significant, and neither were the interactions between inhibitory control, externalizing behavior, and gender (Table 2).

Table 2.

*Child Characteristics in Relation to Sibling Discipline and Sibling Support*

	Sibling discipline		Sibling support	
	$\beta$	R <sup>2</sup>	$\beta$	R <sup>2</sup>
Step 1		.08		.11
Age	-.01		.19**	
Gender	.06		.08	
Sibling support/sibling discipline <sup>1</sup>	.23**		.22**	
Empathy	.40*		-.27	
Inhibitory control	.15		.11	
Siblings' gender	.07		-.01	
Step 2		.09		.12
Empathy* Gender	-.35*		.34*	
Inhibitory control* Gender	-.07		-.08	

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$

*Note:* Betas are derived from the final model.

<sup>1</sup>Sibling support in the model predicting sibling discipline, and sibling discipline in the model predicting sibling support.

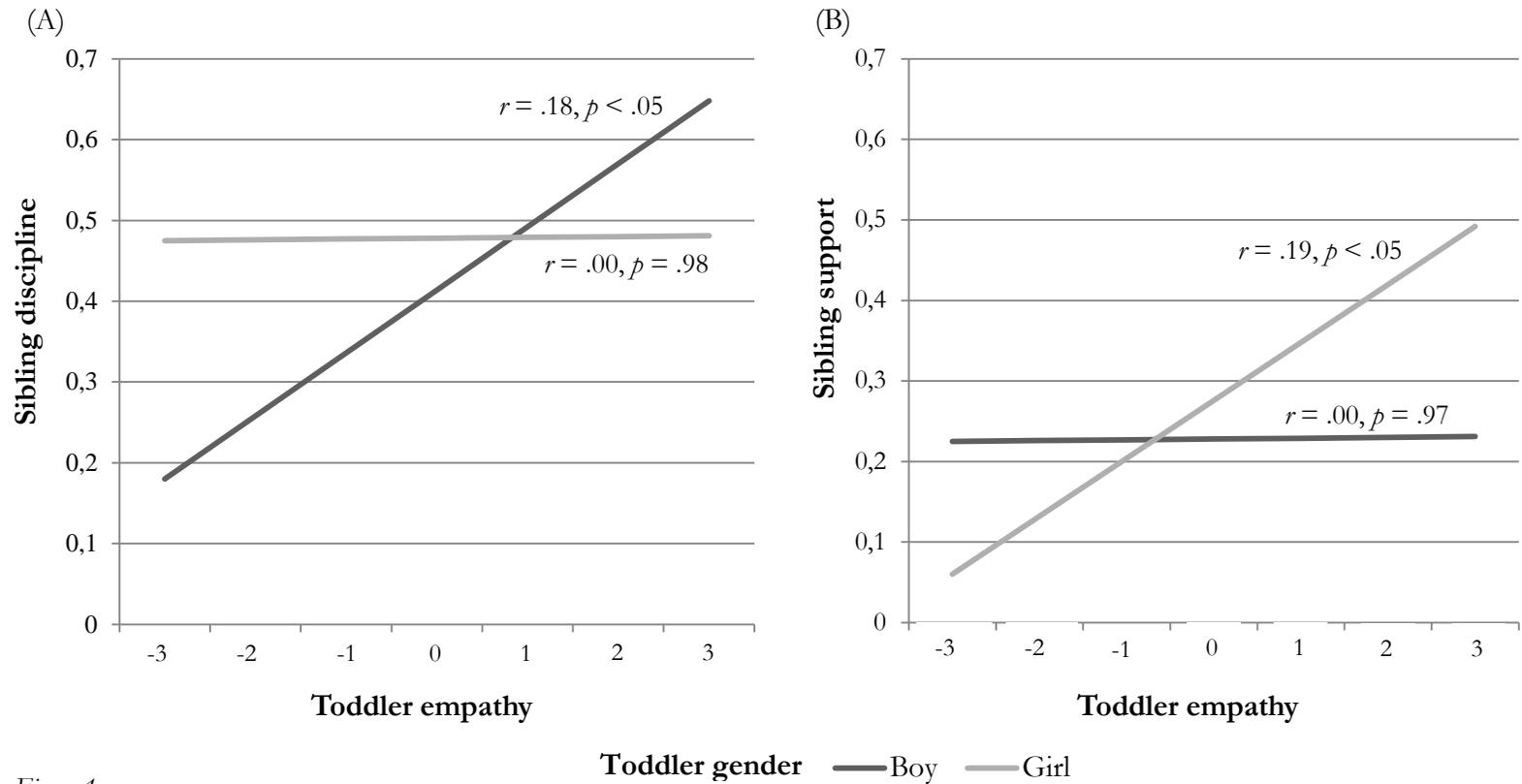


Figure 1.

The associations between sibling discipline (a) and sibling support (b) and toddler empathy by toddler gender

The hierarchical regression analysis predicting sibling support revealed two predictors: sibling discipline and age (Table 2). Similar to the prediction of sibling discipline, the relation between sibling support and empathy was moderated by gender. To illustrate the interaction effect, separate regressions were conducted for boys and girls (Figure 1, panel B). These analyses showed that, contrary to the results for sibling discipline, toddler girls who were more empathic exhibited more support towards their younger sibling, while for toddler boys no relation between empathy and sibling support was found. Other predictors, including toddler inhibitory control, and gender were not significant and neither were the interactions between inhibitory control, externalizing behavior, and gender.

## DISCUSSION

Our results showed that within a parenting discipline situation, the majority of toddlers disciplined their younger siblings and almost half of them tried to comfort or distract their younger siblings. Toddlers who disciplined their younger sibling were also more likely to display sibling support, and higher levels of empathy were related to both more discipline and more support towards their younger siblings. However, both relations with empathy were moderated by gender. For boys empathy was positively related to sibling discipline, whereas for girls empathy was positively related to sibling support. Toddlers' sibling discipline and support were not related to their inhibitory control or the gender of their younger sibling.

Toddlers displayed both discipline and support towards their younger siblings during parental limit setting, which is in line with key developmental changes during toddlerhood. Toddlers start to internalize rules, understand the consequences of rule transgression, and from the age of 3 children have been found to interfere when others violate rules (Kochanska & Aksan, 2006; Vaish, et al., 2011). In addition, they are beginning to understand the emotions of others and act prosocially towards others (Kochanska & Aksan, 2006). Toddlers who disciplined their sibling were more likely to also display sibling support. This converges with previous studies that found associations between rule understanding and prosocial behavior (Kochanska & Aksan, 2006; Vreeke & Van der Mark, 2003). The ability to respond to another person's behavior is a prerequisite

for both discipline and support, perhaps explaining the association between the two behaviors (Kochanska & Aksan, 2006).

The moderating effect of child gender in the relation between empathy and sibling discipline and sibling support indicates that empathy is related to gender-specific social behavior. Girls with higher levels of empathy act more prosocially by comforting their younger siblings or by helping them with the task by means of distraction. More empathic boys on the other hand try to prevent or intervene in noncompliant behavior of their younger siblings, which can also be seen as prosocial behavior if these behaviors are aimed at helping the younger siblings to complete the task. These differences in behavior between boys and girls may arise from gender-differentiated parenting, with parents stimulating nurturing behavior more often in girls than in boys, while stimulating assertive and guiding behaviors more often in boys (Hastings et al., 2007). According to social role theory traditional gender roles and characteristics associated with these roles lead to differential treatment of men and women and possibly to gender-differentiated parenting, which in turn leads to gender differences in children's behavior (Eagly, 2009; Eagly, Wood, & Diekmann, 2000). Traditional gender roles may foster gender differences in prosocial behavior and gender-differentiated socialization of prosocial behaviors. Although we did not find mean level differences between boys and girls in sibling discipline and support, gender-differentiated socialization may lead to gender-specific manifestations of social behavior in children with high levels of empathy, because these children are potentially more sensitive to gender-differentiated parenting.

In line with our expectations, toddlers with higher levels of inhibitory control displayed more sibling discipline and more sibling support. However, after controlling for other child characteristics like age, sibling support or sibling discipline, and empathy, these relations were no longer significant. We expected that to discipline or support a younger sibling, toddlers should be able to inhibit primary responses and comply with parental rules (Kochanska & Aksan, 2006). However, toddler age had more predictive power, probably because both inhibitory control and sibling discipline and support increase significantly during the second year – indeed, age and inhibitory control were positively related (Kochanska et

al., 2001). Previous studies found that children interfered when a rule was violated by another person from the age of three years (Vaish, et al., 2011) – supporting the idea that the age of onset of the development of both inhibitory control and sibling discipline and support are similar. This suggests that additional developmental processes apart from inhibitory control are important for sibling discipline and support. Individual differences in whether toddlers respond to third-party transgression have also been related to affective perspective taking, which is the ability to sympathize with individuals even when they do not show emotional cues, and the ability to understand intentions behind moral transgressions (Vaish, Carpenter, & Tomasello, 2009; 2010). Further research could investigate how these cognitive processes may explain individual differences in sibling discipline and support. In addition to age, high levels of empathy predicted whether toddlers display sibling discipline. High levels of empathy enable toddlers to understand others' perspective and to direct their behavior towards others (Cassidy et al., 2005; Howe & Recchia, 2009).

Sibling discipline and sibling support were not related to the gender of the younger sibling. This is convergent with previous observations concerning children's teaching and comforting of their younger siblings during structured tasks (Garner et al., 1994; Howe & Recchia, 2009). However, results of previous studies that observed teaching and nurturing behaviors between siblings are mixed and there are several studies that did observe gender differences (e.g., Cicirelli, 1976; Kier & Lewis, 1998; Klein & Zarur, 2002).

This study has some limitations. First, we did not take the responses of the parents or the younger siblings to the older siblings' behavior into account. These responses might influence the behavior of the older sibling, and should be included in further research on sibling discipline and support. However, the current study demonstrates that individual differences in sibling discipline and support can, at least partly, be explained by toddler characteristics even without controlling for parent and sibling behavior in the discipline setting. A second limitation is the predominance of high-educated parents in our sample, which may influence the generalizability of our results. Since early development of

social behaviors may differ by social status and parental educational background (e.g., Linver, Brooks-Gunn, & Kohen, 2002) the relation between child characteristics and sibling discipline and support needs to be studied further in more diverse samples.

This is the first study on sibling interactions in a family discipline context. Given that parental limit setting is very common in young children's daily lives and provides an important context for the development of self-regulation, our findings may further our understanding of family processes that foster this aspect of children's development. Sibling discipline and support were observed in most of the toddlers in our study, which indicates that toddlers play an active role in the socialization of their younger siblings in parental limit-setting situations. This study further provides evidence for gender differences in the behavioral manifestation of empathy in interactions between siblings, which lead to different experiences for the younger sibling. Children with an empathic older sister appear to experience more support, while children with an empathic older brother experience more discipline. Thus, our results point towards gendered patterns of sibling interactions during situations that require self-regulation and compliance.

