

Exploring the Directional Effects of Parental Differential Treatment and Sibling Relationship Quality

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1 Introduction

- Parental differential treatment (PDT) is treating one sibling differently than another child in the domains of differential positivity or differential negativity.¹
- Greater PDT is associated with poorer sibling relationships,¹ yet the direction of the relationship is often assumed.

Research Questions

- Does PDT predict later sibling relationship quality?
- Does sibling relationship quality predict later PDT?
- What is the direction of effects between PDT and sibling relationship quality?
- Is PDT associated with sibling relationship quality overall and irrespective of time?

2 Participants

- $n = 189$ caregivers with at least two children aged 5–17.

- Mean age 41.1 ($SD = 6.2$)
- 71% Female
- 85% Caucasian
- 90% Two-Parent Household
- Mean age 8.8 ($SD = 2.7$)
- 51% Male
- Mean age 11.8 ($SD = 2.7$)
- 51% Male

3 Measures

Sibling Relationship Quality

- 6 Items - Perceptions of Children's Sibling Relationships Questionnaire (PEPC-SRQ)

Parental Differential Treatment

- 10 Items - Parenting Practices Scale from the Ontario Child Health Study
- Absolute difference score taken from the scores of each child

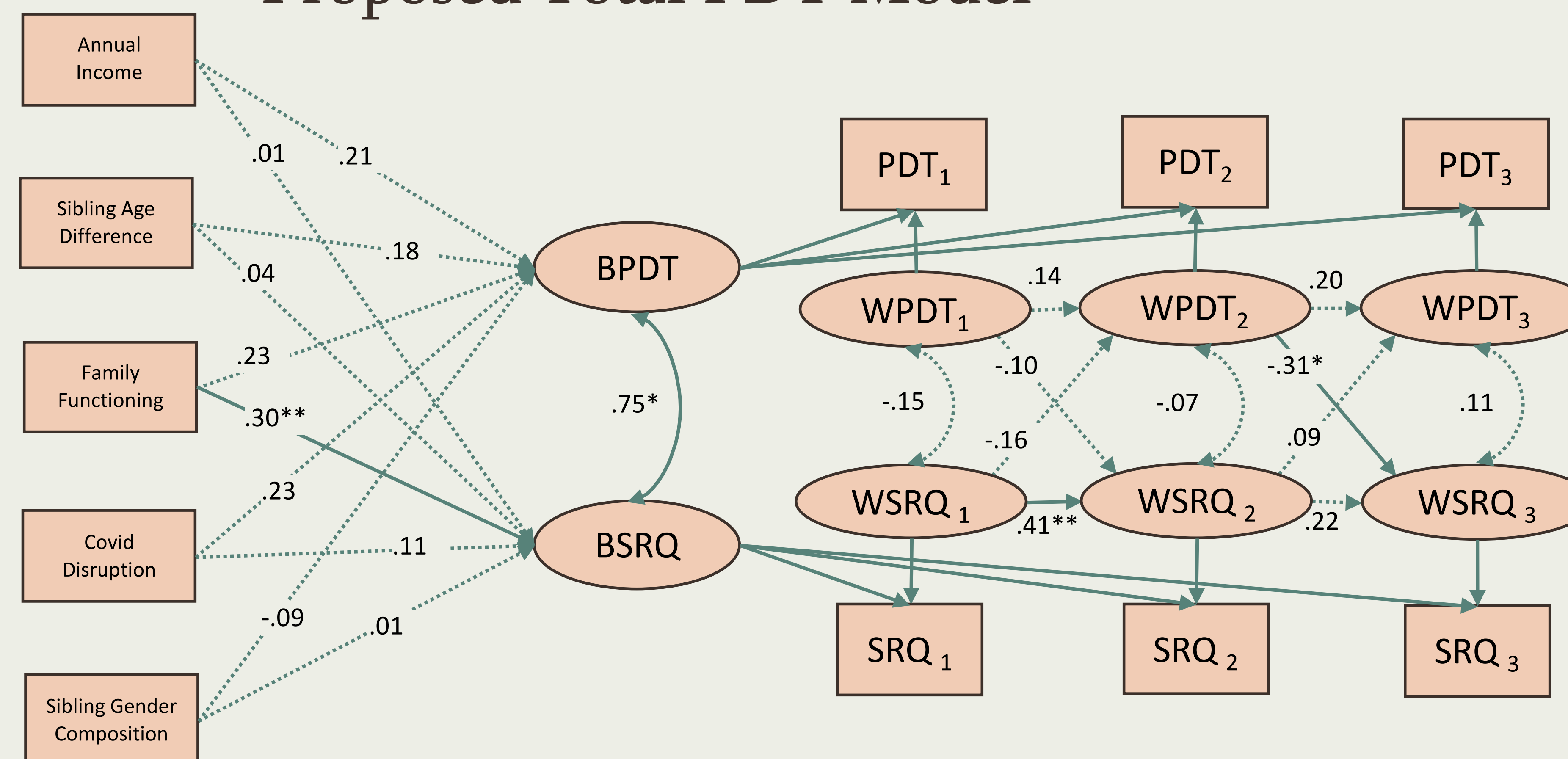
Covariates

- Annual income
- Sibling age difference
- Covid disruption
- Family functioning
- Sibling gender composition

4 Results

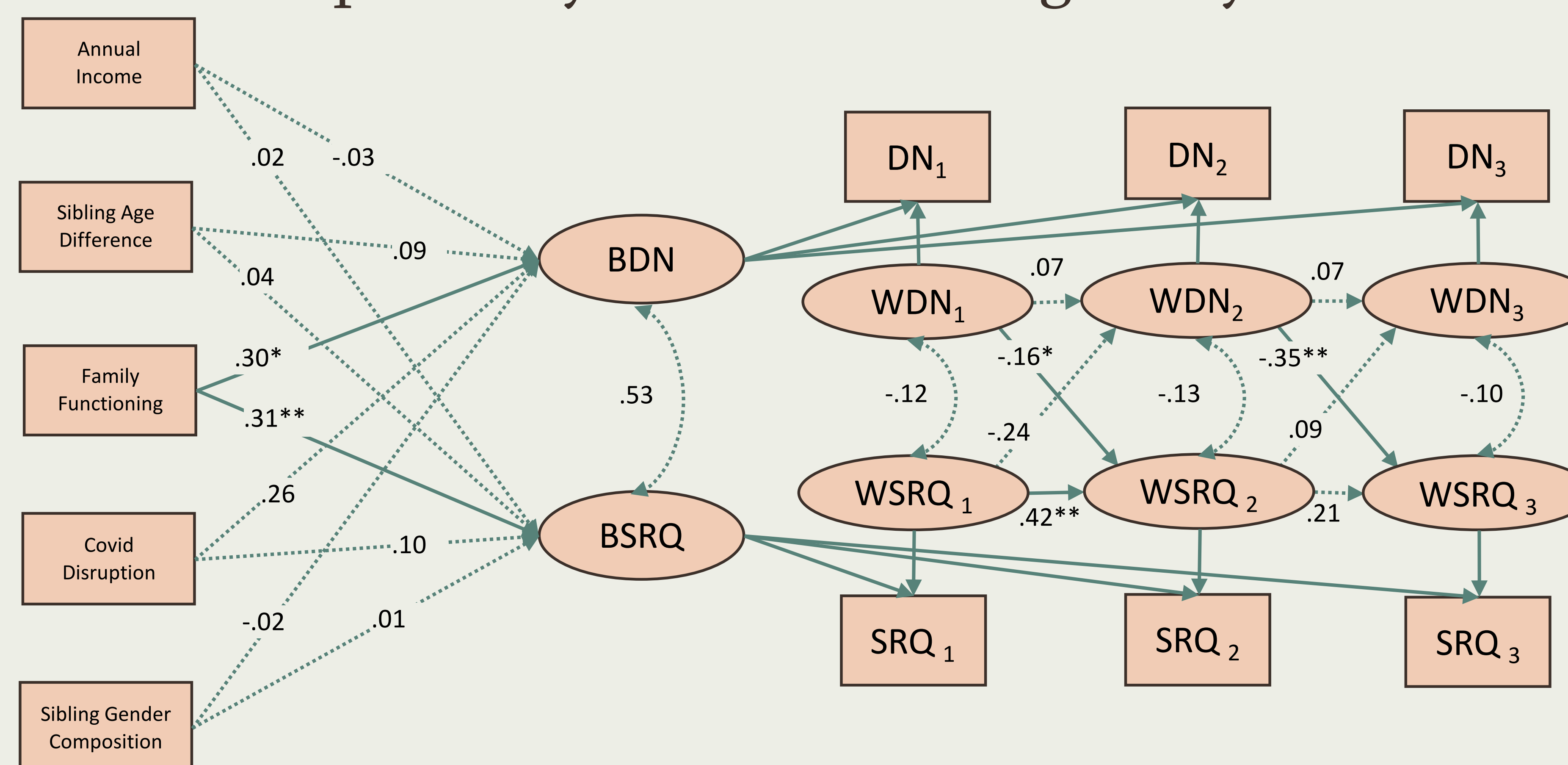
- PDT is related to a poorer sibling relationship quality, overall and irrespective of time.
- Greater differential negativity than usual leads to more positivity in the sibling relationship.

Proposed Total PDT Model



Note. $\chi^2(21) = 28.95, p = .115$; CFI = 0.98, TLI = 0.95, RMSEA = 0.05 [90% CI = 0.00-0.08], SRMR = 0.04.

Exploratory Differential Negativity Model



Note. $\chi^2(21) = 26.14, p = .201$; CFI = 0.99, TLI = 0.97, RMSEA = 0.04 [90% CI = 0.00-0.08], SRMR = 0.04.

5 Discussion

- Results suggest the importance of homeostasis and maintaining social stability within the family environment. Children may recognize when a parent is treating one sibling more negatively and react by positively adjusting their sibling relationship to maintain stability within the family unit.
- Siblings may turn towards each other for warmth as a coping mechanism against the increased parent-child conflict, using the sibling relationship as a protective factor.

6 Conclusion

- Recognizing how parental treatment influences other familial relationships has implications for recommendations of parenting practices to improve the internal workings of the family dynamic.
- Further research could expand upon these findings, examining sibling relationship quality as a protective factor against parent-child conflict and PDT.

References

- Meunier, J. C., Roskam, I., Stievenart, M., Van de Moortele, G., Browne, D. T., & Wade, M. (2012). Parental differential treatment, child's externalizing behavior and sibling relationships: Bridging links with child's perception of favoritism and personality, and parents' self-efficacy: *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 29(5), 612–638.

