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The relationship between conflict resolution styles in cross-gender sibling relationships and romantic relationships

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The Relationship Between Conflict Resolution Styles in Cross-Gender Sibling Relationships and

Romantic Relationships

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Abstract

Previous research demonstrates that there are several similarities between sibling relationships and romantic relationships and the former may even impact the latter. Further, research has shown that sibling relationships of mixed-gender dyads more significantly impact later romantic relationships. As conflict is a normative and frequent aspect of both relationships, the purpose of this study was to determine if there is a relationship between a female's conflict resolution style with her male sibling and her conflict resolution style with her romantic partner, if relational closeness and distance in years between her and her male sibling are moderating factors of her conflict resolution style, and if the female sibling's use of compromise, as a conflict resolution style with her male sibling, effects her level of relational closeness with her romantic partner.

Chapter I: Introduction

Sibling relationships are like no other relationship in a person's life. Unlike friends, siblings cannot be selected, which is part of what makes the relationship so unique. According to Hamilton, Macneil, and Tafoya (2012) the sibling relationship distinguishes itself from all other others because it has one of the longest durations of any human relationship. Although much of sibling literature focuses on childhood, since sibling relationships are the longest lasting relationships in most people's lives, their influence is obvious across a person's lifespan (Waldinger, Vaillant, & Orav, 2007). While parents often know their children from birth to adulthood, siblings being closer in age than parents and children, share a lifetime worth of memories together and are connected for more years than nearly all other family and friend relationships (p. 5).

Researchers have been interested in sibling relationships and communication styles for years, but many researchers argue that there needs to be a larger emphasis placed on the topic. Mikkelson (2006) stated that sibling relationships deserve greater attention for several reasons. Chief among them is simply that up 96% of Americans have at least one brother or sister (p. 115). Therefore, nearly the entire population of the United States falls into the "sibling" category and is impacted by sibling relationships and sibling communication styles. In addition to the majority of American's having and being a sibling, the importance of continued research on sibling relationships stems from the longevity and prominence of sibling relationships. According to Ross, Ross,

Stein, and Trabasso (2006), sibling relationships are lifelong and are one of the most pertinent relationships in a person's life (p. 73).

Another relationship that communication researchers have observed and analyzed for years is the relationship between romantic partners. Romantic relationships differ from sibling relationships primarily because they can be both, electively chosen and ended, and they involve romance. Additionally, unlike sibling relationships, the romantic relationship between spouses can be legally terminated and according to Richmond (1995) spousal relationships tend to be less enduring than sibling relationships and often do not recover from a temporary dissolution like sibling relationships can (p. 153). Communication research in romantic relationships is an important field of study because communication between partners' impacts satisfaction and conversely, satisfaction impacts communication (Richmond, 1995, p. 158). Previous research demonstrates that studying communication and conflict in romantic relationships is vital because of the immense impact communication strategies, styles, and tendencies have on romantic relationships likelihood to survive (Segrin, Hanzal, & Domschke, 2009, p. 200).

Research on adult sibling relationships has focused on identifying why some siblings maintain more contact than others. Most studies examine relationship maintenance behaviors and strategies rather than conflict resolution strategies (McHale, Updegraff, & Whiteman, 2012, p. 330). Previous research has however, found that exposure and/or participation in negative conflict resolution behaviors in childhood family relationships predicts conflict interactions

in adolescent romantic relationships (Reese-Weber, 2000). This premise furthers the likelihood of a relationship between conflict resolution styles in sibling relationships and late adolescent romantic relationships.

Additionally, practicing successful conflict resolution in sibling relationships may enable adolescents to form the conflict resolution skills necessary to successfully resolve conflict in romantic relationships. Specifically, the repeated experiences of conflict and conflict resolution that comprise sibling relationships may form and improve these important social competencies. Such competencies are important because in relationships where conflict is not handled effectively, a person is at higher risk for further conflict and even violence (Sadeh, Javdani, Finy, & Verona, 2001). Thus, handling conflict successfully is crucial for forming and maintaining healthy romantic relationships (Shulman, Tuval-Mashiach, Levran, & Anbar, 2006). In addition, Updegraff, McHale, and Crouter, (2002) found that sibling conflict may make forming attachments with romantic partners more appealing to adolescents—a compensatory pattern. Therefore, interestingly, more experience with sibling conflict may lead to an easier transition into a romantic relationship and more positive outcomes.

In addition, research shows that not only could experience with sibling conflict lead to more positive romantic relationship conflict outcomes, but the degree of closeness between siblings may also impact conflict resolution styles later employed in romantic relationships. Larson, (1998) found that individuals in close relationships increasingly, positively managed conflict to minimize the disruptive potential of the dispute. These positive conflict styles can then be

generalized to how conflict is managed in later romantic relationships (Rubenstein & Feldman, 1993). Individuals in close relationships are motivated to maintain rewards (closeness) and avoid costs, (conflict) causing them strive for more positive interactions. The skills needed to maintain closeness and avoid conflict and damaging outcomes in relationships, could translate to subsequent romantic relationships.

On the other hand, high-conflict sibling relationships hinder the development of the social and relational skills needed to form and sustain attachments to romantic partners later on (Doughty, McHale, & Feinberg, 2013). Specifically, for females, a significant negative relation between high-conflict sibling relationships and later romantic intimacy has been found (Doughty et al., 2013). Relationships skills learned through a positive sibling relationship however, may enhance capacity for relationship skills and subsequent positive relationships (Lockwood, 2001). Since high conflict sibling relationships negatively affects a female's capacity for later romantic intimacy and closeness, the use of a positive conflict resolution style, such as compromise, in sibling relationships, could allow her to attain more intimacy and relational closeness in romantic relationships.

Finally, just as sibling intimacy or relational closeness may impact the type of conflict resolution styles employed in subsequent romantic relationships, distance in years between siblings could as well. Since siblings often spend a great amount of time with one another, they face many developmental challenges throughout the lifespan together. Siblings who are close in age will

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grow together and greatly impact one another (Doughty et al., 2013). Siblings who are separated by several years may have fewer interactions and conflicts and thus less impact on each other's behavior, tendencies, and conflict resolution styles, which are translated into later romantic relationships.

There is an evident lack of research on the consistency of conflict resolution styles across relationship types. McHale et al., (2012) found a stability in individual differences in relationship qualities from childhood to early adolescence, but very little is known about the extent to which sibling relationships show stable individual differences from childhood to young and late adulthood (p. 333). It is necessary to further explore the relationship between sibling conflict resolution styles and romantic partner conflict resolution styles. A better understanding of conflict styles in sibling relationships and romantic relationships and any link between the two could enhance scholars' understanding of how and why certain conflict resolutions styles are formed and their foundation's impact on other relationships.

Chapter II: Literature Review

Defining Siblings

It is evident from the scholarly literature on family communication that although the family is widely researched, there is no consistent definition of "family". The diversity and lack of consensus in defining family can be attributed to several factors: the discrepancies between families' self-definitions and the definitions of "family" embodied in theoretical research studies, the boundaries a consistent definition would set on family communication scholarship, and the changing cultural and legal perspectives of the family. Such factors also speak to the importance a definition of family holds; it can tell researchers what and whom to study and define the scope of knowledge generated in areas that can inform policy and intervention. (Floyd, K., Mikkelson, A. C., Judd, J., 2006).

Floyd et al., (2006) offer three conceptual lenses for defining family relationship, first of which is the role lens. The role lens defines familial relationships based on their emotional attachment, patterns of behavior, and communication. It is the broadest of the three lenses and siblings can be defined as close friends who simply feel like siblings. Second, is the biogenetic lens, which is the most narrow of the three, and asserts that family members must either have the ability to reproduce or share DNA. The biogenetic lens only defines siblings as two individuals that share DNA. Third, is the sociolegal lens, which gives primacy to the legal sanction afforded to certain relationships. Therefore, siblings are defined as those who are legally recognized as siblings, which includes birth and adoptive siblings.

This research study does not provide specific guidelines as to how participants must define their siblings. While it is expected that the majority of participants will use the sociolegal lens, because the focus of this research study is communicative, it is more important that participants reflect on the relationships that are comprised of sibling communicative behaviors, rather than strictly relationships that share DNA.

Sibling Communication

The study of sibling communication has received much attention from communication researchers. The motives behind sibling communication vary, but the most significant motives, and the limited variation of motives as siblings age has proved consistent. Fowler's, (2009) study found that, consistent with findings on other relations, reported the communication motives between siblings that are most salient for siblings are relational and positive in nature, like intimacy and comfort, and the least salient motive are less positive such as, control, escape, and obligation. As siblings age, there is only a limited variation in communication motives however, younger adults reported communication more for reasons of control and escape than did older adults who were more motivated by mutuality (p. 62). Sibling relationships are distinctive because they occur in multiple different types of dyads such as sister-sister, brother-brother, and brother-sister. Fowler, (2009) found that the type of dyad affects the communication motives and styles. Sister-sister relationships are particularly warm and they align with findings of the affiliative nature of female communication. Brother-brother

communication is less motivated by intimacy, and closeness is demonstrated through shared activities rather than self-disclosure or blatant affection (p. 71).

The two types of communication most often studied in sibling relationships are affection and aggression. A study on siblings' use of affectionate communication conducted by Myers, Byrnes, Frisby, and Mansson, (2011) found that affectionate communication is vital in positive sibling relationships especially for adults. Affectionate communication includes verbal statements such as "I like you" or "You're a good brother", nonverbal gestures like hugging, and social support behaviors such as, giving compliments and celebrating accomplishments. Adult siblings consider affectionate language extremely appropriate behavior to use in their relationships and utilize it to remain in each other's lives (p. 152). Further, it is probable that affectionate communication is used more strategically than routinely as a relational maintenance behavior.

On the contrary, aggressive communication can be particularly destructive in family relationships. Teven, Martin, and Neupauer, (1998) define verbal aggression as messages that attack a person's self-concept in order to deliver psychological pain to that person (p. 179). When verbal aggressiveness is present in a relationship, there is less satisfaction and trust (Martin, Anderson, Burant, & Weber, 1997, p. 312). Conflict between siblings is often manifested, at least initially, in verbally aggressive messages, which causes siblings to be less responsive to each other (p. 180). Martin et al., (1997) do however distinguish between argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness. In sibling conflict, argumentativeness is often constructive to the relationship and conflict resolution,

whereas aggressiveness is destructive. There may also be a correlation between aggression in family relationships and aggression in relationships outside of the family. Research on aggression in the home found interparent, parent-adolescent, and sibling aggressive behaviors to be related to aggressive behaviors displayed outside the family, specifically in late adolescent's dating relationships (Reese-Weber & Bartle-Haring, 1998, p. 728).

Sibling Conflict

Conflict is a feature of daily interaction, persisting across time, cultures, and the life course (Hamilton et al., 2012, p. 3). Conflict resolution skills are defined as the ability to resolve conflicts and consequently manage interpersonal disagreement (Reese-Weber, 2000). In 1990, Canary and Spitzberg concluded that although there is limited research on the specific conflict resolution styles that are most preferred in sibling relationships, three strategies are generally used in all conflict situations; integrative, which is more submissive to the other's needs, distributive, or aiming to find a win-win compromise, and avoidant (as cited in Hanzal & Segrin, 2009, p. 159).

Sibling relationships combine intimacy and competing goals and therefore sibling conflict is inevitable and occurs frequently. Ross et al., (2006) concluded the harmony of a family can be extremely undermined by constant and severe sibling arguing, and so constructive conflict management and mutually agreeable resolutions of conflicting goals is of particular importance in sibling conflict management (p. 1721). In sibling conflict, age is a determinant in the conflict outcome and strategy employed, because of the hierarchical nature of sibling

relationships. The age of the older sibling influences the negotiation strategies of their younger brothers and sisters, who are more agreeable when their siblings were relatively older (Ross et al., 2006, p.1737). Conflicts that do not reach a resolution are associated with little to no use of future-oriented planning strategies. Conflicts that aimed for compromise negotiations rather than self-interest resolutions had little argumentation and most often ended in agreement. Aside from age as a determinant, Bigner (1974) found that siblings' sex interacted with birth order to affect resolution strategies. For example, older brothers were perceived as more powerful than older sisters and males reported high power strategies more than females (as cited in Haeffner, Metts, & Wartella, 1989, p. 225).

Siblings reported using solution orientation, such as compromise, and control, or domination, strategies more than nonconfrontation, or avoidant, strategies to resolve conflicts (Killoren, Thayer, & Updegraff, 2008, p. 1200). However, observations of younger siblings between 2 and 7 years of age indicate that disputes end either without resolution or in submissions more than 80% of the time; fewer than 12% of sibling conflicts end in compromise and children in middle childhood through adolescence report that sibling conflicts involve destructive tactics more than constructive ones, and end without satisfactory resolutions (Ross et al., 2006). Most sibling conflict does not result in long-term detrimental outcomes, however, Hamilton et al. (2012), reported that extremely negative sibling interactions during childhood may carry into adulthood, resulting in less intimacy in sibling relationships (p. 11).

Romantic Partner Communication

There is also a large emphasis in communication research on communication within romantic relationships. It is often assumed that increased communication in the romantic relationship dyad will lead to increased satisfaction within a relationship. While in some cases this would prove to be true, to assume that this will always be true is a manifestation of a common misconception that more communication is always better (Richmond, 2009). Such an assumption also fails to take into account the topic of the communication, the quality, or even the content, which have been shown to impact relationship satisfaction. Richmond (1995) found that highly satisfied couples engage in significantly more communication, specifically on topics about the couple's sexual relationship, home life, and vacations, than less satisfied couples do. Couples with low satisfaction engage in a low level of communication on most topics, which are commonly addressed by married couples (p. 152). Increasing communication about the couple's sexual relationship, home life, and vacations enhances satisfaction of both members of the dyad, while increasing communication about religion, work, and friends proves additionally satisfying for females (Richmond, 1995, p. 158).

Verbally aggressive communication is also present in romantic relationships and similar to its impact on sibling relationships, it can lead to serious relational problems and potential physical abuse (Martin et al., 1997, p. 312). Couples who are verbally aggressive express more negativity and offer fewer supportive statements to their partners. Even in nonconflict conversations,

verbally aggressive couples are more controlling and less positive in their

communication (Martin, Anderson, Burant, & Weber, 1997, p. 300).

Romantic Partner Conflict

Segrin et al., (2009) reported that conflict and distress are damaging to the

mental and physical health of couples. For example, relationship distress is

associated with an increased risk of anxiety disorders, mood disorders such as

depression, and even substance use disorders (p. 208). Segrin et al., (2009)

concluded that styles for handling conflict are highly consequential to a couple's

success and wellbeing. How couples argue about issues appears to be more

consequential to the success of the relationship than what they argue about or

the frequency of conflict (p. 200). People enter into romantic relationships with

established conflict resolution styles that are learned in the family of origin and

certain styles for responding to conflict are particularly dangerous to relationship

success.

In both distressed and non-distressed romantic relationships, males show

high base rates of anger and contempt, while females show high base rates of

fear and sadness. Action tendencies are associated with these emotions such as

anger being associated with approach and fear with withdrawal (Aksan et al.,

2013, p. 90). Withdrawal can also result from continuous demands. In romantic

relationships, there is a demand/ withdraw pattern where females issue demands

during conflict and males withdraw (Killoren et al., 2008, p. 1202). Anger

expressions signal holding ones ground or commitment while fear signals

disengagement. Verbal disagreements and criticisms predict improvement in

long run satisfaction and withdrawal behaviors, such as "the silent treatment," predict declines (Askan, Goldsmith, Essex, & Vandell, 2013). Specifically, relationships with a high communication orientation, which are represented by perceptions of disagreement as "healthy" and "important" in romantic relationships, are associated with more positive conflict response strategies and more relationship satisfaction. (Askan et al., 2013) Therefore, a partner's critique or criticism of the other partner's behavior would be perceived as an effort to improve the relationship in the long run rather than an attack.

Similarities between Sibling Relationships and Romantic Relationships

Sibling relationships and romantic partner relationships share many of the same qualities and are both linked to aspects of individual development and adjustment, including identity formation, harmonious peer relationships, and sexual identity development (Collins, Welsh, & Furman, 2009). One feature shared by both sibling and romantic relationships is the centrality of each in a person's life (Doughty et al., 2013). Sibling relationships are often the first peer-like relationship a person experiences and sibling relationships play a large role in shaping early activities and experiences. As children mature and gain the ability and independence needed to begin activities and form relationships outside of the home, they may begin to spend less time with their siblings, especially when romantic relationships start consuming large portions of a person's time.

An additional prominent and shared feature of sibling and romantic relationships is the intensity of emotion – both positive and negative – that these

relationships provoke (Doughty et al., 2013). As siblings grow up together, they face many developmental challenges and achievements together. Adolescents endure countless new and difficult challenges as they begin navigating the transition from the dependency and security of childhood, to the responsibility of adulthood. When siblings endure these challenges together, they share many of the most intense emotion evoking experiences with each other. Similarly, romantic relationships are comprised of high emotion and are thought to fulfill a similar developmental function as sibling relationships – providing opportunities to develop understanding of and capacity for emotional connection and nurturance (Seiffge-Krenke & Connolly, 2010).

The negotiation between power and control is also an important aspect of both sibling and romantic relationships, and the nature and outcome of these negotiations in sibling relationships may impact negotiations in romantic relationships. Unlike most parent-child relationships, sibling relationships can be egalitarian, when siblings serve as playmates and companions with equal power, or they can be hierarchical with one or both siblings striving to achieve dominance (Doughty et al., 2013). In Western society, the role structure of the sibling relationships is far less proscribed when compared to other cultures, which results in siblings having to work out power dynamics on their own (McHale et al., 2012). This may result in an ongoing negotiation process. Exposure to and adeptness with ongoing power negotiations in sibling relationships may be influential in later romantic relationships.

Similar to sibling power dynamics, romantic power dynamics can be

egalitarian with control being shared between partners (Collins et al., 2009).

During negotiations, each partner's skill and experience may play an important

role in aiding couples in negotiating balances of power. Thus, a person's

previous experience negotiating with a sibling may prove influential in the context

of romantic relationships. Consequently, there are obvious similarities between

sibling and romantic relationships that give reasons to expect certain qualities of

sibling relationships will influence or set the foundation for romantic relationships.

Social Learning Perspective

The extent to which conflict styles are translated from childhood to

adulthood and the effect siblings have on one another's conflict styles can be

analyzed through the lens of the Social Learning Perspective. From a social

learning perspective, Bandura (1997) found that individuals acquire novel

behaviors including cognitive behaviors like attitudes and beliefs through two key

social tools, observation and reinforcement. The perspective suggests that the

extensive interaction between siblings and other family members, cause siblings

to be salient agents in each other's social learning because people are most

likely to imitate models who are nuturant, high in status, and similar to

themselves (Bandura, 1977, p. 18). Siblings influence one another's social

processes, which are internalized for the rest of their lives. This implies that

siblings may extend an influence over each other's romantic relationship qualities

and tendencies. The lifelong continuity of most sibling relationships means that

social learning processes in the family of origin may have implications for adult

sibling relationships however; this concept has yet to be directly studied.

Whether or not a person forms a conflict resolution style in childhood that is translated to adulthood and romantic relationships has not been directly addressed. However, a previous study conducted by Black (2006) looked at parental effects on children's ability to trust future partners. Black (2006) determined that in general, secure children have parents who are sensitive and available during times of distress, allowing them to form internal working models of their parents as trustworthy. Insecure children have parents who are rejecting and inconsistent, causing them to form internal working models of their parents as untrustworthy. Eventually, these internal working models are generalized and contain expectations about how much other social partners can be trusted (p. 1460). Secure adults, were better able than insecure adults to express their distress and recognize their partner's distress resulting in more positive conflict interactions (p. 1461).

Intimacy in Mixed-Gender Sibling and Romantic Partner Dyads

There is an inherent discomfort that comes with navigating cross-gender relationships especially for adolescents who lack experience. Doughty et al., (2013) examined whether this navigation task may be easier for adolescents who have exposure to an opposite-gender sibling. Their results are consistent with the idea that children from mixed-gender dyads are advantaged in navigating romantic relationships (p. 14). The findings may be a result of opposite-gender siblings' greater exposure to a person of the opposite sex in their age range, which mitigates awkwardness in interactions with peers of the opposite-gender. Feldman, Gown, and Fisher, (1998) concluded that gender-specific family

influences on intimacy may be the result of intimacy emerging in the context of sex typing and culturally influenced sex roles (p. 283).

Mixed-gender siblings, especially females, have also reported significantly higher intimacy in their romantic relationships (Doughty et al., 2013, p. 11). The achievement of intimacy in relationships is widely regarded as a central developmental task of adolescents (Feldman, Gowen, & Fisher, 1998, p. 264). Sibling intimacy can be seen in the emergence of nuturant behaviors. Sibling relationships characterized by healthful and mutual intimacy have positive implications for intimacy in subsequent relationships. By influencing the nature of intimacy expectations that are internalized, siblings may extend influence over each other's romantic relationship qualities (Doughty et al., 2013, p. 4). Doughty et al., (2013) also found that this effect is pronounced for females in mixed-gender sibling pairs.

Intimacy is important in the selection and maintenance of both long-term marital satisfaction (Feldman et al., 1998, p. 264). The origins of a person's ability to experience intimacy extend back to childhood, because family is essential for learning the skills that translate to adolescent and young adult intimacy (Feldman et al., 1998, p. 265). Consistent with the theory that social relationship behaviors are learned in the home and can apply to relationships outside of the home, a previous study conducted by Dunn (1983) determined that adolescents who reported higher levels of sibling intimacy also reported have more intimacy in their romantic relationships.

A study conducted by Doughty et al., (2013) also indicates that females have a significant negative correlation between sibling conflict and romantic intimacy but males do not (p. 15). High-conflict sibling relationships hinder the development of the social and relational skills that are necessary to form and sustain intimate attachments to romantic partners later on. (Doughty et al., 2013, p. 16). This effect was only found to be significant for females, which may be due to their higher attunement to social relationships making them more vulnerable to the effects of sibling conflict (Doughty et al., 2013, p. 16).

Relational Closeness

Previous research has developed several definitions of intimacy but one of the central, common elements in these definitions is that intimacy depends on feelings of relational closeness. According to Floyd, K. & Parks, M. R., (1995) closeness is a critical component of the human experience and it is the close, personal relationships by which a person measures the quality of life (p. 69).

Hendrick and Hendrick (1991) determined that women are more likely than men to endorse closeness when determining relationship satisfaction. Feldman et al., (1998) found that in order to achieve intimacy in sibling relationships there must be a healthy balance between relational closeness and separation, and that youth may need special encouragement from the family to augment non-gender-stereotypic ways of functioning. Therefore, since women are already high on interpersonal communion and connection, they may need encouragement for separateness and autonomy in sibling relationships (p. 283).

In addition, the way males and females measure relational closeness

differs, which makes studying gender effects in close relationships difficult (Floyd & Parks, 1995). Women are more likely to mention verbal interactions as referents for closeness and are more likely to measure closeness by depth or intimacy of disclosure where as men look instead to the level of shared interests or mutual activities as referents for closeness (Floyd & Parks, 1995). As a result, Wood, J. T. & Inman, C. C., (1993) argue that women's relationships have inaccurately been depicted as closer than men's. Despite possible differences in the ways men and women express closeness, research suggests tat women may be more sensitive to the relational importance of their interactions than men.

Distance between Siblings

As mentioned above, since woman are already high on interpersonal communion and connection, and healthy relationships need a balance between connection and autonomy, women may need encouragement for separateness in sibling relationships. These findings may suggest that since women need encouragement for separateness in sibling relationships in order to achieve more balanced relationships and higher intimacy levels, more distance in years between females and their siblings, rather than little or no distance in years, may provide more separation and autonomy resulting in higher intimacy. On the contrary, when siblings are close in age it allows them to interact often and influence each other greatly. They also may be able to interact in cohort, specific ways as they face developmental challenges and grow together (Doughty et al., 2013, p. 4). These findings contribute to the current study's aim to determine if distance between siblings in years is a moderating factor in for conflict

management strategies.

Rationale

Research shows there are essential parallels between sibling and romantic relationships. According to Mones (2001), sibling interactions and experiences are the original "learning laboratory" for self-growth and it is our sibling interactions that teach us how to deal with differences, fairness, sharing, and conflict. Processes of power, gender identity, competition, cooperation, affection, communication, and empathy are negotiated between siblings and these same skills are critical in interactions between couples (p. 455). Mones also found that several key themes of romantic partner conflict like power and hierarchy, fairness and justice, and conflict resolution are linked to early sibling interaction (2001, p. 459). Several studies confirm that a person's conflict resolution patterns, both negative and positive, develop at a young age and can be generalized to how conflict is managed in other relationships (Rubenstein & Feldman, 1993). While research on the topic has linked childhood, sibling conflict resolution styles to resolution styles used outside of the family of origin, it has never gone beyond that (Black & Schutte, 2006, p. 1474). Additionally, college students may be overrepresented in friendship research, however they are seriously underrepresented in research on siblings (Stocker & Dunn, 1990).

Further, because adolescents with opposite-gender dyads reported higher levels of romantic intimacy, adolescents may benefit from social exposure to an opposite-gender sibling, which could prove negative impacts of childhood gender segregation. The effect of sibling interactions on females in mixed-gender dyads

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has proven to be greater than the effect on males therefore, this topic is especially important to females with male siblings.

RQ 1: Is there a relationship between a female siblings' conflict resolution style with her male sibling and her conflict resolution style with her romantic partner?

Previous research has found a relationship between relational closeness and conflict. According to Larson, (1998) who conducted his research on closeness and conflict using the exchange theory, interdependent relationships are often viewed in light of rewards and costs; rewards are equated with closeness and costs with conflict.

One distinct type of interdependent relationship is the communal relationship, in which participants emphasize equity in meeting one another's needs rather than equity in the contributions made by each party. People in communal relationships are motivated to maintain closeness and avoid damaging conflict. As a consequence, interactions are more positive and are driven by need fulfillment (Laurson, 1998). Laurson's findings revealed that communal relationships were marked by more positive conflict outcomes than were non-communal relationships. He also found that when overall closeness is higher in a relationship, so too is the likelihood of conflict improving the relationship rather than damaging it. Finally, the researcher determined that conflict between close peers is increasingly positively managed to minimize the disruptive potential of the dispute (1998).

In addition, intimacy, which depends on relational closeness, has proven

an essential part of sibling and partner relationships and is an important element of a couple's satisfaction (Feldman et al., 1998). A couple's satisfaction could in part depend on the extent to which intimacy is present in sibling relationships. Specifically, females have been found to endorse more relational closeness when determining relationship satisfaction, (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1991) and may be more sensitive to the relational importance of their interactions than men (Wood & Inman, 1993). Seeing as relational closeness is an important aspect of satisfaction in both sibling and romantic relationships, and females are more likely to judge the value of their relationships based on perceived relational closeness, relational closeness between females and their male siblings could impact behaviors in subsequent romantic relationships.

> **RQ 2**: Is relational closeness between siblings a moderating factor for female siblings' conflict resolution style with her male sibling and her conflict resolution style with her romantic partner?

Along with intimacy or relational closeness, the distance in years between siblings could have a significant effect on the type of conflict resolution styles learned and utilized, which in turn may impact conflict in romantic relationships. Since siblings often spend a considerable amount of time together during a time in their lives when they are constantly developing and facing new challenges, siblings who are close in age will grow together and greatly impact one another (Doughty et al., 2013). Siblings, who are separated by many years, may have less contact and impact on each other's conflict resolution styles and therefore,

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styles later employed in romantic relationships. Practicing successful conflict

resolution in sibling relationships enables adolescents to form the social

competencies needed to resolve conflict in romantic relationships. Further, it is

through repeated experiences of sibling conflict that a person forms and

improves these social competencies (Sadeh et al., 2001). Therefore, less

interaction and conflict between siblings who are separated by several years may

negatively impact a person's ability to resolve conflict in romantic relationships.

> **RQ 3**: Is distance between siblings in years a moderating factor for female
> siblings' conflict resolution style with her male sibling and her conflict
> resolution style with her romantic partner?

While research question two addresses whether or not relational

closeness affects conflict style, previous research findings also warrant the

question of whether or not conflict style affects relational closeness. As

Rubenstein and Feldman (1993) determined, a person's conflict resolution

patterns, both negative and positive, develop at a young age and can be

generalized to how conflict is managed in other relationships. Therefore, if a

female learns positive conflict resolution strategies, such as compromise in her

sibling relationship, she is likely to engage in those same positive resolution

styles in her romantic relationship. Kouneski and Olson (2004) identify vitalized

and harmonious marital types as the highest in intimacy and closeness because

they are highly skilled in their use of conflict resolution and have a low incidence

of avoidant or controlling behaviors.

Previous research on sibling relationships suggests that the relationship skills learned through a positive sibling relationship may enhance capacity for relationship skills and positive peer relationships (Lockwood et al., 2001). On the other hand, high-conflict sibling relationships hinder the development of skills that are essential to forming and sustaining intimate attachments to romantic partners later on, but only for females (Doughty et al., 2013). It has also been determined that only for females is there a significant negative relation between sibling conflict and romantic intimacy (Doughty et al., 2013). Since positive sibling relationships contribute to the formation of other positive relationships and females' romantic intimacy levels are significantly negatively impacted by high sibling conflict, females' use of positive conflict resolution styles, like compromise, may enhance intimacy levels or relational closeness with romantic partners.

> **RQ 4**: Is there a relationship between use of compromise by the female sibling with her male sibling and the female siblings level of relational closeness with her male partner?

Chapter III: Method

Participants

  The participants in this study students enrolled at James Madison University who are female, currently involved in a heterosexual romantic relationship, and have at least one male sibling. There were 155 total participants in this study made up of 129 first-year students, 18 sophomores, 5 juniors, and 3 seniors. This study is a convenience, non-random sample and all first-year students taking the required basic communication course will be contacted for participation. The study was posted on the School of Communication Studies' research participant website SONA.

Procedures

  This online, cross sectional survey study utilized Qualtrics. Participants voluntarily selected the link to the survey and were directed, first, to the consent form, where they learned the requirements of this research study and gave informed consent. Participants then completed an anonymous, 20-minute survey regarding various aspects of their sibling relationship and their romantic partner relationship. Lastly, participants answered four demographic questions to ensure they meet the requirements of the study.

Materials

  The survey first measured participants' conflict resolution strategies with their male sibling using Zacchilli and Hendricks's (2009) Romantic Partner

Conflict Scale (RPCS) (Appendix A). If they have more than one male sibling, they are instructed to report on only one for the entire survey. The RPCS measures six, varying conflict management strategies and answers are solicited on a 7-point Likert Scale. The scale measures, 1) *Compromise* using statements such as, "We try to collaborate so that we can reach a joint solution to conflict", 2) *Domination* using statements such as, "When we argue or fight, I try to win", 3) *Avoidance* using statements such as, "I avoid disagreements with my partner", 4) *Separation* using statements such has, "When we have conflict, we withdraw from each other for awhile for a 'cooling-off'", 5) *Submission* using statements such as, "When we have conflict, I usually give in to my partner" and 6) *Interactional reactivity* using statements such as, "My partner and I have frequent conflicts". This is a reliable scale as test-retest correlations for the scales were as follows: Compromise (.82), Avoidance (.70), Interactional Reactivity (.85), Separation (.76), Domination (.85), and Submission (.72) (Zacchilli & Hendrick, 2009).

The survey then measured relational closeness between participants and their male siblings. To measure relational closeness, this study used Vangelisti and Caughlin's (1997) scale measuring psychological closeness with family members (Appendix B/C). Participants responded to 7 questions measuring psychological closeness such as, "How important is your (relation's) opinion to you" and "How often do you talk about personal things with your (relation)." Participants' answers were solicited on a 7-point Likert Scale and the reliability for this scale is .93 (Vangelisti & Caughlin, 1997). The surveys were measuring

conflict resolution strategies with participants' partner and relational closeness with their partner. Then participants completed the same two measures for their relationships with current romantic partners.

Finally participants answered a few demographic questions regarding the amount of years separating them and their sibling, their class year at James Madison University (i.e. First-Year, Sophomore), their age, and gender identity.

Chapter IV: Results

RQ 1

RQ 1 examined whether there is a relationship between a female siblings conflict resolution style with her male sibling and her conflict resolution style with her romantic partner. Descriptive statistics for RQ 1 and 4 can be found in Table 1 and 3 respectively. To test this, a Pearson's correlation coefficient was utilized and was significant for several of the items tested. A moderate, positive correlation was found between a female sibling's use of compromise with her male sibling and her use of compromise with her male partner $r(129)=.475$, $p=000$. Females who utilized compromise as a conflict style in her sibling relationship also utilized compromise as a conflict style in her romantic relationship. There was a significant positive correlation found between a female sibling's use of domination with her male sibling and several of the other conflict styles tested with her romantic partner. Specifically, her use of domination in her romantic relationship $r(151)=.633$, $p=.000$ had a moderate correlation. There was a low correlation for her use of avoidance $r(149)=.272$, $p=.001$, submission $r(151)=.350$, $p=.000$, and interactional reactivity $r(151)=.236$, $p=.004$ in her romantic relationship, and a slight correlation for her use of separation $r(153)=.188$, $p=.020$ in her romantic relationships. As a female's use of domination with her male sibling increased, her use of domination, avoidance, separation, submission, and interactional reactivity in her romantic relationship increased as well. A moderate, significant positive correlation was found between a female's use of avoidance with her male sibling and her use of avoidance

r(148)=.464, *p*=000 with her romantic partner. A slight, significant positive correlation was found between her use of avoidance with her male sibling and her use of compromise *r*(148)=.190, *p*=.021 with her romantic partner and a low, significant positive correlation was found between her use of avoidance with her male sibling and her use of separation *r*(152)=.244, *p*=.002, and submission *r*(150)=.237, *p*=.003 with her romantic partner. Additionally, a low, significant positive correlation was found between a female's use of separation with her male sibling and her use of domination *r*(151)=.234, *p*=.004, avoidance *r*(149)=.313, *p*=.000, separation *r*(153)=.380, *p*=.000, submission *r*(146)=.216, *p*=.008, and interactional reactivity *r*(151)=.245, *p*=.002 with her romantic partner and a slight, significant positive correlation was found between a female's use of separation with her male sibling and her use of compromise *r*(149)=.182, *p*=.026 with her romantic partner. A low, significant positive correlation was found between a female's use of submission with her male sibling and her use of domination *r*(146)=.249, *p*=.002, avoidance *r*(144)=.301, *p*=.000, separation *r*(148)=.248, *p*=.002, and interactional reactivity *r*(146)=.362, *p*=.000 with her romantic partner. A moderate, significant positive correlation was found between a female's use of submission with her male sibling and her use of submission *r*(146)=.606, *p*=.000 with her romantic partner. Finally, a low, significant positive correlation was found between a female's use of interactional reactivity with her male sibling and her use of domination *r*(143)=.395, *p*=.000, separation *r*(150)=.202, *p*=.013, and submission *r*(148)=.335 with her romantic partner, and

a moderate, significant positive correlation with her use interactional reactivity

$r(148)=.508$, $p=.000$ with her romantic partner.

RQ 2

Moderation statistics for RQ 2 can be found in Table 2. RQ 2 examined whether relational closeness between siblings is a moderating factor for a female's conflict resolution style with her male sibling and her conflict resolution style with her romantic partner. We used the Process Procedure for SPSS Release 2.15 to test this. Moderation is shown by a significant interaction effect, $b=.0174$, 95% CI [0.0010, 0.0337], $t=2.1029$, $p=.0872$, indicating that the relationship between a female siblings use of domination with her male sibling and her use of domination with her romantic partner is moderated by her closeness with her male sibling. As sibling closeness increased, so did the positive relationship between the use of domination in sibling and romantic relationships.

RQ 3

RQ 3 examined whether the distance between siblings in years is a moderating factor for a female's conflict resolution style with her male sibling and her conflict resolution style with her romantic partner. The mean for distance in years between siblings was 4.46 and the median was 3.00. The range was 0-19 years. The relationship between a female's conflict resolution style with her male sibling and her conflict resolution style with her romantic partner is not moderated by the distance between siblings in years.

RQ 4

Finally, RQ 4 examined whether there is a relationship between use of compromise by the female sibling with her male sibling and the female siblings level of relational closeness with her male partner. We found a low, significant positive correlation between the variables, $r(141)=.249$, $p=.003$. Therefore, as a female's use of the compromise conflict resolution style with her male sibling increases, her relational closeness with her romantic partner increases as well.

Chapter V: Discussion

Research question one asked if there is a relationship between a female siblings' conflict resolution style with her male sibling and her conflict resolution style with her romantic partner. Statistical results show that there is a significant relationship between a female siblings conflict resolution style with her male sibling and with her romantic partner. For each style tested (compromise, domination, avoidance, separation, submission, and interactional reactivity) we found a significant positive correlation between the use of each style in a sibling relationship and the use of at least one other style used in romantic relationship. Specifically, each style correlated to itself across the relationships; when it was used in the sibling relationship it was also used in the romantic relationship. However, each style, except for compromise, also correlated to the use of other styles. For example, when avoidance was used in sibling relationships it was also used in romantic relationships along with compromise, separation, and submission. This result was expected because previous research has shown that sibling interactions are the original "learning laboratory" that teach us how to deal with conflict (Mones, 2001, p. 455) and that several key themes of romantic partner conflict like conflict resolution are linked to early sibling interaction (p. 459). Further, this result was expected because past research has found that the effect of sibling interactions on females in mixed-gender dyads is greater than the effect on males and females are especially vulnerable to the effects of sibling conflict (Doughty et al., 2013, p. 16).

As predicted, several sibling conflict resolutions styles had significant

positive correlations with styles utilized in romantic relationships, but the most interesting finding is that a female's use of compromise with her male sibling during conflict is positively correlated only to her use of compromise with her romantic partner during conflict. Specifically, for all of the other styles except for compromise (domination, avoidance, separation, submission, and interactional reactivity) we found positive correlations with multiple other styles. Compromise was the only style that when utilized in sibling relationships, positively correlates to utilization in romantic relationships without correlations to any other style. Therefore, as females use more compromise during sibling conflict, they use more compromise during romantic partner conflict but do not use more domination, avoidance, separation, submission, or interactional reactivity. This finding is of particular interest and importance because it demonstrates the positive impact of using compromise during sibling conflict. Since both positive styles and negative styles transmit from the sibling relationship to the romantic relationship, it also demonstrates the importance of the type of style a female chooses to utilize in her sibling relationship.

Research question two examined if relational closeness between siblings is a moderating factor for female sibling conflict resolution style with her male sibling and her conflict resolution style with her romantic partner. The results show that there is a significant interaction effect indicating that the relationships between a female siblings use of domination with her male sibling and her use of domination with her romantic partner is moderated by her closeness with her male sibling. In other words, as sibling closeness increased, so did the positive

relationship between the female's use of domination to resolve conflict in sibling and romantic relationships. These findings are important because it is often assumed that siblings who employ conflict resolution strategies such as domination, as opposed to positive styles like compromise, are in less relationally close sibling relationships, however, the results demonstrate that this is not always the case.

This result supports previous research findings that females endorse more relational closeness when determining relationship satisfaction and are more likely to judge the value of their relationships based on perceived relational closeness (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1991). It is odd however, that relational closeness only moderated the positive relationship between a females use of domination in both relationships. This may mean that domination is most likely to carry over when the sibling relationship is close. Seeing as females may be more sensitive to the relational importance of their interactions than males, it was expected that more relational closeness between siblings would moderate the relationship between a more constructive resolution style, such as compromise. One explanation for this finding could be that females who feel closer to their male siblings are more confident in the strength and longevity of their relationship and feel they can utilize domination as a conflict resolution strategy without compromising the strength and closeness of the relationship. However, this does not explain why the use of domination would then transmit to romantic relationships.

The prediction that relational closeness would moderate conflict styles is

also based on previous research by Laurson (1998), who found that when

closeness is higher in a relationship, the relationship is marked by more positive

conflict outcomes and that conflict between close peers is increasingly managed

to minimize the disruptive potential of the dispute. However, Laurson (1998)

studied peer relationships, unlike the current study that looked at sibling

relationships. Therefore, it is possible that close peers try to resolve conflict

positively because they view their relationship as more vulnerable to dissolution

than close siblings do.

Research question three asked whether distance between siblings in

years is a moderating factor for a female sibling's conflict resolution style with her

male sibling and her conflict resolution style with her romantic partner. The

results show that distance in years between siblings does not moderate the

conflict resolution style a female utilizes with her male sibling and with her

romantic partner. Previous research that led to this research question found that

since siblings often spend more time together than they do with anyone else

(Waldinger, Vaillant, & Orav, 2007, p.5), they are salient agents in each other's

social learning and influence one another's social processes (Bandura, 1977,

p.18), and their repeated conflict interactions may form and improve their conflict

resolution styles (Sadeh, Javdani, Finy, & Verona, 2001). Therefore, it was

hypothesized that siblings who are separated by many years would have less

interaction and thus be less influenced by one another, however this was not the

case. A possible explanation for this could be that all sibling relationships have

the same foundational characteristics, such as perceived longevity and

permanence, and it does not matter if siblings are two years or 14 years apart, they still impact each other similarly. Additionally, the median distance in years between siblings was only 3.00 which could help explain why distance in years between siblings was not a significant moderating factor for type of conflict style utilized. It would be interesting to see if a larger median distance in years between siblings would moderate the conflict styles females employ in both relationships.

Research question four asked if there is a relationship between the use of compromise by the female sibling with her male sibling and the female sibling's level of relational closeness with her male partner. The results show that there is a positive correlation between the variables. Thus, as a female's use of compromise during conflict with her male sibling increases, her relational closeness with her romantic partner increases as well. This result was predicted because previous research found that in mixed-gender sibling relationships, females have reported significantly higher intimacy in their romantic relationships (Doughty et al., 2013) and that sibling relationships characterized by mutual intimacy have positive implications for intimacy in later romantic relationships. In light of this, the study examined whether the use of compromise in a female-male sibling relationship, assuming it would cause or be an effect of a more intimate sibling relationship, would in turn correlate to more a intimate romantic relationship. Additionally, Doughty et al., (2013) found that high-conflict sibling relationships hinder the development of the social and relational skills that are necessary to form and sustain intimate attachments to romantic partners later on.

The findings of the current study are important because they could help siblings

that are in high-conflict relationships still be able to successfully form and

maintain intimate attachments to romantic partners; through the use of

compromise during conflict.

Limitations/ Future Research

While this study's findings contribute to the study of sibling and romantic

partner conflict, some limitations exist. One limitation of the current study is the

use of a non-random sample as opposed to a random sample. Employing a

random sample would have served to increase the external validity of this study.

As a result, the participants of the study were largely first-year female students at

a medium-size eastern public university who were meeting a research

requirement for their general education communication studies course. This does

not provide the current study with a large, diverse participant pool. However,

being that all the participants were enrolled in a general education course, as

opposed to a specific major course, the participant pool does represent a wide

variety of diverse majors and interests. An additional limitation is the study's

focus on heterosexual relationships and lack of examination of homosexual

relationships. Finally, the surveys the participants completed were based on self-

report data and it may be difficult to objectively self-report on one's own conflict

resolution style. The surveys were however established measures, which

increases their reliability and validity.

Seeing as the present study looked at sibling relational closeness as a

moderating factor in conflict resolution styles, it would be interesting for future areas of research to examine if negative characteristics like high-conflict or contentious/ distant relationships moderate the correlation of the conflict resolution styles employed in both relationships. Additionally, because we found a significant relationship between use of compromise in female-male sibling relationships and intimacy in romantic relationships, future research should look at whether the use of compromise in high-conflict sibling relationships can even mitigate the detrimental affect of frequent sibling conflict on the siblings' ability to form intimate romantic relationships. Finally, future research on the topic should use qualitative methods and observational or other report measures, to examine if the findings are consistent with the present studies, as well as examining homosexual relationships.

Conclusion

This study addressed and examined a population (college students) who had previously been underrepresented in the literature on sibling relationships, as the majority of it focuses on children and young adolescents. Previous research had linked sibling conflict styles to styles employed outside of the family of origin but prior to this study had not specifically linked them to romantic relationships. The present study serves to deepen the literature beyond just the effects of family of origin on individuals' conflict tendencies. It is especially valuable to the female population who can use the findings of this study to potentially improve their conflict interactions with both their male siblings and romantic partners as well as increase intimacy in their romantic relationships.

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Overall, the current research study serves to enable females to gain awareness of how conflict patterns may transfer over from sibling relationships to romantic relationships.

Chapter VI: Appendices

Appendix A: Results Tables

TABLE 1

Descriptive Statistics (RQ 1)

	N	Mean	Range	Std. Deviation
RP Closeness	154	45.4351	49.00-7.00	6.39437
RP Interactional Reactivity	153	15.3660	42.00-6.00	9.13549
RP Submission	153	18.1569	35.00-5.00	7.74182
RP Separation	155	22.3226	45.00-5.00	7.41264
RP Avoidance	151	14.9338	21.00-3.00	4.41764
RP Domination	153	22.7647	42.00-6.00	9.11676
RP Compromise	151	80.6556	98.00-28.00	14.22582
Sibling Closeness	152	40.4474	49.00-8.00	8.48746
Sibling Interactional Reactivity	150	16.7400	42.00-6.00	7.92027
Sibling Submission	148	17.5811	35.00-5.00	6.80537
Sibling Separation	153	20.3464	35.00-5.00	7.04247
Sibling Avoidance	152	13.9803	21.00-3.00	4.24805
Sibling Domination	153	25.6797	42.00-6.00	8.85382
Sibling Compromise	142	71.3380	98.00-16.00	1.13314

TABLE 2

Moderation Statistics (RQ 2)

	b	se	*t*	*p*
Constant	22.3995	.5805	38.5864	.0000
Sibling Relational Closeness (RC)	- .0065	.0789	- .0829	.9340
Sibling Domination (Dom)	.6598	.0611	10.956	.0000
Sibling RC x Sibling Dom	.0174	.0083	2.1029	.0372

TABLE 3

Descriptive Statistics (RQ 4)

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Sibling Compromise	71.3380	17.13314	142
Romantic Partner Compromise	45.4351	6.39437	154

Appendix B: Cover Letter

Conflict Resolution Styles in Sibling and Romantic Relationships

Identification of Investigators & Purpose of Study

You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Kristen Friel of James Madison University. The purpose of this study is to determine in conflict between siblings affects a person's conflict with their romantic partner. This study will contribute to the researcher's completion of her senior honors project.

Research Procedures

This study consists of an online questionnaire that will be administered to individual participants through Qualtrics (an online survey tool). You will be asked to provide answers to a series of questions related to conflict resolution styles in sibling relationships and conflict resolution styles in romantic relationships.

Time Required

Participation in this study will require no more than 25 minutes of your time.

Risks

The investigator does not perceive more than minimal risks from your involvement in this study (that is, no risks beyond the risks associated with everyday life).

Benefits

There are no direct benefits to participants. This research will benefit our understanding of conflict resolutions styles, sibling relationships, and romantic relationships.

Incentives

There are no incentives for this study.

Confidentiality

The results of this research will be submitted to the JMU Honors Program as a senior honors project. Individual responses are anonymously obtained and recorded online through the Qualtrics software, data is kept in the strictest confidence. No identifiable information will be collected from the participant and no identifiable responses will be presented in the final form of this study. All data will be stored in a secure location only accessible to the researchers.

Participation & Withdrawal

Your participation is entirely voluntary. You are free to choose not to participate. Should you choose to participate, you can withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. However, once your responses have been submitted and anonymously recorded you will not be able to withdraw from the study. Participants who are interested in learning more about this study will be able to send an email to one of the researchers listed below requesting a copy of the final paper.

Questions about the Study

If you have questions or concerns during the time of your participation in this study, or after its completion or you would like to receive a copy of the final aggregate results of this study, please contact:

Researcher:	**Advisor:**
Kristen Friel	Dr. Sharlene Richards
Communication Studies, Honors	Health Communication
Program	James Madison University
James Madison University	Telephone: (540) 568-3568
frielkm@dukes.jmu.edu	richarst@jmu.edu

Questions about Your Rights as a Research Subject

Dr. David Cockley

Chair, Institutional Review Board

James Madison University

(540) 568-2834

cocklede@jmu.edu

Giving of Consent

I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about this study. I have read this consent and I understand what is being requested of me as a participant in this study. I certify that I am at least 18 years of age. By clicking on the link below, and completing and submitting this anonymous survey, I am consenting to participate in this research.

Kristen M. Friel
_____

Name of Researcher (Printed)   **Date**

_____

Name of Researcher (Signed)   **Date**

Romantic Partner Conflict Scale (Zacchilli & Hendrick, 2009)

Please respond to the set of questions by thinking about your relationship with your male sibling. If you have more than one male sibling then select one of your siblings when responding to these questions.

1= strongly disagree

2= disagree

3= somewhat disagree

4= neutral

5= somewhat agree

6= agree

7= strongly agree

1. My sibling and I collaborate to find a common ground to solve problems between us.
2. When we have conflict, I try to push my sibling into choosing the solution that I think is best.
3. I avoid disagreements with my sibling.
4. When we disagree, we try to separate for a while so we can consider both sides of the argument.
5. I give in to my sibling's wishes to settle arguments on my sibling's terms.
6. My sibling and I have frequent conflicts.
7. When we experience conflict, we let each other cool off before discussing it further.
8. When we disagree, my goal is to convince my sibling that I am right.
9. My sibling and I try to avoid arguments.
10. When we argue, I usually try to satisfy my sibling's needs rather than my own.
11. I try to meet my sibling halfway to resolve a disagreement.
12. We often resolve conflict by talking about the problem.

13. I become verbally abusive to my sibling when we have conflict.

14. When we have conflict, we withdraw from each other for a while for a "cooling-off" period.

15. I rarely let my sibling win an argument.

16. When we argue, I let my sibling know I am in charge.

17. I avoid conflict with my sibling.

18. When we have conflict, I usually give in to my sibling.

19. When my sibling and I have conflict, we collaborate so that we are both happy with our decision.

20. I suffer a lot from conflict with my sibling.

Psychological Closeness Scale (Vangelisti & Caughlin, 1997)

Please respond to the following set of questions by thinking about your relationships with your male sibling. If you have more than one sibling please continue to respond to the questions by considering the same sibling throughout these questions.

1= strongly disagree

2= disagree

3= somewhat disagree

4= neutral

5= somewhat agree

6= agree

7= strongly agree

1. I am close with my brother.

2. I like my brother.

3. I often talk to my brother about personal things.

4. My brother's opinion is important to me.

5. I am satisfied with my relationship with my brother.

6. I enjoy spending time with my brother.

7. My relationship with my brother is important to me.

Romantic Partner Conflict Scale (Zacchilli & Hendrick, 2009)

Please respond to the next set of questions by thinking about your relationship with your romantic partner.

1= strongly disagree

2= disagree

3= somewhat disagree

4= neutral

5= somewhat agree

6= agree

7= strongly agree

1. My partner and I collaborate to find a common ground to solve problems between us.
2. When we have conflict, I try to push my partner into choosing the solution that I think is best.
3. I avoid disagreements with my partner.
4. When we disagree, we try to separate for a while so we can consider both sides of the argument.
5. I give in to my partner's wishes to settle arguments on my partner's terms.
6. My partner and I have frequent conflicts.
7. When we experience conflict, we let each other cool off before discussing it further.
8. When we disagree, my goal is to convince my partner that I am right.
9. My partner and I try to avoid arguments.
10. When we argue, I usually try to satisfy my partner's needs rather than my own.
11. I try to meet my partner halfway to resolve a disagreement.
12. We often resolve conflict by talking about the problem.

13. I become verbally abusive to my partner when we have conflict.

14. When we have conflict, we withdraw from each other for a while for a "cooling-off" period.

15. I rarely let my partner win an argument.

16. When we argue, I let my partner know I am in charge.

17. I avoid conflict with my partner.

18. When we have conflict, I usually give in to my partner.

19. When my partner and I have conflict, we collaborate so that we are both happy with our decision.

20. I suffer a lot from conflict with my partner

Psychological Closeness Scale (Vangelisti & Caughlin, 1997)

Please respond to the following questions by thinking about your romantic partner.

1= strongly disagree

2= disagree

3= somewhat disagree

4= neutral

5= somewhat agree

6= agree

7= strongly agree

1. I am close to my partner.

2. I like my partner.

3. I often talk about personal things with my partner.

4. My partner's opinion is important to me.

5. I am satisfied with my relationship with my partner.

6. I enjoy spending time with my partner.

7. My relationship with my partner is important to me.

Demographic Questions

How many years separate you and your male sibling (e.g. 1997 and 1994 would be 3 years)?

According to your credit hours at this point in time you are a
    A. First-Year student
    B. Sophomore
    C. Junior
    D. Senior
    E. 5th Year Senior
    F. Graduate student

What is your age in years?

Do you identify as male or female?

    A. Male
    B. Female

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