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THE FAMILY CONTEXT OF SIBLING DEIDENTIFICATION

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Psychology
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirement for the Degree of
Masters of Arts.

by

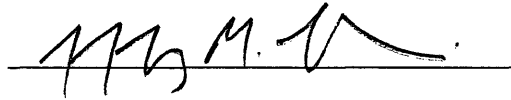
Jeffrey Mark Lackner

1990

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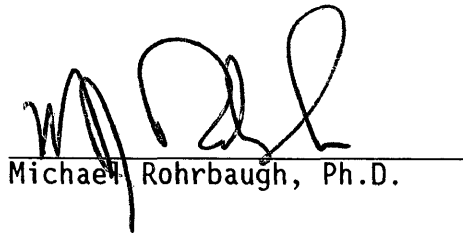
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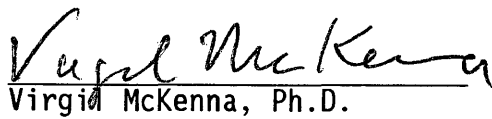


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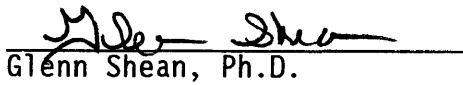
Approved, April, 1990



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DEDICATION

This work is lovingly dedicated to the memory of my mother,
Sandra Antonoff Lackner.

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Quite literally, the following pages represent the final chapters of a very special period of my life. My two years in Williamsburg helped me develop a sense of professional and personal purpose which, at this time, seems everlasting. As such, I would be remiss in not acknowledging those individuals whose guidance, patience, and inspiration helped me in my development. I am thankful to Carl Orensky and the staff of the Child/Adolescent Unit of the Eastern State Hospital. Their dedication to their work and compassion for their clients will serve as role models for a long time to come. I would like to thank members of my thesis committee, Virgil McKenna and Glenn Shean, for their reading and criticism of my thesis. I am especially grateful to my chairman, Michael Rohrbaugh, who has instilled within me an appreciation for empirical stringency, theoretical integrity, and literary clarity. Ours was a Dickensian journey filled at times with laughter and at other times with not-so-much laughter, but rewarding nonetheless.

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ABSTRACT

Schachter (1982) has called attention to sibling deidentification, a tendency for siblings to define themselves (and be defined by family members) as different from one another in terms of personality. The present study sought to replicate Schachter's findings that sibling deidentification is most common in first-born, adjacent, and same-sex pairs, and occurs in the context of "split-parent identification," a tetradic family pattern in which siblings deidentify with different parents. The present study also sought to extend the scope of Schachter's research by investigating what contextual factors prevail in families whose siblings deidentify. To this end, the study investigated the validity of two competing hypotheses derived from alternative models of family therapy. In the framework of Bowen's (1978) family systems theory, deidentification might be taken to indicate emotional differentiation, the hallmark of a healthy family system. From the perspective of structural models (Haley, 1976; Minuchin, 1974), however, deidentification and split-parent identification suggest cross-generational alliances and coalitions, the mark of a dysfunctional system.

Forty-eight male and 54 female undergraduate volunteers, all under the age of 21, participated in the study. All were from intact families and had at least one sibling. In addition to two measures of sibling deidentification and split-parent identification, subjects completed the following measures: the Bloom (1985) family functioning scales; the intergenerational triangulation and fusion subscales of the Parental Authority in the Family System Questionnaire (Bray, Williamson, and Malone, 1985); Social Desirability Scale the Marlowe-Crowne (Crowne & Marlowe, 1964); and a variety of scales designed to measure family alliance/coalition patterns, parent-child proximity, and emotional problems in the nuclear family.

The results indicated that over half the subjects reported deidentifying with at least one sibling, but deidentification was no more prevalent for first-born, adjacent, or same-sex pairs than for other pairs. Previous findings that individuals who deidentified with their siblings also tend to identify with a different parent figure were only partially supported by the data. Consistent with predictions from structural family therapy, sibling deidentification was associated with dysfunctional family patterns, including enmeshment, conflict, triangulation, cross-generational coalitions, and emotional problems of individual family members. The implications of these findings for the study of sibling differences are discussed.

THE FAMILY CONTEXT OF SIBLING DEIDENTIFICATION

by

Jeffrey Mark Lackner

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CHAPTER 1

SIBLING DEIDENTIFICATION FROM A FAMILY CONTEXT

Biblical stories of Cain and Abel, Essau and Jacob, and Joseph and his brothers testify to Western culture's inveterate interest in sibling relationships. For the social scientist, too, interest in sibling relations is hardly a new phenomenon, with well over 2000 published research articles on the effects of sibling status on personality and intellectual development (Wagner, Schubert, & Schubert, 1979). And yet, with the possible exception of the works of Adler (1928) and Anna Freud (Freud & Dann, 1951), major theories of pathological and normal development have largely neglected the role of siblings in the family. Curiously, of the 800 pages constituting the Handbook of Family Therapy (Gurman & Kniskern, 1981), only three pages are devoted to siblings. Part of the reason for this discrepancy stems from the rather narrow definition of the family many psychologists have adopted, one that focuses largely on the parent-child dyad. The realization that families often contain two parents and at least two children has prompted some researchers to recognize that children do not develop in isolation, but rather within the confines of the family system.

Within the family field, the study of sibling relationships has attracted little attention until recently. Contributing to the emerging literature on siblings is research on the concept of sibling deidentification (Schachter, 1982, 1985; Schachter, Marquis, & Campbell,

1976). The phenomenon of sibling deidentification refers to the tendency of siblings to define themselves (and be defined by family members) as different from one another in terms of personality. Schachter and her associates (1976; 1978; 1985) obtained dichotomous judgments of sibling similarities and dissimilarities by asking college students in two- and three-child families whether they were alike or different from each sibling in terms of personality. Additionally, continuous measures were derived by having subjects rate the similarity-dissimilarity of all family dyads on seven-point Likert scales. The researchers (see Schachter et al., 1976) compared first pairs (first- and second-born siblings), second pairs (second- and third-born siblings), and jump pairs (first- and third-born siblings) and found that sibling deidentification occurred most often in the first-pair of children, least often in the first-third sibling pairs, and at intermediate frequency in the second-third sibling pair. The only other variable significantly related to the percentage of deidentification was whether the siblings were of the same or opposite sex; same-sex siblings deidentified significantly more often than opposite-sex siblings. These findings were cross-validated and corroborated with a sample of mothers who judged pairs of their own children (Schachter et al., 1978) on similar dichotomous and continuous measures of deidentification used in the 1976 study.

From her deidentification research, Schachter (1982) offered evidence of a broader pattern of intrafamilial identification in which each deidentifying sibling in a pair tended to identify with a different parent. Schachter refers to this phenomenon as split-parent

identification. In such a scenario, Sibling A identifies with Parent B, while Sibling B identifies with Parent A. In later research with college students, Schachter (1982; 1985) found the pattern of split-parent identification to be associated with sibling deidentification, generating a family structure of similarities and differences that Schachter termed the "family tetrad". Schachter also observed that the family tetrad is mainly a first pair phenomenon, occurring more frequently in same-sex than in opposite-sex siblings pairs.

Schachter (1982, 1985) draws from both the psychoanalytic theory of conflict and defense and from research on social comparison theory to explain the apparent association between sibling deidentification and split-parent identification. She suggests that sibling deidentification and split-parent identification are effective defense mechanisms against sibling rivalry, serving to alleviate the conflict arising from both sibling competition and comparison. According to Schachter (1982), when each sibling in a pair identifies with a different parent, neither child feels that the other sibling is favored. While this explanation is plausible from an individual psychological perspective, it fails to explain what family factors are associated with the manifestation of sibling deidentification and split-parent identification. Indeed, the process of split-parent identification implies that the choice of the main parental identification figure is a function of the entire family system, not simply the child-parent dyad as traditionally suggested (e.g., Bandura, 1977; Kohlberg, 1966).

Interestingly, different family system models imply competing predictions about how sibling deidentification and split-parent

identification may be associated with adaptive family functioning. From the viewpoint of structural family therapists such as Haley (1976, 1980) and Minuchin (1974), one might expect sibling deidentification and split-parent identification to be associated with maladaptive family patterns such as cross-generational alliances between parents and children. In the event that these alliances supplant the marital bond, dysfunction would be predicted to occur. Research suggests that families in which a cross-generational (parent-child) bond is stronger than the marital bond (parent-parent) experience greater adjustment problems than families showing clear and proper generational boundaries (Teyber, 1981). Two very different set of hypotheses about how sibling deidentification relates to family functioning can be derived from Bowen's (1978) family system theory. On the one hand, Bowen family systems theory may predict a negative correlation between sibling deidentification and healthy family functioning. That is, deidentification could be seen as a manifestation of emotional cutoff. Bowen (1978) describes emotional cutoff as an adaptive mechanism for dealing with an unbearably close emotional bond between an individual and one or more family members. In the event that a sibling shares a highly fused relationship with another sibling, then he or she may assume different personality attributes in order to become emotionally cutoff from his or her fellow sibling. By this interpretation of Bowen's theory, deidentification may reflect "emotional cutoff", a family systems property of unhealthy family functioning. On the other hand a different interpretation of Bowen's family system model would suggest that sibling deidentification and split-parent identification reflect a well differentiated nuclear family

system, as defined by low levels of triangulation and intergenerational fusion, and high levels of cohesion. It follows that individuals in such families would show better functioning than those individuals whose families were not marked by sibling deidentification and/or split-parent identification.

The concept of differentiation is the cornerstone of Bowen's (1978) family systems theory. Differentiation is a property of all family systems and refers to the interpersonal processes which maintain the psychological distances among family members (Sabatelli & Mazor, 1985). Bowen (1976) suggests that all family systems may be described as possessing a level of differentiation, ranging on a continuum from poorly differentiated to well differentiated. According to Bowen (1978), poorly differentiated families tend to regulate interpersonal distances in such a way as to retard the family member's efforts at individuation. Individuation refers to the subjective process by which a person becomes existentially distinct from his or her relational context (Bowen, 1978; Karpel, 1976), particularly one's family of origin. Failing to achieve adequate individuation, poorly differentiated families are characterized by an emotional "stuck togetherness" or fusion. The defining characteristic of fused families is a blurring of psychological boundaries between self and other (Nichols, 1984). The greater degree of fusion between two family members, the more emotionally reactive each member is to the tension and anxiety of the other. In fused relationships, so much effort is invested in seeking love and approval, or attacking each other for not supplying it, that there remains little energy for autonomous, goal-directed behavior (Bowen, 1978). The

adolescent raised in such an environment is without the adequate personal resources necessary for the completion of normal developmental tasks.

Additionally, because of their high emotional reactivity, poorly differentiated families are especially vulnerable to "triangulating" one of their members in an attempt to stabilize their emotional balance. Triangulation refers to a process by which a dyadic emotional system encompasses a third member for the purpose of maintaining the emotional balance of the system (Simon, Stierlin, & Wynne, 1985). Whereas fusion typically refers to a type of transaction between two family members, the triangulation process refers to a transaction involving three family members. In highly triangulated families, the identity of the child become submerged in the emotional intensity of another relationship system. Insofar as normal personal development requires each child to form an unique identity from that of his or her sibling counterpart, then frequently triangulated children may show dysfunctional behaviors (Fleming & Anderson, 1985). Because the probability of triangulation within a family is heightened by the poor differentiation of family members, well differentiated families are less likely to use triangulation to stabilize the emotional homeostasis of the nuclear family unit.

Drawing from Bowen family systems theory, one could predict a positive correlation between deidentification and healthy family functioning. That is, one might hypothesize that families manifesting sibling deidentification and split-parent identification would be characterized by a relational climate in which the exhibition of individual differences is not only tolerated but encouraged. Through

the deidentification process, a sibling establishes personal attributes that are unique to those shared by his or her sibling counterpart. To the extent that one's awareness of personal individuality partially defines his or her differentiation level, then the deidentification process would serve the benign function of encouraging each sibling to establish a distinct personal identity. In so doing, the sibling may become more autonomous of his or her family members and, as such, better able to fulfill certain developmental tasks of adolescence and early adulthood.

Through the split-parent identification process, a sibling adopts significantly more personal attributes of one parent than those of the other parent. By implication, families showing sibling deidentification and split-parent identification might be expected to show greater individual differences among family members than those families whose siblings do not differentially identify with parental figures. As with deidentification, siblings may be likely to see differences among family members as a tolerated pattern of personal development and not a threat to the stability of their family. In such families, one might expect heightened differentiation, lower levels of triangulation and fusion. Corroboration of this hypothesis might also imply relatively poor individual functioning for members whose families are not found to show sibling deidentification.

In contrast to this rather healthy view of sibling deidentification and split-parent identification derived from Bowen family therapy, structural models of family therapy (e.g., Minuchin, 1974; Haley, 1976, 1980) might conceive of the two processes as pathological insofar as

their concurrent presence may nurture the formation of cross-generational coalitions. The term cross-generational coalition refers to the formation of an illicit association between parent and child at the expense of a third party. According to Haley (1976), functional families are typically organized hierarchically by generations, with the marital dyad serving as the strongest emotional relationship. The establishment and maintenance of clear and proper boundaries between the marital/parental and sibling subsystems is considered one of the chief and most adaptive tasks confronting the family (Lidz & Fleck, 1965). For the parents, clear generational boundaries function to protect the marital bond and reinforce its interdependency and shared leadership as a parental unit.

Structural family therapy research indicates that the primary emotional bond in disturbed or pathological families is frequently not the mother-father dyad but a cross-generational alliance between parent and child (Haley, 1976; Minuchin, 1974). The formation of cross-generational coalitions challenges the strength of the marital dyad and makes the authority of the favoring parent contingent on support from the child. Where such an alliance supplants the marital dyad as the primary emotional bond of the family unit, significant maladjustment and psychological disturbance may result. In contrast with a primary cross-generational alliance, a strong marital dyad has been found to be significantly related to adolescents' positive self-image and better academic success (Teyber, 1983). Additionally, more recent findings at William and Mary by Wilson & Rohrbaugh (1964), Eldridge & Rohrbaugh (1985), and Rohrbaugh & Peterson (1986) suggest that the integrity of

generational boundaries as reflected in perceived strength of primary parental alliances is important to high school and college students' academic and social adjustment.

Thus, the purpose of the present research was to replicate and extend Schachter's findings by investigating what particular family patterns prevail in families whose siblings deidentify. In addition to replicating Schachter's findings (1985) with respect to the prevalence of sibling deidentification and its association with split-parent identification, two competing hypotheses were investigated. One hypothesis drawn from Bowen's Family Systems theory states that students who reported more sibling deidentification and split-parent deidentification in their families would also report a relatively well differentiated nuclear family system, characterized by adaptive family patterns (including less fusion and triangulation). The theory would also predict better social and academic adjustment among students who deidentify. An alternative hypothesis, reflecting the viewpoint of structural family therapy (Haley, 1976; Minuchin, 1974), is that sibling deidentification would reflect dysfunctional family patterns, especially cross-generational alliances and blurred generational boundaries, as well as poorer student adjustment.

CHAPTER II

METHOD

Subjects

The subjects were 48 male and 54 female undergraduate college students between the ages of 17 and 22 ($M = 18.7$ years) who were enrolled in Introductory Psychology courses at the College of William and Mary. The sample comprised 87% white students and 13% black students; 61% were freshmen, 29% were sophomores, 8% were juniors and 3% were seniors.

All subjects were from intact families (i.e., their natural parents were married and living together) and had at least one sibling but not more than three siblings. The proportion of subjects having one, two, and three siblings were 26%, 48%, and 26%, respectively. Whether siblings were of the same or opposite sex was not considered in selecting subjects.

Procedure

The data were gathered in two stages. First, over 500 students in Introductory Psychology classes completed a Family Background Questionnaire requesting information about their past and present family relationships and current social and academic adjustment at college. From this pool, 48 males and 54 females meeting the criteria described above were invited to participate in a study of "sibling and family relationships" in exchange for course credit. Subjects who agreed to

participate were asked to attend one of two evening sessions at which time they would spend up to one hour completing additional questionnaires.

At the beginning of the test sessions, subjects were told the general nature of the research and given consent forms to sign. They were encouraged to be honest in their responses and assured that their responses would be confidential. Each subject was then given a packet of materials that included portions of the Family Background Questionnaire they had completed previously; subscales adapted from the Personal Authority in the Family System Questionnaire (PAFS-Q; Bray, Williamson, & Malone, 1984a); the Bloom Family Functioning Scales (Bloom, 1985); the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale (Crowne & Marlow, 1964), and a series of scales developed at William and Mary to measure family alliance patterns, parent-child proximity, family problems, and adjustment to college (Caplan, & Rohrbaugh, 1986; Eldridge & Rohrbaugh, 1986; Rohrbaugh & Peterson, 1986; Wilson & Rohrbaugh, 1984). Subjects were asked to remain in the testing room until all participants were finished in order to receive a debriefing.

Measures

Sibling deidentification. Sibling deidentification was operationalized using both a dichotomous measure (global judgments) and continuous measures (dissimilarity ratings). As in Schachter's (1976) original study, the dichotomous index was based on asking subjects whether they were "alike or different" from each sibling in terms of personality. Deidentification was scored if the subject rated him or herself as different from at least one sibling.

Continuous measures of deidentification were obtained by having subjects rate the personality similarity of all pairs of family members on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from -3 (very dissimilar) to +3 (very similar). To be consistent with the deidentification construct, the signs of the rating scales were reversed such that higher scores reflected greater perceived dissimilarity. Mean deidentification ratings were then computed for (a) sibling pairs that included the subject, (b) sibling pairs that did not include the subject, and (c) all sibling pairs in the family. These indices provided interval measures of sibling deidentification with higher scores indicating greater dissimilarity of sibling pairs as perceived by the subject.

Split-parent deidentification. Split-parent deidentification was also operationalized using both dichotomous and continuous measures. As they had done for sibling deidentification, subjects made global judgments of whether they were "alike" or "different" from each parent. For the dichotomous index, split-parent identification was defined as present if the subject indicated he or she was like one parent but different from the other parent in terms of personality. Conversely, split-parent identification was absent if the subject indicated he was like or different from both parents.

Continuous measures of split-parent identification were derived using the seven-point similarity-dissimilarity ratings described above. Split-parent identification was defined as the mean absolute value of sibling-mother and sibling-father difference averaged across the siblings. Finally, a family split-parent identification score was computed in this way for all siblings, including the subject.

Generation boundaries. Four measures were included to represent the clarity or integrity of family generation boundaries. Two of these measures were theoretically relevant subscales adapted from the Personal Authority in the Family System Questionnaire (PAFS-Q) (Bray et al., 1984b), a self-report instrument with well-established reliability and validity (Bray et al., 1984a). The Intergenerational Triangulation (INTRI) scale of the PAFS-Q includes items tapping the degree to which an individual is drawn into the relationship of his or her parents presumably to maintain its emotional balance. The Intergenerational Fusion (INFUS) scale, also from the PAFS-Q, measures the "degree to which a person operates in a fused or individuated manner with his or her parents" (Bray et al., 1984b). Higher scores on these scales indicate higher (and presumably more dysfunctional) levels of intergenerational triangulation and fusion, respectively. Items from these subscales can be found in the Appendix.

Additional measures of generational integrity included a four-item parental coalition scale (Eldridge & Rohrbaugh, 1986), reflecting the extent to which parents are perceived as together (united) in their dealings with their children; and a forced-choice primary parental alliance index (Peterson, 1986; Teyber, 1983a, b; Wilson & Rohrbaugh, 1985), based on whether or not the subject perceived the parents' relationship as the strongest family bond. Both of these measures have been shown to correlate with independent criteria of adjustment in high school and college student samples (Eldridge & Rohrbaugh, 1986; Peterson, 1986; Teyber, 1983a, b; Wilson & Rohrbaugh, 1985).

Parent-child proximity. Several measures were included to assess student closeness to their parents in both subjective and objective terms. A measure of relationship quality (i.e., closeness to peers) was derived by combining Likert-scale ratings of the strength, closeness, and positiveness of the student's relationship with each parent. Parental contact (either face-to-face or telephone) was defined on a frequency scale ranging from one (no contact) to eight (at least daily contact). A third parental contact measure was the estimated geographical distance (in miles) of their parents from campus. The few subjects who lived with their parents while attending college (1%) received a score of one on the geographical distance index.

Global family functioning. To supplement measures of specific family relationships, five scales developed in factor analytic research by Bloom (1985) were added to measure global nuclear family functioning. These five-item scales included cohesion, family idealization, conflict, disengagement, and enmeshment. Items from these five subscales can be found in the Appendix.

Family member emotional problems. Three questionnaire items asked whether the subject's mother, father or any sibling had ever experienced a serious emotional or behavioral problem. These items were combined into a single dichotomous index reflecting the presence or absence of a family member's problem.

Student adjustment. Student adjustment to college was assessed using three questionnaire items, each answered on a seven-point Likert scale: (1) how satisfied are you with your academic achievement in college so far? (2) how satisfied are you with the relationships you have formed in

college so far? and (3) how seriously have you considered seeking professional counseling since coming to college? Previous research using these measures with William and Mary undergraduates (Eldridge & Rohrbaugh, 1986; Shean, Rohrbaugh & Krakauer, 1987; Wilson & Rohrbaugh, 1985) indicates that academic, social and help-seeking dimensions of student adjustment represent relatively orthogonal (uncorrelated) dimensions of student adjustment. Essentially similar findings were found in the present study: Academic satisfaction correlated highly with grade point average; perceived need for therapy correlated with anxiety measures and the Beck Depression Inventory (Beck, 1961); and satisfaction with social relationships correlated with dating behavior and seven items of the revised UCLA Loneliness Scale (Russell, Peplau, & Cutrona, 1980).

Social desirability response set. Family research based on self-report measures does not typically consider the extent to which results may reflect a general response bias among subjects. To evaluate and control for this possibility, the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale (Crowne & Marlowe, 1964) was included in the study. The Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale consists of 33 true-false questions measuring the extent to which subjects' answer questions in a socially desirable manner.

CHAPTER III

RESULTS

Preliminary analyses

Pearson product-moment correlations revealed satisfactory test-retest reliability for the family functioning and student adjustment measures that appeared on both the preliminary (mass screening) and primary questionnaires. The following reliability coefficients were obtained: PAFS-Q triangulation ($r = .64$), PAFS-Q fusion ($r = .71$), strength of parental coalitions ($r = .71$), primary parental alliance ($r = .50$), Bloom cohesion ($r = .87$), Bloom enmeshment ($r = .61$), family problems ($r = .94$), satisfaction with academic achievement ($r = .63$), satisfaction with social relationships ($r = .61$), and consideration of therapy ($r = .73$).

Preliminary analyses also showed that the Crowne-Marlowe social desirability measure correlated significantly ($p < .05$, two-tailed test) with the Bloom cohesion ($r = .27$), conflict ($r = .31$), and family idealization ($r = .22$) scales; the PAFS-Q fusion ($r = .24$) and triangulation ($r = -.21$); the parental ($r = .29$) and relationship quality ($r = .27$) measure; and the academic satisfaction ($r = .22$), social satisfaction ($r = .20$), and help-seeking ($r = -.20$) adjustment indices. In light of these moderately strong correlations, social desirability was controlled in later analyses. Analyses of covariances (ANCOVA) controlling for social desirability revealed no gender or number-of-sibling differences for any of the family functioning or student adjustment variables.

Sibling deidentification

In making dichotomous deidentification judgments, over half (52.9%) of the subjects described themselves as different from at least one sibling, suggesting that sibling deidentification was moderately prevalent in the sample. Women, by this criterion, were nearly twice as likely to deidentify than men (64% vs. 36%), a difference confirmed by a significant chi-square test ($\chi^2 (1) = 5.44, p < .05$). As might be expected, the proportion of deidentifying subjects appeared to increase slightly with the number of siblings with whom the subject could deidentify. Deidentification was reported by 45%, 57%, and 65% of subjects with one, two, and three siblings, respectively. Neither chi-square nor (point-biserial) correlation analyses of this trend were statistically significant.

A somewhat different picture emerged from the analyses of the continuous deidentification measures derived from dissimilarity ratings. Here, the mean dissimilarity ratings (ranging from -3 to +3) between the subject and his or her siblings was -.76. On the average, 68.9% rated themselves as more similar than dissimilar to their siblings; 26.0% rated themselves as more dissimilar than similar, and 5.2% rated themselves as equally similar and dissimilar. Subjects with at least two siblings tended to give somewhat higher deidentification ratings for other sibling pairs compared to pairs in which they were included (paired $t = 1.67, df = 75, p < .10$). Of the 53 subjects rating other sibling pairs, 51% had a negative mean rating and 40.8% had a positive mean rating. In contrast to the results for dichotomous deidentification measures, a 2 x 3 (Sex by

Number of Siblings) ANCOVA for the continuous dissimilarity ratings yielded no significant main or interaction effects.

Correlations were also computed between deidentification with a specific sibling and the characteristics of that sibling relationship, such as whether siblings were of the same or opposite sex, their frequency of contact, the difference in their ages, and how far apart they lived during the school year. These correlations were computed separately for the subject's oldest, next oldest, and youngest sibling, as shown in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

The only variable consistently associated with deidentification was frequency of contact. The less contact siblings had, the more likely they were to deidentify (at least in the eyes of the subject). Contrary to Schachter (1983), there was no indication that siblings of the same sex were more likely to deidentify. In fact, the signs of most of these correlations were negative (opposite to predictions). Essentially similar results were obtained when these analyses were repeated separately for subjects with one, two, and three siblings.

The results also fail to confirm Schachter's finding that first-born pairs were more likely to deidentify than later-born and jump pairs. In analyses performed separately for subjects with one, two, and three siblings, respectively, there was no significant correlation between deidentification ratings and whether the siblings was an oldest, middle, or youngest child.

Split-parent identification

Like deidentification, split-parent identification was operationalized using both dichotomous and continuous measures. On the dichotomous index, 43.9% of the subjects described themselves as different from one parent and like the other parent. Chi-square analyses revealed no difference due to gender or number of siblings. Similarly, for the continuous measure of sibling deidentification, Gender x Sibling Number (2 x 3) ANCOVAs found no significant main or interactions effects.

Relationship between sibling deidentification and split-parent identification

One of Schachter's (1983) main findings was an association between sibling deidentification and split-parent identification, such that individuals who deidentified with their siblings tended to see themselves as different from one parent and like their other parent. In the present study, this finding was partially replicated. There was no relationship between the dichotomous indices of sibling deidentification and split-parent identification, $\chi^2 (1) = .003, p > .5$, with split-parent identification reported by 24% of the subjects who deidentified and 31% of the subjects who did not. However, significant partial correlations were found between the continuous measures of deidentification and split-parent identification (with sex, number of siblings, and social desirability controlled) for ratings of dyads that included the subject, $r (88) = .26, p < .006$. Essentially similar results were found when these analyses were repeated for males and females separately.

The Family Context of Sibling Deidentification

To examine family contextual patterns associated with deidentification, partial correlations were computed between the deidentification indices and the various family functioning measures with sex, number of siblings, and social desirability response set statistically controlled. As shown in Table 2, the continuous deidentification measure was associated significantly with three of the four generational integrity measures, the family problem index, one of the parent-child proximity measures, and four of the five Bloom scales.

Insert Table 2 about here

The directions of these correlations indicate that sibling deidentification in the sample was associated with dysfunctional family patterns -- specifically with weaker generation boundaries, parental coalitions, poorer parent-child relationships, more emotional problems of individual family members, less family cohesion, and more enmeshment and conflict. Again, essentially the same pattern of findings was obtained when these results were repeated for male and female subjects separately. Table 3 shows that correlations between family variables and the dichotomous deidentification index were in the same direction as those for the continuous index, but fewer were significant.

Insert Table 3 about here

Relationship between Sibling Deidentification and Student Adjustment

Partial correlations between measures of sibling deidentification and student adjustment were conducted with sex, number of siblings, and social desirability held constant. As can be seen in Table 4, there was no relationship between deidentification and measures of academic satisfaction, social satisfaction, and previous need for therapy.

Insert Table 4 about here

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION

The purpose of the present study was to replicate and extend Schachter's deidentification research to investigate family contextual factors associated with sibling deidentification. The finding that over half (56%) of the students in this study described themselves as different from at least one sibling roughly approximates the proportion of deidentifying students reported by Schachter. Also consistent with Schachter, there was some evidence of an association between sibling deidentification and split-parent identification, although this held for only one of the two ways in which deidentification and split-parent identification were operationalized. The results do not confirm Schachter's finding that first-born sibling pairs deidentified more than later-born or jump pair siblings, or that same-sex sibling pairs deidentified more than opposite-sex pairs.

The most important results concern the relationship between sibling deidentification and broader patterns of family functioning: In comparison with low deidentification subjects, high deidentification subjects tended to describe their families as having weaker generational boundaries, poorer parent-child relationships, more emotional problems among individual family members, less family cohesion, more enmeshment and more conflict. In other words, students who deidentified with their siblings tended to report problematic patterns of family functioning.

In terms of the predictions from the family therapy theories discussed earlier, the results would appear more consistent with the structural models of Minuchin (1974) and Haley (1976) than with Bowen's view that interpersonal differentiation (i.e., tolerance of difference) is an indicator of family health. Recall that structural family therapy models would suggest that, in comparison with low deidentification students, high deidentification students describe their families as having higher triangulation, greater incidence of family problems, and weaker generational boundaries, as defined by patterns of cross-generational alliances and coalitions and diffuse parental dyads. An interpretation based on Bowen's family system theory, on the other hand, is that deidentification serves a more benign function insofar as a deidentifying sibling may cultivate personal attributes that are unique from those of his or her siblings. To the extent that such individuality reflects differentiation, then Bowen's family system theory may suggest that the deidentification process might help each sibling to establish a unique personal identity. Bowen claims that differentiation is not just an individual concept. Rather, he states that differentiation is the product of the dynamic interchange among family members, with the differentiation of each family member contributing to the overall level of differentiation of the family (Bowen, 1978). Thus, students reporting high deidentification were expected to describe their families as well differentiated, as defined by low levels of intergenerational fusion and triangulation.

When the present study was originally conceived, Bowen family systems theory was assumed to predict a positive correlation between sibling

deidentification and healthy family functioning, while structural family therapy was assumed to imply a negative correlation. Insofar as deidentification could be seen as a manifestation of emotional cutoff, the prediction attributed to Bowen may to some extent misrepresent that theorist's views. Bowen (1978) describes emotional cutoff as a mechanism for dealing with an unbearably close emotional bond between an individual and one or more family members. Emotional cutoff may manifest itself in a variety of ways, including the breaking off of emotional ties, the search for physical closeness from one's family of origin, or a self-imposed isolation (Kerr, 1981). Indeed, any situation is avoided that could reactivate emotional fusion (Bowen, 1978). In the event that a sibling shares a highly fused relationship with another sibling, then he or she may assume different personality attributes in order to become emotionally cutoff from his or her fellow siblings. By this interpretation of Bowen's theory, deidentification may reflect "emotional cutoff", a family systems property that is characteristic of unhealthy family functioning.

In her later sibling deidentification work, Schachter (1982, 1985) presented some evidence that sibling deidentification tends to occur in a tetradic family structure where two deidentifying siblings each identify with a different parent. The results of the present study partially support this finding in that, for measures based on the similarity ratings at least, deidentifying students did tend to see themselves as more like one parent than the other parent. This finding was not found for dichotomous indices, however, which more closely approximated the measures of sibling deidentification used by Schachter

(e.g., 1982). On the other hand, it is important to note that split-parent identification was conceptualized (and operationalized) somewhat differently in the two studies. Whereas Schachter defined split-parent identification as the tendency for two siblings to identify with different parent figures, the corresponding measure in the present study was based on only one sibling (the subject) reporting stronger identification with one parent or the other. Thus, the present findings may not bear directly on Schachter's hypothesized family tetrad.

Schachter (1985) contends that sibling deidentification serves an adaptive function in ameliorating the negative feelings arising from sibling rivalry. By deidentifying from his or her sibling(s) an individual can avoid the competition, conflict, and comparison that frequently typify sibling relationships. By extension, Schachter argues that families whose siblings deidentify will be better able to maintain their equilibrium and experience greater domestic harmony than families whose siblings fail to deidentify (Schachter, 1985). The present findings do appear to be associated with dysfunctional family patterns, at least in the eyes of college student subjects. Thus, Schachter's appraisal of sibling deidentification as an enhancer of "domestic harmony" does not fit the data of the present study. While sibling deidentification may effectively neutralize potentially negative feelings between siblings, it may do so at the expense of the health of the family system. For example, a scenario may develop wherein a family whose siblings deidentify and split-parent identify may experience reduced conflict between siblings but more conflict between the two cross-generational dyads formed from the family tetrad. In the event

that either one of these cross-generational alliances supplant the marital dyad as the primary emotional bond in the family, serious family problems may ensue.

The results are obviously limited by the fact that they are based solely on the self-report of one family member. In using self-report measures, the researcher is abstracting a sole member's perception of the family that other members do not necessarily share. While previous research has found significant agreement between family members regarding the subjective phenomenon of deidentification (Schachter et al., 1978), it would be unwise to assume that the respondent's view is necessarily congruent with that of other family members. Surely, the results of the present study would be more conclusive if agreement were found among all family members on measures of sibling deidentification and family functioning.

A second limitation with using data drawn exclusively from self-report measures is that the data tend to reflect what Olson (1985) terms an "insider" view of reality. Olson describes the "insider" perspective as a phenomenological frame of reference taken from the point of view of the respondent and distinguishes it from an "outsider" perspective in which evaluators external to the family assess the interactions of its constituent members. Given the qualitative differences between the two types of research measures, it is not surprising that several investigators have found little congruence between what respondents indicate in self-report measures and how their behavior is evaluated by external judges during an interaction task. Olson (1969), for example, conducted a methodological study of the

relationship between self-report and observational measures and found no agreement between what couples reported on questionnaires and what was observed in overt marital interaction. Similar divergences between self-report and observational measures have been found in other areas of family functioning (Singafoos & Reiss, 1985). Singafoos and Reiss (1985) account for the divergence in terms of the different social setting established in a research context. The self-report method creates a transaction between the observer and each family member in which the meaning of the subjects' answers and what is being measured are clearly defined to the subject. In contrast, the observation method creates a transaction between the investigator and the family in which the purpose of the task and what is being measured remain ambiguous. Olson suggests that each method is not necessarily superior to the other, as each type provides unique information about a family system. With the exception of one study (Schachter et al., 1978) in which the observations of a sample of mothers judging their own children corroborated the phenomenon of sibling deidentification, all of the reported work on sibling deidentification has been conducted using an "insider" method of investigation in which the sibling is required to evaluate the system in which he takes part. It would be interesting to study to what extent, if any, the relationship between sibling deidentification and family functioning differs when observational methods of family functioning are used rather than insider methods.

APPENDIX

Subscales of the Bloom Family Functioning Scales

Cohesion

Family members really helped and supported one another.
There was a feeling of togetherness in our family.
Our family didn't do things together.
We really got along well with each other.
Family members seemed to avoid contact with each other when at home.

Conflict

We fought a lot in our family.
Family members got so angry they threw things.
Family members hardly ever lost their temper.
Family members sometimes hit each other.
Family members rarely criticized each other.

Family Idealization

I didn't think any family could live together with greater harmony than my family.
I didn't think anyone could possibly be happier than my family and I when we were together.
My family had all the qualities I've always wanted in a family.
Our family was as well adjusted as any family in this world could have been.
My family could have been happier than it was.

Disengagement

It was difficult to keep track of what other family members were doing.
In our family we knew where all family members were at all times.
Family members did not check with each other when making decisions.
Family members were extremely independent.
Family members were expected to have the approval of others before making decisions.

Enmeshment

Family members found it hard to get away from each other.
It was difficult for family members to take time away from the family.
Family members felt pressured to spend free time together.
Family members felt guilty if they wanted to spend time together.
It seemed like there was never any place to be along in our family.

Selected Subscales of the PAFS-QIntergenerational Fusion

I wonder how much my parents really love me.
I get so emotional with my parents that I cannot think straight.
I worry that my parents cannot take care of themselves when I am not around.
I am able to disagree with my parents without losing my temper.
My parents do things that embarrass me.
My parents say one thing to me and really do another.
My parents try to change some aspect of my personality.
My present day problems would be fewer or less severe if my parents had acted or behaved differently.

Intergenerational Triangulation

I feel compelled to take sides when my parents disagree.
When my parents disagree that I feel "caught in the middle" between them.
It feels like I cannot get emotionally close to my mother without moving away from my father.
It feels like I cannot get emotionally close to my father without moving away from my mother.
Mother intervenes when father and I disagree.
Father intervenes when mother and I disagree.
In my family, children's problems coincide with marital conflict or other stress in the family.

Table 1
Correlations Between Deidentification Ratings
And Other Characteristics of Subjects' Relationships
With their Oldest, Next Oldest, and Youngest Siblings

	Oldest		Next Oldest		Youngest	
	Dich ^a	Cont ^b	Dich	Cont	Dich	Cont
Same Sex	-.05	-.06	.07	-.12	-.27	-.20
Age Difference In Years	.06	.22*	-.08	-.07	.31	.18
Distance in Miles ^c	.04	.03	.18	.02	-.02	-.02
Frequency of Contact ^d	-.18+	-.30**	-.26*	-.17	-.33	.50*
(N)	(98)		(74)		(24)	

Note. a = Dichotomous Deidentification Measure
b = Continuous Deidentification Measure
c = Higher scores indicate further geographical distance
d = Higher scores indicate more contact
+ $p < .10$
* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$

Table 2
Correlations Between Sibling Deidentification Ratings
and Theoretically Relevant Family Functioning Measures

	Sibling Deidentification	
	Dichotomous	Continuous
<hr/>		
Generational Boundaries		
Cross-generational alliance	.22*	.35**
Triangulation	.11	.10
Fusion	.15	.28**
Parental coalition	-.08	-.22**
Parent-Child Proximity		
Parental Contact	-.09	.02
Geographical Distance	.02	-.07
Proximity	.16	-.34**
Global Family Functioning		
Family Problems	.08	.35**
Cohesion	-.20*	-.33**
Disengagement	-.05	-.07
Enmeshment	.11	.25*
Conflict	.01	.20+
Family Idealization	-.23*	-.38**
Student Adjustment		
Academic Satisfaction	.01	-.04
Social Satisfaction	-.01	-.04
Therapy Consideration	-.16	.10

Note. + $p < .10$
* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$
N = 102

Table 3
Correlations Between Sibling Deidentification Ratings
and Theoretically Relevant Family Functioning
Measures for Males and Females

	Sibling Deidentification			
	Dichotomous		Continuous	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
<hr/>				
Generational Boundaries				
Cross-generational	.44**	.30	.27 ⁺	.19
Alliance Triangulation	.20	.06	.16	.07
Fusion	.16	.10	.24	.30*
Parental coalition	-.06	-.08	-.004	-.33*
Parent-Child Proximity				
Parental Contact	.01	.15	.19	-.10
Geographical Distance	-.07	.10	-.05	-.10
Parental Proximity	-.27 ⁺	-.04	-.43**	-.24 ⁺
Global Family Functioning				
Family Problems	-.01	-.13	.27	.40**
Cohesion	-.21	-.15	-.34*	-.30*
Disengagement	-.07	-.05	.02	-.20
Enmeshment	.16	.04	.25	.25 ⁺
Conflict	.07	-.08	.19	.16
Family Idealization	-.27 ⁺	-.17	.008	.24 ⁺

Note. + $p < .10$
 * $p < .05$
 ** $p < .01$

Table 4
Correlations Between Sibling Deidentification
and Student Adjustment

	Sibling Deidentification			
	Dichotomous		Continuous	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Student Adjustment				
Academic Satisfaction	-.17	.07	-.005	-.09
Social Satisfaction	-.15	.08	.24	.11
Therapy Consideration	-.19	-.11	.008	.24 ⁺

Note. + $p < .10$

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