

Sibling Relationships in the Context of Family Transitions

by

Jacqueline Elaine Bush
B.A., University of Western Ontario, 1995

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

in the Department of Psychology

We accept this thesis as conforming
to the required standard



Dr. Marion Ehrenberg, Supervisor (Department of Psychology)



Dr. Catherine Costigan, Departmental Member (Department of Psychology)



Dr. Frances Ricks, Outside Member (Department of Child and Youth Care)



Dr. Marie Hoskins, External Examiner (Department of Child and Youth Care)

© Jacqueline E. Bush, 2002
University of Victoria

All rights reserved. This thesis may not be reproduced in whole or in part, by photocopy or other means, without the permission of the author.

Supervisor: Dr. Marion Ehrenberg

ABSTRACT

This exploratory, qualitative study examined how young adults perceive their sibling relationships in the context of their parents' divorces and related family transitions during childhood. Thirty undergraduate participants between the ages of 17 and 24 were interviewed individually using the Adult Divorce and Sibling Relationship Interview (ADSRI), during which they described their sibling relationships at present, as well as before, during, and after their parents' divorces. The researcher used techniques from "grounded theory" approach to examine the data for emerging themes and notable exceptions. Although some participants reported increased conflict at the time of the divorce, this conflict was perceived as meaningless and had no significant long-term impact. Overall, most participants felt that their parents' divorce fostered some degree of closeness between them and their siblings. Moreover, many participants felt that their sibling relationships helped them to cope with their parents' divorces. The subtle ways in which siblings provided support for each other were particularly salient in the interview protocols. The long-term perspective of this study demonstrated how sibling relationships in the context of family transitions are perceived as fluctuating over time rather than having static outcomes. The implications of the findings are considered in light of the strengths and limitations of this study, with special attention to further research planning.


Dr. Marion Ehrenberg, Supervisor (Department of Psychology)


Dr. Catherine Costigan, Departmental Member (Department of Psychology)


Dr. Frances Ricks, Outside Member (Department of Child and Youth Care)



Dr. Marie Hoskins, External Examiner (Department of Child and Youth Care)

Table of Contents

Title Page	i
Abstract	ii
Table of Contents	iii
List of Tables	vi
List of Figures	vii
Acknowledgements	viii
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Chapter 2: Literature Review	3
2.1 Current Divorce Literature in Historical Perspective	3
a. Effects of divorce and marital conflict on child adjustment.	4
b. Role of marital conflict in children's adjustment	6
c. Effects of divorce on young adult adjustment	8
d. Family Systems perspective and family transitions	11
e. Effects of divorce on custodial mother-child relationship in childhood	13
f. Effects of divorce on parent-child relationships in young adulthood	15
2.2 Sibling Relationships across the Life Span	17
a. What is a sibling relationship?	19
b. Sibling relationships in childhood and adolescence	22
c. Sibling conflict	23
d. Influence of sibling relationships on children and adolescents' adjustment	29
e. Sibling relationships in later adulthood	31

f. Sibling relationships in late adolescence and young adulthood	34
g. What factors are involved in the formation of a sibling relationship?	35
2.3 Family Transitions and Sibling Relationships	39
a. Why is there an increase in sibling conflict during divorce?	42
b. Buffering effect of a supportive sibling relationship	48
c. Nature of the buffering effect of siblings	50
d. A word about gender and family transitions	53
2.4 Problems with current research on siblings and family transitions	54
2.6 Current study	61
a. Tentative lines of inquiry	62
Chapter 3: Method	65
3.1 Participants	65
3.2. Procedure	66
3.3 Measures	67
a. Adult Divorce and Sibling Relationship Interview	67
3.4 Qualitative Analysis	71
a. Data Management	71
b. Coding	72
c. Content Analysis	75
3.5 Analysis of Rating Scale Information	75
Chapter 4: Results	77
Chapter 5: Discussion	85
5.1 Impact of Divorce on the Sibling Relationship	89

a. Consistency	89
b. Closeness	92
c. Separated Siblings	98
d. Conflict	103
e. Withdrawal	113
f. Care-taking	117
g. No impact of divorce on sibling relationship	126
h. Fluidity of impact of divorce on sibling relationship	126
i. Ongoing impact	129
5.2 Impact of Sibling Relationship on Coping with Divorce: Positive, Negative, and No Impact	134
5.3 Summary and Implications	144
a. Parents	155
5.4 Strengths and Limitations of the Current Study	156
5.5 Future Research Directions	160
5.6 Conclusion	163
References	164
Appendices	181
Appendix A: Consent Form	181
Appendix B: Adult Divorce and Sibling Relationship Interview (ADSRI)	184

List of Tables

<i>Table 1.</i>	Summary of Rating Scale Information	78
<i>Table 2.</i>	Psychological Themes in the Context of Family Transitions	83
<i>Table 3.</i>	Definitions of Psychological Themes	84

List of Figures

- Figure 1.* Example of change in closeness over time: Closeness increased during divorce period, but then returned to pre-divorce levels. 79
- Figure 2.* Example of change in closeness over time: Closeness decreased during divorce period, but returned to pre-divorce levels after the divorce. 79
- Figure 3.* Example of change in closeness over time: No change in closeness at time of divorce, but there was a decrease in perceived closeness in later years. 79
- Figure 4.* Example of change in conflict over time: Conflict increased during the divorce, but returned to pre-divorce levels in later years. 81
- Figure 5.* Example of change in conflict over time: Conflict decreased at time of divorce, but returned to pre-divorce levels in later years. 81
- Figure 6.* Example of change in conflict over time: Conflict remained stable over time. 81
- Figure 7.* Example of impact of divorce on sibling relationship over time: Impact increased then decreased in years after divorce. 82
- Figure 8.* Example of impact of divorce on sibling relationship over time: Impact decreased then increased in the years after the divorce. 82
- Figure 9.* Example of impact of divorce on sibling relationship over time: Impact remained stable over time. 82

Acknowledgements

I thank my supervisor and my committee members for their support and help with this thesis. In particular, I thank Dr. Marion Ehrenberg, my supervisor, for her guidance and encouragement throughout my years as a student at the University of Victoria, and for her valuable insights and comments on my thesis.

I thank my research colleagues, Laura Stewart and Jennifer Pringle, for their thought-provoking questions and comments during our research team discussions of this project. I am particularly grateful to Jenn for her help in transcribing the interviews.

I am grateful to the participants in this study for generously sharing their family stories with me. Divorce is not an easy subject to revisit. Without their willingness to reveal their thoughts, feelings, and memories about what was, at times, a painful topic, this project would not have been possible.

I am indebted to Megan and Ai-lan for their unwavering support throughout this research study. Without Megan's optimism, encouragement, and occasional scoldings, I would not have been able to maintain my motivation or my sense of humour. Without Ai-lan's quiet patience in listening to my endless concerns, worries, and fears, I would not have been able to maintain my presence of mind.

I thank my parents, Rosanne and André Cilliers, for their resolute assumption that I will accomplish great things, and for their unconditional love, comfort, and acceptance when I don't.

I am grateful to Edd for his love and support, and for reminding me that there is a world outside of graduate school.

Finally, I am thankful for my remarkable brother, Andy, who inspired me to pursue this project.

Sibling Relationships in the Context of Family Transitions

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Divorce is an event that affects all members of a family. To date, researchers have focused primarily on investigating the impact of divorce and related transitions on individual adjustment. A family systems framework, however, suggests that when a disruption in a family occurs, it affects not only individual members of a family, but all of the relationships within a family. That is, a divorce or remarriage has an impact on the marital relationship, the parent-child relationships, and the sibling relationships. In terms of parent-child relationships, researchers have begun to recognize the important role that parent-child relationships have in mediating the effects of family transitions on individual adjustment. In particular, family transitions often disrupt parenting, which can then have an impact on children's functioning. Conversely, a close parent-child relationship can help provide support to a child during a family transition.

The effect of family transitions on sibling relationships has been relatively neglected. The developmental literature suggests that sibling relationships are important across all stages of the life span. In childhood, sibling relationships have been associated with the development of cognitive skills, social relationships, and self-esteem; in adulthood, siblings become important sources of companionship and support.

Given the importance of sibling relationships over the life span, it is critical to understand the impact of divorce on this family subsystem. At present, little is known about the relationship between divorce and sibling relationships. Consequently, the purpose of the present study was to examine sibling relationships in the context of family

transitions. To this end, undergraduate students were asked about their sibling relationships to assess what impact, if any, they felt divorce has had on the quality of their sibling relationships over time.

To put the present study of sibling relationships and family transitions into context, a review of the general research findings on the effects of divorce and related transitions on individual adjustment and parent-child relationships will be conducted. This review will be followed by an examination of sibling relationships in general. Finally, an analysis of the existing literature on sibling relationships within the context of family transitions will be provided.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

Current Divorce Literature in Historical Perspective

Recent statistics indicate that in 1998 alone, there were 69,088 divorces in Canada and 9,827 divorces in British Columbia (Statistics Canada, 2002). Since the 1960s, when divorce rates began to rise dramatically (Hetherington, Bridges, & Insabella, 1998), the makeup of Canadian and American households has shifted from being primarily a traditional, two-parent nuclear household to including a variety of different households, such as single-parent families and step-families. Initially, researchers interested in studying the effects of divorce on families conducted studies in which they compared the adjustment of family members, most often children, from divorced homes with family members from intact homes at one particular point in time. Although these studies were helpful in identifying some of the immediate effects of divorce on family members, researchers began to recognize that divorce is not one isolated incident that affects children and parents in the moment, but that it is one part of a series of family transitions and challenges that family members confront. For example, in many families of divorce, there is often a stressful period of conflict before any actual separation occurs. Moreover, following divorce, family members often are faced with numerous lifestyle changes, besides the obvious change of one parent leaving the home. Such changes can include a change in residence, a change in financial status, loss of friends, new jobs, new schools, subsequent remarriages, and in some cases, additional divorces. To put some of these changes in perspective, recent statistics suggest that approximately 75% of men and 66% of women eventually will remarry, and that about 60% of these remarriages will end in

divorce (Hetherington et al., 1998). Overall, one in ten children will experience two divorces of his/her custodial parent before the age of 16 (Hetherington et al., 1998). As these statistics suggest, children growing up in a family in which a divorce has occurred are likely to experience a multitude of family transitions in addition to the divorce itself. Consequently, researchers have become interested in investigating the effects of such multiple transitions on children and young adults.

Effects of divorce and marital conflict on child adjustment.

Overall, research indicates that the majority of children who experience divorce and related transitions adjust fairly well and are not permanently scarred by such experiences (Amato & Keith, 1991; Hetherington et al., 1998). Nevertheless, studies do suggest that, on average, children who experience their parents' divorce or remarriage display more adjustment difficulties than children from non-divorced homes (Hetherington et al., 1998). As Amato and Keith (1991) point out, however, the size of the effect is less great than it was once thought to be. Essentially, there is great variability in the effects of family transitions on individual adjustment (Amato, 1994). Consequently, it is important to recognize that there is no concrete evidence for strong, detrimental effects, but neither is there evidence that there are no effects at all.

Regarding negative effects of divorce and related transitions, research suggests that children who experience family transitions are approximately twice as likely to manifest adjustment problems as children from intact homes (McLanahan & Sandefeur, 1994). Compared to children from intact homes, children who have experienced family transitions manifest more externalizing and internalizing problems, have greater cognitive/academic deficits, experience more difficulties in social and family

relationships, and demonstrate lower self-esteem (Allison & Furstenberg, 1989; Amato & Keith, 1991; Hetherington, 1989; McLanahan & Sandefeur, 1994). The most consistently demonstrated finding in the research concerns the area of externalizing behaviour in which children of divorce and remarriage manifest more instances of aggression, delinquency, impulsivity, and disobedience than children from intact homes (Amato & Keith, 1991; Hetherington, 1989; Hetherington & Clingempeel, 1992; Morrison & Cherlin, 1995). In terms of internalizing behaviours, although the research is less consistent than that for externalizing behaviour, there is some indication that problems such as depression and anxiety may be more prevalent in children from divorced and remarried homes than in children from intact homes (Hetherington & Clingempeel, 1992; Vandewater & Lansford, 1998). Academic difficulties of children who have experienced family transitions are demonstrated by a higher number of placements in special reading classes, and decreased performance on tests of reading, spelling, and math (Allison & Furstenberg, 1989; McLanahan & Sandefeur, 1994; Morrison & Cherlin, 1995).

Gender differences in response to family transitions also have been reported in the literature, with boys manifesting more externalizing behaviours and girls demonstrating more internalizing behaviours, such as depression (Hetherington, 1989; Kelly, 2000). Recent studies, however, have found that this difference may be smaller than it was once was thought to be (Vandewater & Lansford, 1998). For example, in a four-year longitudinal study of adolescents in remarried, divorced, and intact homes, Hetherington and Clingempeel (1992) found no differences between boys and girls in terms of externalizing or internalizing behaviours. This contrasted with an earlier study of younger children in which boys were found to be more negatively affected by divorce than girls

(Hetherington, 1988). Vandewater and Lansford (1998), using a sample of 618 families found no gender differences in the behaviour of children from divorced homes. Similarly, Wallerstein (1980; 1985; 1991), in her qualitative longitudinal investigation of children from divorced homes, found that whereas at the younger ages, boys were demonstrating more adverse effects of divorce than girls, when the children entered adolescence, girls began to manifest equal levels of problems as the boys. In addition, Forehand et al. (1991), in their longitudinal study of adolescents and divorce, found no gender differences. Such findings point to the possibility of a “sleeping effect” for girls, such that the impact of family transitions may not become evident until a later age (Wallerstein, 1991).

Moreover, the course of a family’s transitions also plays a role in gender differences that are found in children’s adjustment. For example, remarriage has been found to have a differential effect for boys and girls (Hetherington, 1993; Hetherington & Clingempeel, 1992). When the remarriage of a custodial mother to a step-father occurs before adolescence, girls often manifest behaviour problems that were not previously observed, whereas boys who previously demonstrated behaviour problems when living in a single, mother-headed household, exhibit fewer problems. On the other hand, when the remarriage occurred during adolescence, girls and boys demonstrated similar levels of behaviour difficulties (Hetherington, 1993). Thus, developmental status and type of family transition may interact to influence gender differences (Kelly, 2000).

Role of marital conflict in children’s adjustment.

Divorce per se does not affect children’s adjustment; instead, the literature suggests that the level of ongoing conflict between parents appears to be associated

with children's adjustment problems (Emery, 1982). In particular, researchers have found that marital conflict is a stronger predictor of child adjustment than divorce itself (Amato, Loomis, & Booth, 1995). Ongoing conflict between parents has been associated with aggression, hyperactivity, and delinquency (Harrist & Ainslie, 1998), as well as with difficulty with peers and authority figures, depression, and achievement problems (Cherlin, Furstenburg, Chase-Lansdale et al., 1991; Smith & Jenkins, 1991). In a study designed to disentangle the effects of marital conflict and family structure on children's adjustment, Vandewater and Lansford (1998) found that regardless of family structure, children in high-conflict families manifested greater externalizing, internalizing, and peer problems than did children from low-conflict families. It is important to point out that it is overt, marital conflict as opposed to marital dissatisfaction that is associated with children's adjustment difficulties (Gano-Phillips & Fincham, 1995; Simons, 1996).

Marital conflict is thought to be associated with children's adjustment both directly and indirectly (Cummings & Davies, 1994; Dunn, 1992; Emery, Cummings, & Fincham, 1992; Jenkins & Smith, 1990). In terms of direct influences, Cummings and Davies (1994) point out that exposure to parental conflict can induce physical, cognitive, and emotional arousal in children. As children repeatedly are exposed to marital conflict, they may become sensitized to anger and may experience increased arousability, and consequently, they may be more prone to act aggressively. In other words, anger between parents appears to increase the anger experienced by children, thereby lowering a child's threshold for becoming aggressive (Cummings & Davies, 1994). Similarly, modeling processes also might increase a child's aggressive behaviour by weakening a child's

inhibitions of negative behaviours (Cummings & Davies, 1994). Marital conflict can affect children's functioning indirectly through disrupted parenting practices, such as decreased parental warmth, rejection of child, withdrawal of parent, parent-child aggression, and harsh and inconsistent discipline (Cummings & Davies, 1994; Fauber, Forehand, Thomas, & Wierson, 1990; Fauber & Long, 1991; Fincham, Grych, & Osborne, 1994).

Divorce and related transitions can have consequences long into adulthood. Although the effects of family transitions on children's adjustment have been studied extensively, the long-term effects have received considerably less attention. Moreover, what is known about the long-term effects has been drawn primarily from retrospective studies (Chase-Lansdale et al., 1995). Nonetheless, a number of longitudinal studies have been conducted and reveal some of the long-term impacts of family transitions on individual adjustment (Amato et al., 1995; Chase-Lansdale et al., 1995; Zill, Morrison, & Coiro, 1993).

Effects of divorce on young adult adjustment.

Overall, it appears that children of divorce may continue to manifest problems in young adulthood. Adjustment difficulties have been noted in the areas of educational and socioeconomic attainment, personal relationships, sexual activity, and emotional functioning (Amato et al., 1995; Chase-Lansdale et al., 1995; Zill et al., 1993). Specifically, in terms of educational attainment, individuals from divorced backgrounds, especially females, are more likely than individuals from intact homes to have dropped out of school and to have decided against pursuing post-secondary education (Zill et al., 1993). Consequently, low academic

attainment can affect later occupational functioning and socioeconomic attainment (Hetherington et al., 1998).

A strong factor in low academic attainment is decreased opportunities to pursue higher education as a result of limited financial resources (Wallerstein, 1991; Zill et al., 1993). In addition, the nature of personal relationships that young adults from a divorced background experience also may play a role (McLanahan & Sandefeur, 1994). For example, individuals who experienced divorce as children are more likely to be sexually active at an early age, to have children as teenagers, to marry early, and to experience the dissolution of their own marriages than are individuals from intact homes (McLanahan & Sandefeur, 1994). Early pregnancies are likely to be associated with subsequent school drop out and a decrease in financial resources, both of which may be associated with lowered educational achievement and concomitant occupational and socioeconomic attainment (Kelly, 2000).

In terms of emotional well-being, it appears that in the long run, individuals of divorced backgrounds adapt to and cope with the family transitions they experienced as children (Chase-Lansdale et al., 1995). For example, in a large, longitudinal study of British families, Chase-Lansdale and colleagues (1995) found that although individuals who had experienced divorce as children were at greater risk for emotional disorders (e.g., anxiety, depression, phobias) than individuals from intact homes, the majority of young adults did not exhibit such problems, thereby suggesting that for most individuals, there may be significant recovery after divorce. It should be noted, however, that when individuals were studied during the time of adolescence and young adulthood (i.e., ages 16 and 23), individuals from divorced homes exhibited significantly more emotional

problems than individuals from intact homes, but by the age of 33 years, such differences had largely disappeared. This finding suggests that the developmental stages of adolescence and young adulthood may “reinvoke certain vulnerabilities” (p.1631) for individuals of divorced backgrounds. It also points to the need for researchers to examine the influence of divorce and related transitions across the entire life span, as difficulties at one stage may not be evident at later stages.

Recently, researchers have noted the influence of the pre-existing family environment on later adult adjustment (Booth & Amato, 2001; Jekielek, 1998; Morrison & Coiro, 1999). Booth and Amato (2001) found that young adults whose parents divorced after a highly conflict-ridden relationship were better adjusted ten years later than young adults whose parents remained married, but who had a conflict-ridden relationship. Interestingly, this longitudinal study indicated that individuals whose parents’ relationships were not observably conflictual before the divorce occurred manifested significantly greater adjustment difficulties as young adults than did individuals who had parents whose relationship with each other was high in conflict. Specifically, young adults from low-conflict homes whose parents divorced demonstrated poorer psychological well-being, had less social support from friends and relatives, and had more problematic intimate relationships than young adults whose high conflict-ridden parents divorced. In other words, the long-term effects of divorce may be related to the level of parent conflict prior to separation (Booth & Amato, 2001). Researchers hypothesize that for children from conflict-ridden homes, divorce may be a relief from the ongoing tension and stress of living in such an environment; on the other hand, for children in low-conflict families, divorce may be a significant stress without the

concomitant benefit of no longer living in a violent environment (Booth & Amato, 2001; Jekielek, 1998).

Family Systems perspective and family transitions.

In addition to the effects of family transitions on individual adjustment, researchers also have been interested in the impact of family transitions on parent-child relationships. In fact, many researchers endorse the hypothesis that the effects of divorce and family transitions on children are mediated primarily through disrupted parent-child relationships (Fauber et al., 1990; Hetherington et al., 1998; Simons, 1996; Vandewater & Lansford, 1998). This is consistent with a family systems perspective, which suggests that problems in one family subsystem will have an impact on other family subsystems (Minuchin, 1988). According to this perspective, a family is composed of three primary subsystems: the marital, the parent-child, and the sibling subsystems (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1995). A disruption in one subsystem, such as the parental subsystem, affects other subsystems, such as the parent-child subsystem. For example, as a result of the disruption in the marital relationship, various financial and emotional stresses are placed on the custodial parent, which, in turn, may affect the parent-child relationship. In particular, parenting may be less consistent, children's activities may be supervised less, and the parent may be less physically and emotionally available. Consequently, children may develop adjustment problems.

In addition, the various subsystems are maintained by invisible boundaries that serve to keep a healthy distance between the subsystems and the individuals within those subsystems (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1995). For example, when a divorce occurs,

there is a reorganization of the family unit in which the various subsystems are altered. One parent, typically the father, moves out, leaving not just one less family member, but a radical shift in the family composition. In a family in which the mother is the custodial parent, it has sometimes been observed that the older child becomes a surrogate partner for her, such as being a confidante or taking on household responsibilities such as caring for siblings or performing household chores (Shapiro & Wallace, 1987). In one sense, the child becomes a “quasi peer” or “confidante” for the custodial parent, and the boundary between the parent and child shifts. Although the added responsibilities can be beneficial for some children, a child may manifest problems, such as depression or anxiety, if the responsibilities or relationship become too onerous (Hetherington, 1988; 1989). Further, this increased closeness of the mother and older child affects other children in the family. For instance, such increased closeness may make a younger sibling feel left out, which may impact that child’s adjustment (Shapiro & Wallace, 1987). Moreover, the added responsibilities of the older child, which may involve care-taking responsibilities, as well as the close relationship between the elder child and the parent, may have an effect on the sibling subsystem.

Similarly, when a remarriage occurs, there is an additional reorganization of the family system and subsystems, which includes the introduction of a step-parent and, possibly, step-siblings. Such reorganization can lead to further shifts in individual subsystems. An older daughter who experienced a particularly close relationship with her mother after her parent’s divorce suddenly may feel displaced by a step-father who is taking over her role as her mother’s confidante; consequently, feelings of resentment and anger may be directed towards the mother and the step-father. Likewise, a son who had

little contact with his father after he moved out of the home, and felt left out by the increased closeness he observed between his sister and mother, may welcome the introduction of a step-father with whom he can develop a relationship.

Overall, it is important to recognize that relationships within a family do not exist in a vacuum; each subsystem affects the other. In addition to impacting individual adjustment, divorce and related transitions affect various relationships within the family.

Effects of divorce on custodial mother-child relationship in childhood.

Because the majority of children tend to live with their mothers following a divorce, the preponderance of research investigations has examined the relationship between mothers and children (Hetherington, Henderson, & Reiss, 1999).

Consequently, this review will focus only on such findings, although this is not to deny the importance of fathers. In a longitudinal investigation of families in transition, Hetherington and Clingempeel (1992) found that “the mother-child relationship in divorced families can be described as highly ambivalent, involved, and affectively charged” (p.128). Mothers and children report high levels of affection and high levels of conflict, negativity, and punishment (Hetherington & Clingempeel, 1992). In the first two years following a divorce, when there is considerable emotional and financial stress, there is often a period of disrupted parenting, in which, compared to mothers and children in intact families, fewer maturity demands are made on children, less monitoring of children’s activities occurs, and less effective disciplinary techniques are used. In addition, control, consistency, and communication are diminished (Hetherington, 1991; Simons & Johnson, 1996). Moreover, parenting is less authoritative (i.e., warm, firm, and

appropriately controlling, with low levels of conflict and coercion) in divorced homes as it is in nondivorced homes, which is significant, since authoritative parenting that provides structure and support has been found to be important in protecting children from the negative effects of marital transitions (Hetherington, 1989). During this period, mothers and pre-adolescent sons appear to have particular difficulties, with heightened coercive exchanges and problems in control typifying their interactions (Hetherington & Clingempeel, 1992). In contrast, mothers' relationships with their pre-adolescent daughters often are reported to be close, confiding, and mutually satisfying (Hetherington, 1989). As children enter adolescence, however, a notable increase in mother-daughter conflict develops, such that differences between a mother's relationship with her son and her relationship with her daughter tend to dissipate (Hetherington, 1993; Hetherington & Clingempeel, 1992). Such a change in the mother-daughter relationship is thought to be attributed to an increase in monitoring and control, techniques used in an attempt to respond to daughters' sexual and externalizing/antisocial behaviour (Hetherington, 1993). Although as time passes, mothers often improve in their parenting skills, they are often less authoritative than nondivorced mothers, and problems between mothers and sons continue to exist even six years after the divorce occurs (Hetherington, 1993). It is important to recognize that the majority of divorced mothers display competent parenting skills, and that for those who do not, depression and economic stress are found to be associated with their problematic parent-child relationships (Simons & Johnson, 1996). In other words, the difficulties some divorced mothers experience in their parenting may be a result of the stress

and emotional upheaval that sometimes accompany a divorce (Simons & Johnson, 1996).

Remarriages also are associated with changes in parent-child relationships. When a remarriage occurs, mothers sometimes feel anxious and depressed as a result of the stress of trying to develop a new marital relationship while also trying to attend to the needs of their children as they adjust to the new family arrangement (Hetherington et al, 1999). Consequently, there is a period of disrupted parenting, in which mothers display both over-permissiveness and greater punitiveness. Over time, however, parenting becomes more authoritative, and mothers show few differences in parenting compared to their nondivorced counterparts (Hetherington et al., 1999).

Effects of divorce on parent-child relationships in young adulthood.

Overall, research indicates that strained relationships between parents and offspring in childhood persist into young adulthood (Amato & Booth, 1996). For example, Zill et al. (1993) found that a sample of 18-to-22-year-olds from divorced backgrounds were twice as likely to have poor relationships with their mothers and fathers than young adults from intact homes, as measured by reported closeness, satisfaction with amount of affection from parent, desire to be the kind of person the parent is, and how often they did things with the parents that they really enjoyed. Typically, these effects are stronger for a young adult's relationship with the noncustodial parent than with the custodial parent, and the results hold regardless of whether a remarriage has occurred (Amato & Booth, 1996; Zill et al., 1993). In an attempt to understand the process underlying the disrupted parent-child relationships

in young adulthood, Amato and Booth (1996) conducted a prospective investigation in which they followed families from the time before a divorce occurred until the offspring were young adults. Consistent with previous research, results indicated that divorced parents reported less affection and satisfaction in their relationships with their children than nondivorced parents. Moreover, five years later, the children, now young adults, reported that their parents were less understanding, affectionate, respectful, fair, and trustworthy than young adults from intact homes (Booth & Amato, 2001). Furthermore, such deficits in the parent-offspring relationship were evident, in some cases, years before the divorce occurred, thereby supporting the notion that pre-divorce factors play a role in the parent-child relationship as well. In particular, the researchers discovered that marital conflict primarily explained the association between poor parent-offspring relationships in childhood, and that these problematic parent-offspring relationships in childhood combined with the low parental marital quality and subsequent divorce to predict later disrupted relationships between parents and young adults. In other words, as Booth and Amato (2001) explain, “marital conflict lowered children’s closeness to parents, and divorce lowered it even further.” Thus, the long-term quality of parent-child relationships may be set in motion by factors occurring before the divorce takes place.

To summarize, divorce and related transitions have effects on children at least into young adulthood, and for the most part, these effects on adjustment appear to be mediated, in great part, through the parent-child relationship (Simons, 1996; Vandewater & Lansford, 1998).

Although the effects of divorce and related transitions have been studied in respect to children's adjustment and parent-child relationships, the association between divorce and other family relationships has been studied less extensively. In particular, the effect of divorce and family transitions on sibling relationships has been relatively neglected (Hetherington et al., 1999). Given the increasingly recognized role that sibling relationships play in human development (Dunn et al., 1999), it is imperative to learn about the impact of family transitions on this central subsystem. Before examining the extant literature on sibling relationships within the context of family transitions, however, it is essential to review what the developmental literature tells us about the nature of sibling relationships across the life span.

Sibling Relationships across the Life Span

A person's relationship with his or her sibling is likely to be the most enduring and stable relationship across the life span (Cicerelli, 1995; Ross & Milgram, 1982). In childhood, sibling relationships are associated with cognitive development, social functioning, externalizing and internalizing behaviour, and self-esteem; in later adulthood, siblings become important sources of companionship and support (Bank, Patterson, & Reid, 1996; Buhrmester & Furman, 1990; Cicerelli, 1995; Duncan, Duncan, & Hops, 1996; Dunn, Slomkowski, Beardsall, & Rende, 1994; Hetherington & Clingempeel, 1992; Howe & Ross, 1990; Stormshak, Bellanti, & Bierman, 1996; Wishart, 1986). Given the importance of sibling relationships across the life span, it is surprising that research in this area has begun only recently (Dunn, 2000). The most cited explanation for this lack of interest in sibling relationships is a cultural belief that marital and parent-child relationships are the most central in family functioning and child

development (Bank & Kahn, 1982; Goetting, 1986). As Bank (1992) explains, “siblings are rarely viewed as major actors on the stage of human development, and the culture itself gives siblings short shrift.” (p.143).

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, however, researchers began to take an interest in siblings (Dunn, 1992). Early sibling research focused on the link between structural variables, such as birth order and family size, and sibling relationship quality (Buhrmester & Furman, 1990; Lamb & Sutton-Smith, 1982). Overall, this line of research was flawed methodologically and produced findings that were weak and inconsistent (Cicerelli, 1995; Eno, 1985;). Although some researchers continue to examine the influence of structural variables on sibling relationships, the general consensus is that variables such as age, birth order, and sex account for only a modest amount of variance in sibling relationships (Buhrmester & Furman, 1990; Stocker, Dunn, & Plomin, 1989). Given that variables such as sex and age are usually salient factors in other research areas, as demonstrated in the divorce literature reviewed above, the absence of a strong effect in sibling relationships is surprising. Some researchers attribute such a lack of findings to the unique characteristics of sibling relationships (Lamb & Sutton-Smith, 1982). For example, Dolgin and Lindsay (1999), in trying to account for the lack of gender differences they found in sibling disclosure rates, state that, “it may be that day-to-day, rubbing shoulders-with familiarity breeds comfort, and siblings are viewed as “genderless”... that is, a brother is not a *male*, he’s just a brother; a sister is not a *female*, she’s just a sister” (p.398). In other words, compared to other research areas, gender may have a different role, or more aptly, less of a role, in sibling relationships. This is not to suggest, however, that gender does not play a role in sibling relationships at

all, because there is evidence for a relationship between gender and sibling relationships (Cicerelli, 1995). For example, one consistent finding is that, overall, female siblings are likely to exhibit more prosocial behaviours than boys, but brothers and sisters demonstrate equal levels of antagonistic behaviours (Bryant, 1982; Dunn, 1983). Nonetheless, although gender plays a small role in sibling relationships, it does not account for much of the variance in sibling relationships.

Similarly, although age, per se, may not account for a lot of variance in sibling relationships, relative age (i.e., being older or younger) seems to be more strongly associated with the quality of sibling relationships (Buhrmester & Furman, 1990; Cicerelli, 1995). For example, in childhood, older siblings are more active in initiating interactions with their siblings than are younger siblings (Dunn, 1993).

Overall, most researchers have concluded that it is the quality of sibling relationships rather than sibling structural variables that is most likely to account for individual functioning (Furman & Buhrmester, 1985; Hetherington, 1988; Hetherington & Clingempeel, 1992; MacKinnon, 1989). Consequently, researchers began to focus on determining what constitutes a sibling relationship.

What is a sibling relationship?

Capturing the essence of what constitutes a sibling relationship has been a challenging task for researchers. When children are young, they often are unaware of the impact of their sibling in their lives. Parents, by virtue of their roles as authority figures and caregivers, are a strong presence, and because children consciously choose their friends, they, too, are a prominent focus; siblings, however, are just there. A sibling is a play companion, a competitor for parental

affection, and a person against whom a child is constantly comparing himself/herself. The meaning of a sibling in a child's life, however, often is not articulated. If asked, children can recount instances of sibling aggression and affection, but rarely are children observed discussing the meaning and quality of their sibling relationship. As children grow up and begin to reflect back on their family relationships, one constant finding is that individuals often speak of the "unspoken nature" of their sibling relationship; that is, they explain that much of what constitutes their sibling relationship is the unarticulated knowledge that their sibling will always be there and the strong bond they share from growing up together in whatever family circumstances existed (Caya & Liem, 1998; Cicerelli, 1995; Ross & Milgram, 1982). For example, in a qualitative study in which children of divorced backgrounds were interviewed from early childhood to adulthood, Wallerstein (1985) found that some young adults spoke of the tacit bond they share with siblings as a result of having survived the experience of divorce. The unspoken nature of sibling relationships also is seen in sibling rituals (Eno, 1985). Sibling rituals, such as getting up early on Saturday mornings to watch cartoons, often are not given much thought by children, but are nonetheless a source of stability and continuity, and are associated with individual well-being (Eno, 1985).

Through empirical and clinical investigations, researchers have concluded that the sibling relationship can best be conceptualized as being "a union firmly rooted in ambivalence...with sibling loyalty, defined as a feeling for and identification with the other person, coexisting with rivalry and competition" (Caya & Liem, 1998). In other words a sibling relationship is multidimensional, characterized by both warmth/closeness

and conflict/hostility. Moreover, researchers point to three defining unique characteristics of sibling relationships (Cicerelli, 1995). First, as mentioned earlier, a sibling relationship is the longest relationship that a person will experience in a lifetime. Second, compared to friendships and intimate relationships, a sibling relationship is ascribed rather than earned. This assigned characteristic of siblings is unique in that it suggests that although one may lose contact or have a falling out with a sibling, the lifelong connection with a sibling allows for the possibility of renewing the relationship at a later date. This contrasts with friend or peers, in which dissolution of the relationship is often final. Finally, shared and unshared experiences between siblings result in a relationship that can fluctuate across the lifetime. A relationship that is particularly close at one particular point in time (e.g., when caring for an ill parent) may be different at a later point in time when experiences are different (e.g., when establishing different careers).

Sibling relationships, therefore, are ambivalent, complex, and constantly changing. As individuals make their way through the developmental stages of the lifespan, the sibling relationship appears qualitatively different (Cicerelli, 1995). An intense relationship in early and middle childhood often gives way to a calmer, somewhat more detached relationship in late adolescence and young adulthood, as individuals are focusing on intimate relationships and careers. As individuals move into the later phases of the life span, when social support networks begin to shrink, the sibling relationship changes again, as siblings reach out to one another for companionship and support.

It is important to note, however, that although the sibling relationship may fluctuate throughout the life span, research also suggests that there is a certain degree of stability and continuity in sibling relationships (Dunn, Slomkowski, & Beardsall, 1994).

For example, Dunn and colleagues (1994), in a longitudinal study of young children, found that positive and negative behaviour during the preschool years was associated with similar behaviours during early adolescence.

Sibling relationships in childhood and adolescence.

Beginning in early childhood, a sibling is a primary source of companionship, and some researchers have found that a child may spend approximately twice as much time with a sibling as with his or her parents (Dunn, 1993; Stormshak, Bellanti, & Bierman, 1996). Early in childhood, siblings are observed to be affectionate, helpful, aggressive, and warm with one another (Cicerelli, 1995). Older siblings often are the initiators of both prosocial and aggressive sibling interactions (Abramovich, Corter, & Pepler, 1980), and younger siblings display a tendency to imitate older siblings (Dunn, 1993; Hetherington et al., 1999; Lamb, 1978). As children become older, younger siblings begin to play a more active role in the relationship, the older child's interest in the sibling grows, and the frequency of interactions increases (Newman, 1994). This pattern persists until middle adolescence, when the frequency of sibling interactions decreases as outside peers and interests become a priority for children (Buhrmester & Furman, 1990). Nevertheless, although there is a decrease in the frequency of contact between adolescent siblings, emotional attachment remains strong (Buhrmester, 1992; Buhrmester & Furman, 1990; Hetherington et al, 1999).

Older siblings also take on care-taking duties, particularly in the absence of parental care (Bryant, 1992). For example, in the absence of a parent, older siblings have been found to comfort a distressed sibling, and younger siblings will approach older siblings when feeling upset (Bryant & Crockenberg, 1980; Dunn, 1993;

Stewart, 1983). Such comfort from older siblings appears to be beneficial to younger siblings, as evidenced by a decrease in distress, and a greater tendency to explore the environment even if the parent is not present (Bryant, 1992). Care-taking tasks also seem to be positive for the older siblings (Dunn, 1992). Rarely, however, will an older sibling turn to a younger sibling for comfort (Bryant, 1990). It is important to note, however, that sibling care-taking is not as qualitatively rich as parental care-taking, and therefore, should not be seen as compensating for parental care-taking (Bryant, 1990).

Sibling conflict.

Early research in sibling relationships focused on conflict between siblings (Dunn, 1993). Given that sibling conflict consistently has been found to be one of the most common and persistent child-related problems facing families (Brody & Stoneman, 1987; Dunn, 1993; Newman, 1994;), this fascination with negative sibling interactions is understandable. As Eno (1985) posits, “there is probably no other childhood relationship in which children express as much continuous hostility toward each other as the relationship between siblings” (p.143). For example, in pre-adolescence and early adolescence, sibling conflict was found to be a full standard deviation higher than conflict reported for any other relationship (Buhrmester, 1992). Given that siblings are forced to remain in an intense, long-term relationship at a time when they have rudimentary social and cognitive skills, it is perhaps not surprising that conflicts frequently arise among children growing up in the same household (Newman, 1994). Similarly, conflict is highest among

siblings closest in age, which again, is not surprising, since such siblings are at similar developmental levels and have the most interactions (Newman, 1994).

Discordant interactions are observed from the moment a sibling is born and continue to increase, reaching a peak in middle childhood and early adolescence (Buhrmester & Furman, 1990). Conflict in middle childhood and early adolescence is thought to be at its highest, in part, as a result of social comparison processes, particularly as age disparities begin to decrease and siblings become more equal in cognitive, social, and behavioural abilities (Brody, Stoneman, & McCoy, 1994). Middle childhood and early adolescence is a time when children are securing their individual identities, and in doing so, they have a tendency to compare themselves to other children; consequently, children may constantly be measuring themselves against their siblings, and depending on the outcome, conflicts may arise (Buhrmester & Furman, 1990). For example, a child who gets Cs and Ds while her sister achieves straight As may begin to resent her sister and initiate fights or disagreements. The less academically inclined child may begin to pick on her sister, teasing and pointing out flaws. Such processes may be another reason why sibling conflict is highest among children closest in age (Lamb & Sutton-Smith, 1982). It is important to note that the effect of social comparison processes on sibling conflict may be compounded by parents who are constantly holding one child up to another (Dunn, 1988).

Sibling conflict decreases dramatically in middle and late adolescence, and there are several explanations for this change (Boer & Dunn, 1992). First, greater social and cognitive understanding is thought to contribute to the decrease in

conflict in adolescence (Boer & Dunn, 1992; Cicerelli, 1995). Specifically, children can comprehend the reasons behind other people's behaviour, and as a result, they may not react in a hostile fashion. For example, an adolescent who knows his sister has just lost an important tennis game at school may understand that her sniping at him is a result of her disappointment, and therefore, he will ignore her ill-tempered remarks and will not respond in kind.

A second explanation for the dramatic decline in sibling conflict in adolescence is that as children become older, sibling relationships become more egalitarian, and the balance of power shifts (Boer & Dunn, 1992; Buhrmester, 1990; Buhrmester & Furman, 1990). Younger siblings begin to take more initiative in interactions, and acquire more responsibility for themselves. Similarly, older siblings no longer have the same responsibilities towards their younger sibling (e.g., care-giving), and consequently, do not have as much authority over them (Buhrmester, 1992). According to Buhrmester (1990), this transition phase may be an important milestone in siblings' relationships, as they become more equal and can develop a more meaningful relationship.

Finally, sibling conflict may decline in adolescence, because sibling relationships typically become less intense (Buhrmester, 1992). As children begin to develop outside interests, and as friendships and romantic relationships begin to take a priority, siblings begin to spend less time together; consequently, conflict is not as high. This lack of contact persists throughout middle adulthood as individuals focus on developing their careers and forming families (Cicerelli, 1982; 1995). It is important to note, however, that although contact with siblings decreases, emotional

attachment remains strong (Buhrmester & Furman, 1990; Ciccerelli, 1996; Hetherington et al., 1999).

Overall, sibling conflict is a complicated phenomenon that often is misunderstood as being simply an expression of hostility from one child to another (Munn & Dunn, 1989). As Munn and Dunn (1989) indicate, “conflict between siblings represents interpersonal processes far more complex than hostility” (p. 449). Sibling conflict can exist for a number of reasons. For example, conflict can be a form of play, such as when brothers physically fight (Eno, 1985). Conflict also can be a way to initiate contact, to increase or decrease proximity, or to seek revenge for a perceived wrongdoing (Dunn, 1993; Eno, 1985). Conflict can be a means of competing for parental attention, as evidenced by findings indicating that sibling conflict typically increases in the presence of a parent (Dunn, 1988), as well as a reaction to perceived differential parental treatment (Dunn, 1988; Kowal & Kramer, 1997). Finally, as mentioned earlier, conflict may reflect social comparison processes.

Regardless of the fact that sibling conflict may have multiple causes, there is substantial evidence that suggests that ongoing conflict between siblings has been associated with problems in individual adjustment (Bank et al., 1996; Conger, Conger, & Elder, 1994; Dunn, 1992; Hetherington & Clingempeel, 1992; Patterson, 1986). For example, in a study of families undergoing economic difficulties, Conger et al. (1994) demonstrated an association between hostility and conflict in sibling interactions and conduct problems and emotional distress in the younger, early adolescent sibling in each pair. Similarly, aggressive or hostile interactions have

been found to predict clinical disturbance (i.e., internalizing or externalizing problems) and poor peer relations outside the home (Dunn, Slomkowski, Beardsall, & Rende, 1994; Hetherington & Clingempeel, 1992). In a demonstration of the long-term impact of sibling conflict on individual adjustment, Bank et al. (1996) conducted a longitudinal study in which they studied aggressive boys for 10 years. Results indicated that negative sibling interactions in middle childhood predicted adjustment problems in young adulthood. Specifically, hostile sibling interactions in middle childhood were related to adult arrests, psychopathology, and hostility towards women ten years later.

It is important to note that much of the evidence supporting an association between sibling conflict and serious individual adjustment difficulties has been found in studies in which clinical samples were used (e.g., Bank et al, 1996), or in studies that looked at families undergoing some form of stress (e.g., Conger et al., 1994; Hetherington & Clingempeel, 1992). Researchers have discovered that in nonclinical samples, sibling conflict that is not violent or continually ongoing, and which is tempered with warm interactions, often is correlated with positive interactions and positive adjustment. For example, conflict in young children has been associated with emotional control, social competence and prosocial behaviours such as sharing, helping, cooperation, and teaching (Dunn, 1993; Stormshak, Bellanti, & Bierman, 1996). Researchers suggest that sibling relationships provide a safe environment in which to learn negotiation skills, affect regulation, and behavioural control. In addition, contrary to friendships, in which children may fear that conflict may signal an ending of the relationship, the permanent ties that a

sibling relationship provides makes for an environment in which children learn that the “expression of anger need not threaten mutual attachment and endurance of important relationships (Lamb & Sutton-Smith, 1982, p.111). Consequently, although sibling conflict is associated with later aggressive and antisocial behaviour in clinical samples, in community samples, it is associated with learning to control aggressive impulses. Thus, as mentioned earlier, conflict is a complex phenomenon, and although severe forms of conflict are associated with problems in individual functioning, some sibling conflict seems to be beneficial to children.

Four final points about sibling conflict bear mentioning. First, research findings suggest that although conflictual sibling interactions are more frequent than peer or parent-child conflict, instances of prosocial behaviour and positive sibling interactions are more common than instances of hostile behaviour between siblings (Newman, 1994).

Second, the degree of conflictual behaviour reported in a particular study can depend on who the respondent is (Newman, 1994). For example, if parents are asked about their children’s sibling relationships, they tend to report more instances of conflict-ridden interactions than harmonious exchanges. Given that instances of conflict are more distressing for parents than are instances of peaceful co-existence, discordant interactions may be more memorable. Moreover, because sibling conflict increases in the presence of a parent, parents may overestimate the extent to which their children quarrel (Dunn, 1988). When siblings are asked about their attitudes toward one another, siblings often report more positive than rivalrous feelings. Finally, reports by independent observers suggest that sibling relationships are

characterized mostly by harmonious interactions, with intermittent periods of conflict.

Related to taking into account who is reporting on the sibling interactions, a final point to remember is that sibling relationships may be categorized differently depending on whether the focus is on overt behaviour between siblings or on the underlying feelings that siblings have towards one another (Newman, 1994). In other words, it does not follow that siblings who exhibit many instances of conflict do not have positive feelings for one another. Because the positive feelings may not be articulated unless asked by someone, a researcher investigating sibling relationships who focuses only on behavioural observations may conclude mistakenly that two siblings who engage in conflict do not have positive, warm feelings for one another. Thus, how sibling closeness or hostility is operationalized (i.e., behaviourally or affectively) can have an impact on the results of sibling relationship studies.

Influence of sibling relationships on children and adolescents' adjustment.

Although researchers are not yet certain how sibling relationships influence individual development, the association between sibling relationships and functioning has been demonstrated in numerous areas, such as social behaviour, cognitive development, deviant behaviour, and overall emotional adjustment. For instance, studies have demonstrated that positive sibling relationships, such as those characterized by playing together, being affectionate, and having feelings of warmth towards siblings are associated with positive affect and prosocial behaviours between sibling pairs (Dunn, Slomkowski, Beardsall, & Rende, 1994; Stocker,

Dunn, & Plomin, 1989). On the other hand, sibling relationships that are hostile, critical, and aggressive are associated with greater externalizing and internalizing problems in children (Dunn et al., 1994; Garcia, Shaw, Winslow, & Yaggi, 2000; Patterson, 1986; Stocker, Burwell, & Briggs, 2002).

The link between sibling relationships and cognitive functioning has been demonstrated on various fronts. For example, research has demonstrated that cooperative and friendly sibling interactions have been associated with enhanced social-cognitive and affective perspective-taking skills. Moreover, perspective-taking ability is more closely related to the quality of the sibling relationship than to mother-child interactions (Dunn, Brown, Slomkowski, Tesla, & Youngblade, 1991; Howe & Ross, 1990). In addition, sibling modeling has been linked to cognitive development in children as early as infancy (Wishart, 1986). Finally, teaching between siblings has been associated with cognitive development. For example, Smith (1990) found that older children who verbally taught their younger siblings, such as by explaining what something is or by teaching how to solve a homework problem, demonstrated enhanced reading and language skills. Similarly, Azmitia and Hesser (1993) found that younger siblings learned a block building task more readily from their older siblings than from their friends.

Siblings relationships also have been associated with deviant behaviour in adolescents. For example, East (1996) found that a close relationship between adolescent girls and their older, adolescent, childbearing sisters was correlated with permissive sexual behaviour in the younger sister. The authors hypothesize that as sibling closeness increases, the younger sibling's identification with the older

sibling is enhanced. Similarly, sibling relationships are also associated with substance abuse (Conger & Reuter, 1996; Duncan, Duncan, & Hops, 1996). For example, Conger and Reuter (1996) found that frequent drinking on the part of a sibling close in age exacerbated the tendency of adolescents to drink.

In terms of overall adjustment, positive sibling relationships have been associated with feelings of self-competence, attractiveness, self-confidence, and a decreased risk for internalizing behaviour, such as anxiety (Dunn, Slomkowski, and Beardsall, 1994; Dunn et al, 1994b). For example, East and Rook (1992) found that children who were socially isolated from their peers, but who had a supportive relationship with a sibling, demonstrated better adjustment on measures of anxiety and immaturity than did isolated children who did not have such sibling support. Although an association between positive sibling relationships and positive adjustment is not surprising, it is interesting that Dunn and colleagues found that internalizing behaviours on the part of younger siblings were associated with a lack of friendly sibling behaviour rather than high levels of conflict, thereby suggesting that emotionally expressive interactions between siblings may be of developmental significance.

Sibling relationships in later adulthood.

Although researchers have traditionally focused their attention on sibling relationships in childhood, investigators are now beginning to recognize the importance of sibling relationships across the life span (Cicerelli, 1995). Although in middle adulthood, contact with siblings tends to decrease as individuals are focusing on establishing careers, getting married, and having children (Cicerelli, 1995; 1996), middle-

aged adults report that they feel closer to their siblings than do younger adults, and in addition to maintaining feelings of closeness to their siblings, their siblings also serve as confidantes in middle age (Cicerelli, 1996; Ross & Milgram, 1982)

Although the general trend is one of increased closeness as individuals age, sibling relationships appears to wax and wane in the face of life events (Cicerelli, 1996). For example, for some sibling pairs, a sibling's marriage can be associated with a loss of closeness, as when the new spouse is disliked by the sibling (Cicerelli, 1996); on the other hand, for other sibling pairs, a sibling's marriage to a well-liked spouse has contributed to feelings of increased closeness between siblings (Cicerelli, 1995).

Positive sibling relationships among elderly persons have been associated with increased morale, decreased loneliness, greater sense of security, fewer depressive symptoms, and greater life satisfaction. (Cicerelli, 1995; Ponzetti & James, 1997; Wilson, Calsyn, & Orlofsky, 1994). It is important to note that it is the quality of the sibling relationship rather than the frequency of sibling contact that has been associated with well-being in adulthood (Cicerelli, 1996). Sibling relationships have clinical importance as well (Kahn & Lewis, 1988). For example, a poor sibling relationship may add to problems that an individual is having, and therefore the sibling relationship may need to be addressed as part of treatment. It has been suggested that "early conflicts and estrangements persisting from childhood, long-term sibling dependencies, or reactivated rivalries and aggressions can all come to necessitate therapy in old age" (Cicerelli, 1996-p.53-54). Furthermore, a clinician may want to focus on the sibling relationship as a means of improving a client's well-being, particularly as adults enter the later stages of the life span and their support networks begin to shrink (Kahn & Lewis, 1988).

Through investigating sibling relationships in adulthood, researchers have begun to realize that the conventional childhood conceptualization of the sibling relationship as being warm or conflictual is not capturing the complexity of the sibling relationship in adulthood. For instance, researchers have noticed that following mid-adolescence, sibling conflict begins to decrease, with a dramatic drop occurring when children leave home (Dunn, 2000). Moreover, as individuals mature further, other elements of the sibling relationship become more salient, such as perceived support, companionship, and reminiscing about one's shared history (Cicerelli, 1995). Perceived support refers to the idea that a sibling is available to provide help if necessary (Cicerelli, 1996). Although adults may not actually ask for help from their siblings, the knowledge that a sibling is there as a source of support provides them with a sense of security and well-being (White & Riedmann, 1992). Companionship is expressed through shared interests and activities, such as sports and shopping, as well as through less specified behaviours, such as calling "just to chat" (Cicerelli, 1996). Although companionship is important as individuals age, it appears that the confidante and perceived helping roles may become more dominant (Campbell, Connidis, & Davies, 1999). Finally, as people progress through the life span, opportunities to reminisce about one's past enables individuals to re-evaluate earlier experiences and integrate them into one's present identity (Cicerelli, 1996). It has been suggested that encouraging adult siblings to reminisce may be a particularly effective therapeutic technique when working with individuals in clinical settings (Cicerelli, 1988 in Kahn & Lewis, 1988).

Sibling relationships in late adolescence and young adulthood.

Despite substantial research documenting sibling relationships in childhood and in late adulthood, the nature of sibling relationships in late adolescence and young adulthood has been relatively neglected (Cicerelli, 1995; Conger, et al., 1994; Floyd, 1995). Given that, developmentally, this is a period of transition in which children are leaving home, forming new peer groups, and focusing on developing a career, it is likely to be a period of reorganization in the sibling relationship (Newman, 1991).

Research that has been conducted has focused primarily on closeness among college students and their siblings (Cicerelli, 1980; Dolgin & Lindsay, 1999; Floyd, 1995; Newman, 1991; Pulakos, 1989). Interestingly, it has been the limited research with this population that has revealed pertinent information about the nature of sibling relationships; specifically, one of the most consistent findings in the literature on sibling relationships at all ages has been that sister-sister relationships are found to be closer than opposite-sex and brother-brother relationships (Cicerelli, 1996). Floyd (1995), in her investigation of closeness and gender, however, found no differences in siblings in terms of reported closeness; what differed was how that closeness was expressed. Specifically, females expressed their closeness in ways that are associated with traditional conceptualizations of closeness, such as through verbal interactions (e.g., talking about fears, discussing personal problems, and saying that they liked or loved each other). Sisters were also more likely to manifest their closeness through hugging. Brothers, however, were more likely to associate closeness with shaking hands, drinking together, and talking about sexual issues, rather than looking to self-disclosure or emotional sharing as expressions of closeness. Such findings parallel research on closeness in same-

sex friendships. In the opposite sex sibling relationships, women indicated that doing favours, borrowing money, attending events, doing outdoor activities, and “hanging out” were indicative of closeness, actions that are often cited as ways in which men express their closeness to one another. Thus, perhaps the women noticed the ways in which their brothers interacted with other men, and adopted them as a means to develop closeness to their brothers (Floyd, 1995).

In addition, Floyd (1995) found that, overall, siblings were more likely to express closeness in instrumental ways, such as by doing favours for each other, providing help in a crisis, and “just by knowing we are close without having to talk about it” (p.200). As a result, closeness between siblings “emerged as a function of dependability, wherein siblings know they can count on each other for assistance and can be assured the relationship will remain close without even discussing it” (p.200). This is consistent with research findings on sibling relationships in old age, in which emotional and instrumental support are seen as more important qualities than companionship activities (Campbell, Connidis, & Davies, 1999).

What factors are involved in the formation of a sibling relationship?

Given the importance of sibling relationships across the life span, one critical question concerns how sibling relationships develop. Overall, research has determined that the quality of a sibling relationship is established primarily in childhood when children are living together; rarely do siblings begin to develop a relationship in adulthood (Buhrmester & Furman, 1990; Dunn, 2000; Ross & Milgram, 1982). One factor found to be related to sibling relationship quality is individual temperament. For example, research has indicated that the temperamental match between two children is

important, such that if there is a mismatch between two siblings, conflict is more likely to occur than between siblings who are similar in temperament (Munn & Dunn, 1989; Stocker, Dunn, & Plomin, 1989; Stoneman & Brody, 1993).

In a retrospective study of adult siblings, Ross and Milgram (1982) found that middle-aged adults believed that their childhood family environment played a prominent role in fostering the development of their sibling relationships. Siblings who felt they had a strong bond to one another mentioned families that fostered sibling relationships through family activities and values. Such a qualitative study is consistent with more recent studies that suggest family settings may help shape sibling relationships. For example, as will be discussed in more detail later, family disruptions, such as divorce, are linked with increases in sibling conflict (Conger et al., 1996). Similarly, as Patterson (1986)'s work suggests, families characterized by conflictual interactions may create an environment in which siblings develop conflict-ridden relationships with each other and with others outside the home.

One of the most frequently studied and discussed aspects of siblings and their family environment is the link between parent-child relationships, particularly mother-child, and sibling relationships (Dunn, 1992). In some of the most systematic work completed on sibling relationships in early childhood, Dunn (1988; Dunn & Kendrick, 1982) found that children who had enjoyed a close, positive relationship with their mothers prior to the birth of a sibling subsequently engaged in more conflicts with their mothers following the birth of the sibling. Interestingly, however, children who were close to their mothers and whose mothers prepared them for the arrival of a new sibling demonstrated more prosocial behaviour towards their sibling than did children who were

less well prepared. Similarly, after the birth of the sibling, mothers who talked to their first-born children about how the baby was feeling and what the baby needed had children who were more positive towards their siblings than children whose mothers did not provide such information. Such findings suggest that perceived differential processes may be at work, since, as Kowal and Kramer (1997) point out, sibling conflict that results from differential parental treatment depends on the child's interpretation of the differential treatment. If the child understands why a parent needs to treat a sibling differently, that child does not exhibit antagonistic behaviour towards the child. Thus, perhaps children who are taught that newborn babies have special needs requiring additional attention feel less displaced or neglected by their parents.

In a related set of findings, Dunn (1988) also found that children who had disengaged relationships with their mother before the birth of a sibling exhibited more positive behaviour towards their sibling following the birth. Dunn (1988) hypothesizes that perhaps the newborn sibling fulfills an emotional need that was not being met through the child's relationship with the mother. On the other hand, researchers have consistently demonstrated that children who have conflict-ridden relationships with their mothers engage in negative interactions with their siblings (Brody, Stoneman, & McCoy, 1994; Dunn, Deater-Deckard, Pickering, & Golding, 1999).

Overall, it appears that conflictual sibling relationships are better predicted by parent-child relationships than are positive sibling relationships (Brody, Stoneman, & McCoy, 1994; Erel, Margolin, & John, 1998; Volling & Belsky, 1992). For example, in a longitudinal investigation, Volling and Belsky (1992) found that families in which mothers were punitive and overly restrictive in their interactions with their children had

siblings that engaged in more aggressive behaviour toward one another than families in which mothers did not behave in such a way.

Although the exact mechanisms through which parent-child relationships and sibling relationships are related are unknown, researchers use attachment theory, social learning concepts, and parental differential treatment to help account for such links (Brody & Stoneman, 1996; Dunn, 1992). Children with a secure attachment to parents have been found, overall, to have positive sibling relationships (Boer, Goedhart, & Treffers, 1992; Volling & Belsky, 1992). The influence of social learning processes in family interactions is found in the work of Patterson (1986), who has demonstrated that in families where aggressive behaviour is reinforced, siblings tend to be aggressive towards one another. Finally, as mentioned earlier, parental differential treatment, in which parents behave unequally towards their children, often has been cited as playing a prominent role in linking parent-child relationships with conflicted sibling relationships (Brody, Stoneman, McCoy, & Forehand, 1992; Bryant & Crockenberg, 1980; Volling & Belsky, 1992). Research also indicates that in times of family stress (e.g., divorce, economic trouble), parental differential treatment may be exacerbated (Crouter, McHale, & Tucker, 1999; Hetherington, 1988).

It should be noted, however, that recent evidence suggests that, overall, the amount of variance in sibling relationship quality that is accounted for by the presence of parental differential treatment is relatively low (Kowal & Kramer, 1997). Moreover, children's attributions of differential treatment appear to be important. Children who perceive the differential treatment as being necessary because of developmental or physical differences, do not manifest aggressive behaviour to their siblings, but when

treatment is perceived as favouritism, sibling conflict is evident (Kowal & Kramer, 1997). Thus, children differentiate between justified differential parental treatment and blatant favouritism.

It is important to emphasize that the relationships between parent-child relationships and sibling relationships are correlational in nature, which allows for the possibility that bidirectional influences may be at play (Brody & Stoneman, 1996; Dunn, 1992; Volling & Belsky, 1992).

Finally, the marital/partner relationship has been associated with sibling relationships. Just as marital conflict and family transitions, such as divorce and remarriage, can affect individual adjustment and parent-child relationships, such disruptions, according to a family systems perspective, may also affect sibling relationships. Given the importance of sibling relationships in individual development and well-being, the association between marital functioning and sibling relationships needs to be examined.

Family Transitions And Sibling Relationships

There is scant research investigating the effects of divorce and related transitions on sibling relationships. Initially, researchers believed in a “compensatory” perspective, whereby it was thought that in the absence of parental attention and care, siblings develop close relationships that help them to support one another; in other words, the siblings make up for the lack of parental care (Schibuk, 1989; Waters, 1987). Based on the idea that the sibling relationship is the only unit of continuity during a time of multiple changes, such a perspective was fuelled further by Bank and Kahn (1982)’s seminal work, The Sibling Bond, in which the authors drew from their clinical experiences to

suggest that during divorce, when parental care is inconsistent or less available, siblings develop intense bonds to one another (Bank & Kahn, 1982). Their research has been substantiated by other clinicians, who have also found that in times of severe parental dysfunction during divorce, siblings often will take care of each other (Waters, 1987). When researchers began to test the compensatory hypothesis empirically, however, findings were not supportive of the theory. On the contrary, most researchers found that when a divorce occurred, siblings demonstrated increased levels of conflict-ridden behaviour rather than the increased prosocial and warm behaviour that was anticipated (Anderson & Rice, 1992; Conger & Conger, 1996; Hetherington, 1988).

Two points are noteworthy, however. First, Bank and Kahn (1982) did not suggest that parental dysfunction is associated with positive sibling behaviour. They specifically stated that parental dysfunction is related to intense sibling relationships, which may be manifested in clinging behaviour or in other ways, such as by high conflict or high avoidance (Bank, 1992; Waters, 1987). Such a perspective is consistent with current research that finds an increase in sibling conflict in the aftermath of family transitions such as divorce or remarriage. The second significant point is that it appears that the clinging, enmeshed behaviour of siblings seems to be more common in cases of severe parental deprivation and parental psychopathology, and may represent a specific response pattern (Bank & Kahn, 1982; Dunn, 1992; Hetherington, 1988). For example, Hetherington (1989), in her longitudinal study of divorce, identified a group of siblings, primarily sister-sister pairs, that appeared to manifest “pathologically intense, symbiotic, and restrictive” relationships to one another (p.9). Most important, such sibling relationships occurred in families in which the children had no regular contact or

involvement with an affectionate adult (Hetherington, 1988). Although such relationships may be effective coping mechanisms at the time of the parental deprivation, such enmeshment has been associated with later adult adjustment problems and later adult sibling relationship problems (Kahn & Lewis, 1988; Schibuk, 1989). Nevertheless, it appears that in most cases of divorce and related transitions, siblings do not suddenly develop close, supportive relationships. As will be discussed later, however, there is evidence to suggest that an already established close sibling relationship may act as a buffer to the negative effects of such transitions (Caya & Liem, 1998; Hetherington et al., 1999; Jenkins & Smith, 1992)

In contrast to the compensatory perspective, in which divorce and related transitions were thought to result in warm, positive sibling relationships, the congruency hypothesis suggests that what occurs in the marital relationship similarly occurs in the sibling relationship. Thus, if there is tension and conflict between marital partners, or a disruption in the family environment, there will be tension and conflict between siblings. (Conger & Conger, 1996). Much of the research in divorce and family transitions provides support for this perspective (e.g., Anderson & Rice, 1992; Hetherington, 1988; Hetherington et al., 1999; MacKinnon, 1989). For example, in one of the earliest divorce studies to consider sibling relationships, Hetherington (1988) found that one year after experiencing their parents' divorce, both male and female siblings reported more aggression and less affection towards one another than did siblings from intact families. Similarly, in a study of recently remarried families, Anderson and Rice (1992) reported increased levels of aggression between siblings in stepfamilies as compared to siblings from intact homes.

Why is there an increase in sibling conflict during divorce?

Essentially, there are two theories as to why family transitions are related to aggressive behaviour between sibling pairs. First, the degree of ongoing marital conflict may be a prominent factor. In one of the earliest systematic studies investigating divorce and sibling relationships, MacKinnon (1989) found that, whereas siblings in divorced homes were more negative in their interactions than children from intact homes, the quality of spousal/ ex-spousal relationships contributed more than did marital status in predicting whether siblings were negative in their interactions. Similarly, Jenkins and Smith (1992), in a study of maritally distressed and nondistressed families, found that families characterized by marital discord had siblings who were more negative in their interactions than families in which the marital relationship was harmonious. Moreover, the quality of marital or partner relations can predict later sibling functioning. For example, in a longitudinal investigation of siblings, parent-child relationships, and partners, Dunn and colleagues (1999) found that that among a group of preschool children and their siblings, the condition of parental relations when the children were infants and toddlers was associated with their behaviour four years later. Specifically, lack of affection and high levels of hostility between mothers and their partners were related to later instances of negative behaviour from the older sibling to the younger sibling. Conversely, mother-partner affection was related to positive interactions between siblings. It is important to note, however, that it is marital discord and not merely marital dissatisfaction that is associated with sibling conflict. In contrast to the findings of MacKinnon (1989) and Jenkins and Smith (1992), Conger and Conger (1996) found no difference in sibling interactions in families that were distressed and non-distressed. Their

measure of marital harmony, however, involved a four-item questionnaire in which parents rated the extent to which they were happy and satisfied in their marriage rather than the degree of marital conflict that existed. This differs to the other two studies in which marital conflict was the measured construct and was assessed through extensive questionnaires and interviews. Thus, it appears that it is overt marital conflict, rather than marital happiness, that is implicated in the degree of negative sibling interactions, perhaps because partners can be unhappy or dissatisfied in their marriages without exhibiting any blatant signs of distress (Caya & Liem, 1998).

A second hypothesized reason as to why there is an increase in sibling conflict during a family transition is that the parent-child relationship is disrupted (Conger & Conger, 1996). Whether the parent-child relationship is disrupted because of ongoing marital conflict, or because of the stress that accompanies family transitions, the association between parent-child relationship and sibling relationships within the context of family transitions has been noted in clinical settings (e.g., Eno, 1985; Shapiro & Wallace, 1987) and, more recently, in empirical investigations (Conger & Conger, 1996; Dunn et al., 1999). For example, from the clinical literature, Shapiro and Wallace (1987) discuss how when a divorce occurs, there is an alteration in the family composition, such that a family goes from being a four-member family to being a triangle (assuming two children). Such a triangle, in which a mother may develop a particularly close relationship with one of the children, may result in the other child feeling left out, which may, in turn, negatively impact the sibling subsystem. Consequently, the sibling relationship may be affected by the parent's relationships with both children. Eno (1985) describes the effect that parent-child coalitions can have on a family's functioning. A

coalition is a term originating from the family systems literature referring to a situation in which two family members join together against a third person in the family, either intentionally or unintentionally. Although parent-child coalitions also can be found in intact families, they create particular problems for the one-parent family. In intact families, if a parent-child coalition exists, leaving one child out, that child has an alternative parent to provide support. In a separated family, however, if the custodial parent and one child form a coalition, the other child is completely alone without any support. Such coalitions may result in situations whereby if the siblings are arguing, the parent may become involved and take the side of the favoured child. Similarly, if the excluded child argues with the parent, the sibling will be drawn in as well.

To illustrate the influence of parent-child coalitions, Eno (1985) describes a family in which two children were in two different parent-child coalitions, the son with the mother and the daughter with the father. In this family, the children were drawn into the marital arguments and expected to side with their allied parent. Consequently, the children rarely played together, and any interactions they had were characterized by high levels of conflict. When the divorce occurred, the sibling relationship became worse. When the brother and sister were arguing, the mother would be drawn in and would support the brother. Similarly, when the daughter argued with the mother, the brother would jump in and take his mother's side against his sister. As a result, the son exhibited contempt and disregard for his sister, and the sister began to disengage from the family and manifest adjustment difficulties. In contrast, the second family described by Eno (1985) differed markedly from the family above, in that there were no parent-child coalitions either before or after the parental divorce. Neither parent allied himself or

herself with one child over another, and if a child attempted to ally himself with either parent against a sibling, the parent would not allow it. In fact, the only coalition in the family was a sibling coalition, in which the siblings would join together against a parent. In this family, the parents actively encouraged the sibling relationship and tried to foster positive interactions. This sibling relationship, rather than being heavily conflict-ridden as in the first family, consisted of a great deal of play, companionship, and conflict. Moreover, the close sibling relationship appeared to provide a stabilizing influence throughout the stressful divorce period.

There are three noteworthy points about the two families described above. First, the influence of the parent-child relationships is unmistakably evident. Consistent with the research findings from the developmental field that was reviewed earlier, whether a sibling relationship is positive or negative depends on the family environment and how that family environment affects parent-child relationships. In particular, how a parent fosters a sibling relationship or, through a parent-child coalition, forces the siblings into antagonistic roles, is powerfully associated with the sibling relationship.

Second, in both families, the quality of the sibling relationship before the divorce occurred was consistent with the quality of the relationship after the divorce occurred. In fact, the divorce appeared to intensify the nature of the relationship. For example, in the first family, the negative sibling relationship that existed before the parents divorced appeared to be even more negative after the divorce. Similarly, although this was not as clearly demonstrated, the siblings in the second family appeared to have a stronger, more positive bond following the divorce. This is consistent with research on the impact of critical incidents on sibling relationships, which suggests that in order to understand the

significance of critical incidents, such as divorce, for sibling relationships, it is necessary to look at the quality of sibling relationships before the critical incident occurred (Dunn, 1984; Ross & Milgram, 1982). Ross and Milgram (1982) found that sibling responses to critical incidents were associated with the quality of the sibling relationship before the critical incident. For example, if a sibling relationship was primarily conflict-ridden before the incident, the incident typically exacerbated such conflict. Similarly, sibling relationships characterized by closeness and affection appeared to be even closer following the critical incident (Ross & Milgram, 1982). Thus, when evaluating and trying to understand the impact of a critical incident, such as divorce, on the sibling relationship, it is important to have a sense of the nature of the relationship before the divorce occurred.

Finally, it is important to note that in the second family in which the two siblings had a positive relationship, their interactions included substantial conflict in addition to their playful and affectionate behaviour (Eno, 1985). This observation further emphasizes the findings in the developmental literature suggesting that sibling relationships are multifaceted, in that negative and positive qualities can co-exist (Dunn et al., 1999). Similarly, Hetherington (1988), in her longitudinal study of divorce and children, noted that high levels of conflict and closeness can characterize some sibling relationships in the context of family transitions. Hetherington (1988) observed that sibling caretaking increases in divorced households as parents become less available, and hypothesizes that this increased contact between siblings may account for the increases in both positive and negative interactions. Thus, when examining sibling relationships in the context of family transitions, it is essential to explore both positive and negative aspects of the relationship.

Although the role of parent-child relationships in sibling relationships within the context of divorce has been described in the clinical literature (e.g., Eno, 1985), there has been little empirical work done on the topic. In a longitudinal study investigating the effects of divorce on children, Hetherington (1988) reported that families in which parents were punitive, unaffectionate, and unresponsive to children's needs had greater levels of rivalrous and unaffectionate sibling interactions than siblings from intact families. Moreover, the largest effects were found when the differential treatment of the siblings by parents was examined. Similarly, Dunn and colleagues (1999), in their longitudinal investigation, found that marital hostility was related to negativity in parent-child relationships, and thus indirectly to less positivity from older to younger siblings. In an attempt to directly examine the link between parenting and sibling relationships in the context of marital transitions, Conger and Conger (1996) found that seventh-grade boys and girls who had experienced their parents' divorce within the past two years reported directing and receiving more hostile behaviour towards one another within the past month than did children from intact homes. Moreover, this effect of divorce on sibling relationships was mediated primarily through disrupted parenting, such that when the parenting construct was removed from the model, there was no direct association between family structure and sibling interactions.

Although it appears that there is often a rise in negative interactions between siblings in the face of family transitions and that positive sibling relationships do not suddenly develop as a result of a family transition, there is evidence to suggest that if a positive sibling relationship already exists, there may be a potential buffering effect. To date, in every study conducted on the relationship between family transitions and sibling

relationships, researchers have noted that despite the findings of increased hostility and conflict between sibling dyads, there invariably is a subgroup of children for whom the sibling relationship appears to be having a positive effect in terms of emotional and psychological functioning (e.g., Anderson, 1999; Conger & Conger, 1996; Hetherington, 1988; Hetherington & Clingempeel, 1992). As such, there have been several investigations into the role of sibling relationships in moderating the negative effects of family transitions (Caya & Liem, 1998; Jenkins & Smith, 1992; Kempton, Armistead, Wierson, & Forehand 1991).

Buffering effect of a supportive sibling relationship.

Wallerstein (1985), in her qualitative, longitudinal study of families undergoing divorce in California, was one of the first to note the positive effects that siblings sometimes have on each other during times of stress. She describes how at the ten-year mark, when the children were being interviewed as young adults, she was struck by the degree of closeness and love that a subgroup of the siblings expressed for one another. The importance of siblings was demonstrated in comments such as, "I don't know what I would have done without him," "My relationship with my sister has been the saving of our emotional and physical selves," and "Without the other, our chances of turning out as we are would have been very different" (p.552). Wallerstein (1985) concluded that,

In a subgroup of families, the sibship emerges as a powerful supportive network with the capacity not only to buffer the family ordeal but also to provide the significant nutrients of family relationships and to actualize for these young people their otherwise battered conceptions of fidelity, enduring love, and intimacy (p.552).

Wallerstein's observations have been demonstrated in other research investigations. For example, in a direct examination of the potential buffering effect of sibling relationships during family transitions, Kempton and colleagues (1991) compared adolescents with one sibling with adolescents who had no siblings and found evidence for a moderating effect for the sibling relationship. Compared with their peers from intact homes, adolescents from divorced homes who had a sibling were functioning at the same level, whereas adolescents from divorced homes who did not have a sibling manifested more externalizing problems than the other two groups.

Although the findings of Kempton et al. (1991) suggest that the mere presence of a sibling has a buffering effect on the negative impact of family transitions, other studies indicate that it is the presence of a supportive sibling relationship that is key. For example, Jenkins and Smith (1990) investigated the role of sibling relationships in the context of marital conflict for a group of 9-to-12 year-old children. Consistent with other studies, results indicated that children living in conflict-ridden families did not develop positive sibling relationships, and, in fact, were more likely to exhibit hostile behaviour towards one of their siblings than children living in harmonious homes. Children living in conflict-ridden homes, however, who had a close or moderately close sibling relationship, as measured by high ratings on items indicating that the sibling spent a lot of time with the child or was a source of comfort when the child was upset, exhibited levels of emotional and behavioural problems similar to children living in harmonious homes. In contrast, children living in conflict-ridden homes without a supportive sibling relationship demonstrated a significantly greater number of psychological and behaviour problems than children in conflict-ridden homes who had a close sibling relationship.

Jenkins (1992) points out that the effect of a close sibling relationship is a true protective factor since the effect was only present in the conflict-ridden homes and not the harmonious homes.

Moreover, such buffering effects appear to have a lasting impact. For instance, Caya and Liem (1998) conducted a survey study of undergraduate college students to assess the long-term buffering effects of sibling relationships in conflict-ridden homes. Similar to the findings of Jenkins and Smith (1990), participants from high conflict families who had experienced high sibling support during childhood reported similar levels of current functioning as participants from low conflict families. Moreover, for individuals from high conflict-ridden backgrounds, individuals with high levels of sibling support reported greater levels of self-esteem than both those participants without any siblings, and those participants who had low levels of sibling support. These findings further support the notion that it is not the mere presence of a sibling that is related to the buffering effect, but that it is the quality of the sibling relationship, and, in particular, the degree of perceived supportiveness, that is important.

Nature of the buffering effect of siblings.

In spite of recent evidence suggesting that siblings may play a role in moderating the effects of family transitions, little is known about the exact mechanism through which this effect operates. Hetherington (1988) suggests that the age of the sibling may play a role in the degree to which a buffering effect is apparent. She found that in the subset of children for which a buffering effect appeared to be occurring, this effect was greatest among the adolescent children. This is consistent with the findings of Kempton et al. (1991), who included a sample of adolescents.

Care-taking influences also may have a function in the buffering effect (Anderson, 1999; Kempton et al., 1991). As discussed in the earlier review of sibling relationships, there is some evidence that siblings benefit both from receiving and providing nurturance and comfort (Dunn, 1992). Although the mechanism through which care-taking is helpful is not clear, it is speculated that the opportunity for older siblings to nurture and care for a younger sibling results in feelings of increased self-competency (Jenkins & Smith, 1990). For example, although the finding was not significant, Kempton et al. (1991) found a trend in which older siblings appeared to benefit slightly more than the younger members of the sibling dyads. Similarly, Anderson (1999), in a longitudinal study of children in intact and remarried homes, found that, in the remarried families, although a positive sibling relationship was associated with increased social responsibility in both members of a sibling dyad, the degree of positivity in the sibling relationship was associated with lower externalizing behaviour for the older adolescents only.

Another possible explanation for the buffering effect may be the fact that a person has a stable relationship with a supportive figure (Caya & Liem, 1998). Perhaps the notion that one's relationship with a sibling is an enduring bond that is a source of stability and security helps children cope with the stress of the family transition they are experiencing (Caya & Liem, 1998). Interestingly, it is speculated that such support can occur regardless of the extent to which a sibling relationship is close or conflictual (Caya & Liem, 1998), which implies that a conflict-ridden sibling relationship can be supportive. Perhaps, in a strange way, a sibling relationship that is conflict-ridden before the divorce occurs and continues to be conflict-ridden following the divorce may provide

a sense of security and stability for the siblings (Rosenberg, 1980). Although this may appear to contradict the findings of Caya and Liam (1998) and Jenkins and Smith (1992), who found that low levels of sibling support were associated with high levels of disturbance in children living in conflict-ridden homes, it is important to remember that conflict between siblings does not mean that they are not supportive of one another. In both of these studies, children were classified as being either supportive or not supportive; sibling conflict, per se, was not measured. As mentioned earlier, sibling relationships can be high in both closeness and conflict. Thus, perhaps there are cases in which siblings exhibit high levels of conflict behaviour, and yet the relationship can have a buffering effect. Given the findings of Conger, Conger, and Elder (1994), Anderson (1999), and Anderson and Rice (1992), however, all of whom found an association between negative sibling interactions and individual adjustment, perhaps the nature of the conflict between siblings is a critical factor. For example, ongoing aggression may have a negative impact on a child's adjustment in the face of family transitions, but minor disputes or scuffles, such as those that probably occur on a daily basis as a result of frequent interactions, may provide a sense of security and stability in the context of family transitions. Again, this points to the complex nature of sibling conflict and the importance of assessing the exact type of conflict that is occurring.

Overall, however, in spite of speculations as to why positive sibling relationships help to buffer children from the negative effects of family transitions, the mechanisms underlying such a protective effect are not well understood. Nonetheless, for a significant number of sibling dyads, the presence of a supportive sibling appears to help mitigate the effects of family transitions.

A word about gender and family transitions.

Overall, there is a general consensus that, similar to the developmental research findings on sibling relationships, the gender makeup of sibling dyads does not contribute significantly to sibling interactions in the context of family transitions. Nonetheless, a few consistent gender findings are worth noting. Remarkably, the findings appear to parallel, for the most part, the patterns of sibling interactions found in the general developmental literature. Specifically, whereas boys and girls exhibit equal levels of aggression, girls exhibit greater levels of prosocial behaviour (Anderson & Rice, 1992; Conger & Conger, 1996; Hetherington, 1988). As mentioned earlier, however, there is one exception. Although reports are not consistent, there is a sense that in the immediate aftermath of a family transition, be it a divorce or a remarriage, boys, in particular, are more hostile (Anderson & Rice, 1992; Hetherington, 1988; MacKinnon, 1989). Moreover, boys appear to receive fewer positive interactions directed at them from their siblings than girls, resulting in boys receiving less support from their siblings (Anderson & Rice, 1992; Hetherington, 1988). Perhaps this gender discrepancy in sibling support is associated, in part, with the greater externalizing problems reported by boys in many studies of divorce. Although it is unknown why boys receive fewer prosocial interactions, perhaps it is a result of their increased aggression. In other words, the lack of prosocial behaviour may be a consequence of negative behaviour exhibited by boys. As time passes, however, and the family transition stabilizes, boys' negativity decreases to the point where boys and girls exhibit equal levels of hostility toward one another (Hetherington et al., 1999). Thus, this pattern becomes similar to that found in developmental studies of sibling relationships (e.g., Bryant, 1982).

Problems with Current Research on Siblings and Family Transitions

In spite of the growth in research studies investigating sibling relationships within the context of family transitions, some gaps remain in the literature. The first issue concerns the classification of sibling relationships. To date, most researchers use some variant of a behaviour checklist to classify sibling relationships as warm or hostile, in which participants are asked to rate the extent to which their siblings were hostile or warm to them over a specific period of time. For example, Conger and Conger (1996) classified their sibling dyads according to the degree to which they were hostile or warm to each other in the past month. Examples of hostility included instances where the siblings yelled at, shoved, or argued with each other, and examples of warmth included instances where the siblings acted loving and affectionate towards one another, and where the siblings listened to one another's points of view. Given that the sibling relationship is an elusive construct that researchers have struggled to capture for years, this focus on overt behaviours is not surprising. One problem with this approach, however, is that behavioural checklists, or any other measure that focuses solely on behaviour, may not be capturing the underlying nature of sibling relationships, such as siblings' overall feelings toward one another. As was noted earlier, there can be a discrepancy between the overt behaviour and the underlying feelings of siblings (Newman, 1994). For example, a child who is helping a sibling may be seen as acting positively, but the behaviour may be motivated by a negative feeling, such as the desire to control the sibling (Newman, 1994). Similarly, negative interactions may be caused unintentionally by children who are too young to understand how to achieve a goal or communicate their needs in a socially appropriate manner (Newman, 1994). In other

words, a child's behaviour may not be an accurate reflection of that child's feelings towards his or her sibling. Moreover, when looking at the relationship between the quality of sibling relationships and individual adjustment, some studies suggest that it is the global aspect of the sibling relationship rather than specific incidents that is associated with well-being (Jenkins, 1992; Jenkins, Smith, & Graham, 1989). Thus, rather than determining or classifying sibling relationships based on behaviour, it is necessary to examine how siblings perceive their sibling relationships (Conger & Conger, 1996).

A second issue is that current studies do not provide a measure of the sibling relationship before the family transition occurred. Given that research suggests that reactions to critical incidents are related to pre-existing relationships (Dunn, 1984; Ross & Milgram, 1982), the impact of a transition, such as divorce, on sibling relationships needs to be assessed with knowledge of the prior relationship. Moreover, knowledge of the pre-existing relationship may provide information as to why some siblings support each other following divorce, while others appear to fight with each other.

A third problem is that current research designs typically do not provide a measure of marital conflict. Since marital conflict is associated with child aggression (Cummings & Davies, 1994), it may be useful to know, in terms of disentangling possible reasons for why some siblings are supportive and others fight, what the degree of existing marital conflict is.

A fourth issue is that in those studies in which sibling relationships have to be classified in order to assess their association with individual adjustment, sibling dyads are classified as either hostile or close, or some variation of that differentiation (e.g.,

supportive vs. unsupportive). For example, in the Jenkins and Smith (1990) examination of marital conflict and sibling relationships, siblings were not able to be both high in conflict and high in support. Similar classifications can be found in the studies of Hetherington and Clingempeel (1992) and Anderson (1999). The developmental literature shows that warmth and hostility do not lie on a continuum, but rather they are separate dimensions on which sibling dyads can take various configurations (Dunn et al., 1999). Moreover, sibling relationships often are found to be characterized by ambivalence and can be high in both warmth and conflict. For example, Hetherington (1988) found that 35% of the siblings in her sample fell into an “ambivalent” category, in which high levels of rivalry and aggression co-existed with high levels of warmth and involvement. Consequently, in order to fully comprehend how family transitions affect sibling relationships, studies need to allow for various dyad compositions.

A fifth area in which there is a gap in the literature concerns the meaning of sibling behaviour in the context of family transitions. Specifically, whereas it clearly is evident that heightened sibling conflict is a common reaction to family transitions, the function of that sibling conflict is not as obvious. As was discussed earlier, sibling conflict is a complicated phenomenon that is not well understood. Rather than serving as a simple index of the degree of hostility in a sibling relationship, conflict between siblings can serve various functions (Eno, 1985; Munn & Dunn, 1989). Bank and Kahn (1982) suggest that during family transitions, such as divorce, when changes are occurring and when parents may be less emotionally and physically available to their children, engaging in aggressive behaviour with a sibling may be an attempt to provoke a predictable reaction from a familiar figure in the child's life; in other words, during a

frightening time of changes in living arrangements and in parental behaviour, children may try to reassure themselves that something in the environment, namely their ability to fight with their sibling, remains the same. In short, although it may seem paradoxical, in some circumstances where the home environment is particularly chaotic, sibling conflict may make children feel safe, and therefore, it may be serving an important adaptive function. Bank and Kahn (1982) also suggest that sibling conflict during family transitions may be the result of children displacing anger resulting from the disruptions in their lives onto a safe object. At a time when children may be feeling insecure about their relationships with their parents, they may be unwilling to express their frustration and distress to those parents for fear of further abandonment. Because they know that a sibling is always going to be there, however, children may feel more secure directing their rage at their siblings. In addition to a lack of understanding as to the meaning of sibling conflict during family transitions, little is known about the buffering nature of positive sibling relationships. Thus, when attempting to understand sibling relationships in the context of family transitions, it is important to know not just what the sibling behaviour is, but what that behaviour means to the siblings involved.

Finally, little is known about the long-term impact of family transitions on sibling relationships. Most current studies focus on the first two years following a divorce, a time that is characterized by chaos, multiple changes, and a decrease in parenting quality (Morrison & Cherlin, 1995). Given these circumstances, perhaps it is not surprising to see an increase in sibling conflict. In fact, some recent longitudinal investigations suggest that the sibling conflict found in children in the immediate aftermath of a family transition may decrease once the family situation becomes stabilized (Anderson & Rice,

1992; Hetherington et al., 1999). Hetherington (1988) conducted a six-year longitudinal study of divorce and family relationships, looking at children from the time they were four until they were ten years of age. Although no systematic data on sibling relationships were collected until the last stage of the project, there was some indication that whereas at one year after the divorce, more aggression and rivalry were seen in siblings from divorced homes than in siblings from intact homes, at the six year mark, a decrease in sibling conflict was evident six years after the divorce occurred. This decrease, however, was evident only if another family transition had not occurred. Specifically, children in stabilized divorced homes were warmer, more involved, and less avoidant of their siblings than were children in newly-formed stepfamilies.

Similarly, in a two-year examination of siblings in divorced, intact, and newly formed stepfamilies, Anderson and Rice (1992) found that early adolescent full siblings in recently formed stepfamilies exhibited higher levels of negative interactions than siblings in intact homes. Moreover, siblings in stabilized, divorced families, who were not undergoing a family transition, did not differ from either group in terms of sibling behaviour.

Finally, Hetherington et al. (1999), in a five-year longitudinal study of young adolescent full siblings in intact homes and stepfamilies, found that negative sibling interactions that were evident in the two to three year period following the formation of the stepfamilies appeared to decline as the stepfamilies became more stabilized. At the five-year mark, there were no significant differences between the two groups in terms of positive and negative behaviour.

Although the above longitudinal research is encouraging in that it suggests that over time, as family transitions become stabilized, sibling negativity appears to decrease, to the point where sibling behaviour in divorced and stepfamilies does not differ significantly from sibling behaviour in intact homes, two problems remain. First, whereas most studies to date focus on sibling relationships spanning the preschool age to middle adolescence, few studies focus on sibling relationships in young adulthood. With the exception of Wallerstein's (1985) qualitative longitudinal investigation on the effects of divorce on children, there is no other study that looks at young adult sibling relationships in the aftermath of family transitions. This gap in the family transition literature is consistent with the general developmental literature, which also neglects sibling relationships in young adulthood. As was noted earlier, given that young adulthood is a period of transition in which sibling relationships are likely changing, this oversight is surprising. Moreover, because young adulthood also has been found to be a time when the effects of divorce and family transitions on individual functioning may resurface (Chase-Lansdale et al., 1995), the sibling relationship may have particular significance during this period.

A second, and perhaps more important, problem, is that the focus of the recent longitudinal investigations is still on sibling behaviour. Although sibling behaviour may appear similar over time, it is possible that siblings who have experienced divorce may perceive their relationships to be qualitatively different than siblings who have not undergone a family transition. For instance, various researchers who have looked at young adult sibling relationships in the context of family transitions (e.g., Caya and Liem, 1998; Wallerstein, 1985) have found that siblings often spontaneously speak of an

unspoken bond that developed as a result of their shared experiences. As one participant put it, “We’re like a group of Vietnam veterans in that we’re the *only* ones who really *understand* what it’s like to be us, given the incidents we’ve been through” (Caya & Liem, 1998, p.331). Although such spontaneous comments provide some initial insights into how siblings may perceive their sibling relationships in the context of family transitions, there has not been a study that has focused solely on examining such perceptions. Given the importance of sibling relationships throughout the lifespan, it is critical to understand the long-term effect of divorce on siblings’ perceptions of their relationships.

Current Study

The current study is a retrospective, exploratory study of young adult sibling relationships within the context of divorce and related family transitions. The overall goal of the study was to take a first step towards understanding how divorce affects sibling relationships over time, and, in particular, how siblings perceive their relationships to have developed or changed as a result of such transitions. The focus was on siblings' perceptions of their relationships with one another rather than an assessment of specific behaviours they direct toward one another. In an attempt to uncover siblings' perceptions of their relationship, the study involved a semi-structured interview format design. An interview format was selected, because it enabled the participants to discuss their sibling relationships in their own words, which was thought to be the most prudent and revealing approach given the existing lack of knowledge about siblings' feelings and perceptions about each other. Because this study was a first step in uncovering siblings' perceptions of their relationships in the context of family transitions, an exploratory approach was selected. The purpose was to allow the participants to discuss the quality of their sibling relationships in their own words, with minimal prompting from the interviewer. Although the retrospective nature of the study is subject to the same memory limitations as all retrospective studies, such as biased memories of past events (Caya & Liem, 1998), a retrospective study was chosen because of the desire to trace the course of sibling relationships over time. It is worth noting, however, that the flaws involved in retrospective studies may not be as relevant in this project. Since the main purpose of the study is to learn about siblings' perceptions of their relationships, the veracity of the past events in their lives is not as important as it might be in other studies that focus on

particular incidents. In studies where the focus is on perceptions, the real interest lies in how participants make sense of what has happened, rather than determining whether events occurred (Maxwell, 1998). In fact, whether past incidents are remembered accurately or not is irrelevant to a certain extent, because they, in part, form the basis of the participants' current perceptions of their relationships. How participants remember events drives their perceptions and, consequently, their feelings, regardless of whether the events took place or not. Thus, in a way, the truth of events is relatively unimportant.

Undergraduate students served as participants, in order to view the long-term impact of family transitions on sibling relationships. This sample is ideal for this study because they are old enough to be able to reflect back on their sibling relationships; research indicates that beginning in late adolescence, individuals begin to think back on their past relationships in attempts to integrate past and current experiences (Cicerelli, 1996). In addition, because even within the general developmental literature little is known about sibling relationships in young adulthood, this sample will provide information about sibling relationships at this developmental stage.

Tentative Lines of Inquiry

Given that previous research has focused almost exclusively on sibling behaviour, it is difficult to predict how siblings may feel about one another. Nevertheless, based on some of the literature reviewed earlier, it is possible to generate some general ideas. For example, it is possible that the quality of the sibling relationship after the divorce may have been associated with the quality of the sibling relationship before the divorce occurred. That is, in general, it was thought that the divorce would not be associated with a marked change in the sibling relationship; how siblings felt about one another after the

divorce was likely to be similar to how they felt about each other before the divorce, although such feelings may have been stronger after the divorce has occurred.

A second idea is that the quality of the marital relationship may have been involved in participants' perceptions of their sibling relationships. Specifically, one possibility is that exposure to conflict between parents would be associated with negative sibling relationships at the time of the exposure to the conflict. In other words, if parents fought a lot before the divorce, such conflict was likely to be associated with how siblings felt about one another at that time. Given the findings of long-term effects of family transition on young adults, however, there may be additional findings. For example, it is possible that if marital conflict continued to be high after the divorce occurred, problematic sibling relationships may have continued. If, however, conflict that was high before the divorce decreased after the divorce, sibling relationships may have improved over the long run, as the siblings benefited from being removed from a stressful, violent environment. On the other hand, if conflict was low before the divorce, the subsequent stress and changes accompanying the divorce may have taken a toll on the sibling relationship.

In terms of sibling conflict, it was thought that participants may have had varying explanations for why there was sibling conflict during the divorce. For example, for some participants, conflict that occurred during the divorce may have served an adaptive function by helping the participants to adjust to the divorce; specifically, sibling conflict may have increased during divorce as children attempted to create a feeling of security during a chaotic time. Moreover, for some participants, siblings may have been safe outlets for the anger and confusion they were feeling during the divorce. In these cases, it

is possible that the nature of the sibling conflict may have played a role. Specifically, minor disputes and scuffles may have been linked to an explanation that sibling conflict served an adaptive function; it was not thought likely, however, that participants would report that ongoing, violent, aggression helped them to cope with the divorce. Finally, for others, sibling conflict simply may have been a continuation of the conflict that had permeated their life before the divorce and may not have any significant meaning in the context of divorce. Thus, sibling conflict may have had divergent meanings for the various participants.

Finally, some participants' relationships with their siblings may have been perceived as having served a buffering effect during their parents' divorce. It was possible that the presence of a stable sibling relationship, which may have been conflict-ridden, close, or both, may have been associated with this buffering effect. In addition, it was thought that older siblings would benefit more from the presence of a sibling than younger siblings would, perhaps due to care-taking effects.

In spite of the above general thoughts, it should be noted that this project was not designed to test specific hypotheses; on the contrary, the overall purpose of the study was to attempt to understand and perhaps generate hypotheses about the experience of sibling relationships in the context of family transitions.

CHAPTER 3

Method

Participants

Thirty undergraduate students who had experienced a parental divorce during childhood participated in this study. Students enrolled in an introductory psychology course at the University of Victoria participated on a voluntary basis.¹ Two criteria determined the eligibility of participants. First, participants had to have experienced the divorce of their parents before the age of fifteen. This age cut-off was selected to ensure that participants would be beyond a two year adjustment phase following the divorce, thereby enabling the researcher to investigate the longer term impact of family transitions on participants' perceptions of their sibling relationships. Second, the participants must have had a natural, half-sibling, or adopted sibling relationship before the divorce occurred. Because research suggests that step-sibling relationships are qualitatively different to those of natural siblings (Anderson, 1999), only natural siblings and half-siblings were considered. In other words, siblings were "counted" as siblings as long as they were involved in the family before the transition, and as long as they were not step-siblings. In cases where participants had more than one sibling, participants were asked to select one sibling to discuss.

Thirteen males and 17 females, ranging in age from 17 to 24 years ($M = 19.37$ years, $SD = 2.37$) participated in this study. The majority of participants were first-year,

¹ Participants received bonus course credit in exchange for their participation. At the University of Victoria, students enrolled in introductory psychology courses are allowed to volunteer for whatever studies they choose in order to earn such bonus points. In recognition of ethical concerns regarding coercion, participants receive credit for showing up at the research session, regardless of whether they actually participate. In this way, participants are free to choose whether to take part in the study and to discontinue their participation.

undergraduate students (53%). Most participants described themselves as middle class in terms of their family background (83%). Ninety-three percent of participants ($n=28$) were Caucasian, and 7% ($n=2$) were Asian. The average age at which participants experienced their parents' separation was 9.98 years ($SD = 3.35$). Thirty-seven percent of participants ($n=11$) had experienced their parents' separation before the age of nine, 30% ($n=9$) between the ages of nine and 12, and 33% ($n=10$) between the ages of 13 and 15. Mothers had custody in 57% of the cases ($n=17$), fathers had custody in 10% of cases ($n=3$), and 33% of participants ($n=10$) lived in joint custody arrangements. Just over half of the participants (53%) had experienced a parental remarriage, and one participant had experienced the divorce of her mother and step-father. Forty-seven percent of participants ($n=14$) were in brother-sister dyads, 30% ($n=9$) belonged to brother-brother dyads, and 23% ($n=7$) were members of sister-sister dyads. Of the brother-sister pairs, 20% ($n=6$) included older brother-younger sister pairs, and 27% ($n=8$) contained older sister-younger brother pairs. Fifty percent of participants ($n=15$) were older siblings, 47% ($n=14$) were younger siblings, and one participant was a twin. Of the older sibling participants, 20% ($n=6$) were older brothers and 30% ($n=9$) were older sisters; of the younger sibling participants, 20% ($n=6$) were younger brothers and 27% ($n=8$) were younger sisters. Age differences between siblings ranged from zero to seven years ($M = 2.90$, $SD = 1.45$). All sibling dyads were composed of biological siblings.

Procedure

Each research session lasted from one and one-half to two hours. The researcher explained the purpose of the study and asked the participants to complete the consent forms (see Appendix A). The researcher explained that participants were free to withdraw

from the study at any time. In addition, in order to prepare participants for potentially unexpected emotional responses, the researcher pointed out in advance that divorce can be an emotional topic that is painful to discuss. The researcher emphasized that if participants became too emotionally overwhelmed during the interview, they were free to withdraw at any time. After the participant signed the consent form, the interview began. Each interview was tape recorded and transcribed in full (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996).

Measures

Adult Divorce and Sibling Relationship Interview

The Adult Divorce and Sibling Relationship Interview (ADSRI) was designed for the purposes of this study (see Appendix B). It consists of a series of open-ended questions and rating scales designed to assess participants' perceptions of their sibling relationships in the context of family transitions. Although the interview allows for some flexibility in certain areas, the questions are asked in a pre-determined order.

The beginning of the interview consists of a series of background questions to orient the interviewer to the general family environment (Ehrenberg & Walker, 1996). Participants were asked a number of background questions designed to understand the family environment before, during, and after the divorce. Specifically, participants were asked when the parents separated and divorced, how often they saw each parent following the separation, and whether any additional family transitions occurred (e.g., remarriage). Because a divorce may be granted at varying times following a parental separation, the time of the parental separation served as the anchor around which the sibling questions were asked.

In addition, because marital conflict has been found to have an association with parent-child and sibling relationships, participants also were asked about the degree of marital conflict that existed before, during, and after the divorce (i.e., “How much conflict was there in your parents’ relationship while they were married/while they were separating/after they separated/divorced?”). Participants rated the level of their parents’ conflicts with each other on a 5-point Likert scale (1=no conflict; 3 = some conflict; 5=lots of conflict).

The final background questions were designed to elicit information concerning the circumstances of the sibling relationships, and to assess which siblings would be the focus of questioning (e.g., “How long did you live with ___ before the divorce?,” “Were you living with ___ during the divorce?,” “Were you living with ___ after the divorce?”).

Following the background questions, the interview traced the course of the participants’ sibling relationships during four phases: when the parents were living together, during the separation and divorce process, after the divorce process, and at the present time. At each phase of the interview, participants were asked an open-ended question about the quality of their sibling relationship (“What was your relationship with ___ like?”), as well as what factors they felt contributed to the quality of their sibling relationship at each particular time (“What were the main influences on your relationship with ___ at this time?”). Asking participants to tell the stories of their sibling relationships in this way enabled the researcher to track the course of sibling relationships before the divorce, in the immediate aftermath of the divorce, and after the divorce. Following the open-ended question about their sibling relationships, participants were

asked about the existence of any conflict (“Was there conflict in your relationship with ____ at this time?”). Subsequently, participants were asked to rate the degree of conflict in their relationship at that particular time on a 5-point Likert scale, where “1” indicates “no conflict,” “3” signifies “some conflict,” and “5” denotes “lots of conflict.” If participants rated the degree of their sibling conflict as being “2” or greater, they were asked three follow-up questions designed to uncover the nature of the conflict and to understand why they think there was conflict (“What was this conflict like?” “Why do you think there was conflict?” “Do you think these conflicts affected your relationship with ____? If yes, how so? If no, why not?”). In addition, when participants were being asked about their sibling relationships during the separation/divorce phase, an additional question was asked to assess the impact of sibling conflict on individual adjustment to the divorce (“Do you think the conflict in your relationship with ____ had an impact on your ability to handle your parents’ divorce/separation? If yes, how so? If no, why not?”). If participants indicated that there was no conflict in their sibling relationship, they were asked, “Why don’t you think there was conflict in your relationship at this time?” As a whole, these questions about conflict were developed to assess the meaning of conflict, and what possible functions such conflict might serve. As mentioned earlier, many studies have demonstrated that sibling conflict increases in the aftermath of a family transition, but little is known about why that happens, or what this means from the perspective of the sibling relationship.

Participants also were asked about the degree of closeness in their sibling relationships (“Were you and ____ close at this time?”). Following the same format as that used for the above conflict questions, participants were asked to rate the degree of

closeness in their sibling relationship at that particular time on a 5-point Likert scale, where “1” indicates “not close at all,” “3” denotes “somewhat close,” and “5” signifies “extremely close.” If participants rated the degree of their sibling closeness as being “2” or greater, they were asked a question designed to assess the meaning of this closeness (“Why do you think you were close?”). Participants also were probed as to what effect such closeness may have had on their adjustment to the divorce, in an attempt to explore what possible mechanisms might account for the buffering effect of supportive sibling relationships (“Do you think your close relationship with _____ had an impact on your ability to handle your parents’ divorce? If yes, how so? If no, why not?”). In addition, participants were asked to describe how this closeness was manifested (“How would you describe this closeness?”). Although this is not directly related to divorce and sibling relationships, it is included in an effort to unravel any potential differences among the various dyadic gender compositions. As was discussed in the review of sibling relationships, it is common to find that sister-sister pairs are closer than other dyads. It was suggested, however, that this may be due, in part, to how males and females manifest closeness. Consequently, this question was added, both to assess closeness in various dyads, and to see if divorce or related family transitions impact expressions of closeness between same-sex and opposite-sex sibling pairs.

After asking participants about their sibling relationships in the context of family transitions, the ADSRI included a series of questions designed to assess the potential impact that other life events may have had on sibling relationships. First, each participant was asked if there “Are any other events in your life that you think have had an impact on your relationship with ___?” For each life event mentioned, participants were asked how

the event affected their relationships with their siblings, and how the life event compares to the parental divorce in terms of its impact on the sibling relationship. The purpose of this section was to uncover the extent to which participants felt the parental divorce impacted their sibling relationships compared to other life events.

Qualitative Analysis

This study was exploratory, with an emphasis on describing and generating theoretical ideas about how siblings perceive their relationships within the context of family transitions. As such, the primary analysis was based on a grounded theory approach (Pidgeon & Henwood, 1996). Grounded theory is an approach to qualitative data that involves coding and repeatedly examining the data for themes and contradictions in order to develop an overall picture of what is occurring. Such an approach differs to a content analysis approach in which codes and categories are counted in order to provide numerical facts, such as frequencies and correlations. Although such information can be informative, a content analysis approach tends to remove the data from its context, leaving the reader with an impression of how often a particular category occurred, but with no real sense of how the data all fit together. Consequently, in order to develop an idea of how people perceive their sibling relationships in the context of family transitions, tools from grounded theory analysis were used.

Data Management. Following the grounded theory approach (Pidgeon & Henwood, 1996), the first step in the analysis was to transcribe each interview fully. Each transcription listed the participant's research number, the age of the participant and the sibling, and the age at which the parental separation occurred. The entire interview then followed verbatim. Each transcription was checked three times to ensure accuracy. In

addition, for reference purposes, each line of the interview was assigned a number. Such preparations facilitated the later stages of the analysis when portions of different interviews were compared, and the researcher needed to be able to readily locate specific segments.

Coding. The next phase of the analysis involved coding the interviews (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Creswell, 1994; Pidgeon & Henwood, 1996). Although the coding process is presented here as a step-by-step process, it is important to note that the actual process was iterative, in that it involved moving back and forth between steps. Initially, each interview was read in its entirety. The purpose of this step was to develop an impression of the whole. The investigator made notes on a piece of paper as beginning ideas and categories came to mind (Creswell, 1994). Then, the interviews were read again. This time, the researcher made notes in the margin of the transcription. Specifically, categories that were thought to capture the meaning of what the participant was saying were written in the margin of each paragraph. For example, if a participant was explaining how she and her sibling began to fight less as they entered late adolescence, and attributed that change to growing up, “maturity” was written in the margin of that statement. The developing categories involved “in vivo” codes and researcher codes. “In vivo” codes are categories that are derived directly from the participants’ words (Pidgeon & Henwood, 1996). For example, some participants described their memories of their relationships with their sibling during their parents’ divorce as “fuzzy.” Because this was a term that was used specifically by participants and was not anticipated by the researcher, the code “fuzzy” was used as it was. On the other hand, researcher categories are codes that were used by the researcher to help link ideas

and move the coding to a higher level of abstraction. For example, one category that arose was the notion that divorce can have a fluctuating impact on the sibling relationship. This theme was not mentioned directly by the participants, but based on their descriptions of what happened in their lives, this category was labelled as such by the researcher based on her incorporation of the whole transcript. In other words, codes may emerge directly from specific portions of the transcript, or they may be based on an overall integration of numerous aspects.

In the next phase of the coding process, the researcher read the interviews three more times and listed each developing category on an individual index card. Each index card had the category written at the top and the various dimensions of that category were listed beneath the title. The purpose of this step was to develop a summary category. Contrary to content analysis, where the goal is to count instances of a category, the goal in this type of analysis was not to record every case of a code that occurs, but rather to report multiple aspects of a particular code. In other words, a category may have multiple dimensions to it, and the goal was to capture all of the meanings that make up a particular category. This process is known as the method of “constant comparison”, and it involves looking for similarities and differences in the data (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Pidgeon & Henwood, 1996). For example, under the category, “Explanations of Conflict Unrelated to Divorce,” the researcher listed, “differences in developmental stages, personality/temperament differences, boredom, jealousy, perceived favouritism, searching for boundaries, reaction to perceived rejection by sibling, and nature of the relationship.” Each index card also listed examples of which interviews included each dimension and cited the relevant lines in the transcription.

The final stage of the coding process involved integrating the data, which required systematic and repeated examinations of the coded data to identify overall patterns and themes (Pidgeon & Henwood, 1996). Of particular importance at this stage was “negative case analysis” (Maxwell, 1998; Pidgeon & Henwood, 1996), whereby the researcher focused not only on data that provided support for developing ideas or themes, but paid close attention to those cases that did not fit the emerging patterns. Negative case analysis was critical in terms of understanding the complexity of the data and in serving as a check against potential researcher bias (Maxwell, 1998). For example, one of the common themes that emerged in the analysis was that older siblings sometimes took on a care-taking role with their younger siblings; for instance, older siblings often helped younger siblings with homework, assigned them chores, and provided support and comfort. Although this role typically was perceived as mutually beneficial, in that it brought siblings closer together at a time when parents were less available, one participant explained how her care-taking role had a negative impact on her relationship with her younger sister. In this case, the participant became her mother’s confidante and pseudo-spouse. The participant’s mother looked to her older daughter for emotional support, confided in her the reasons behind the divorce, and discussed her concerns about their financial situation. In short, the participant’s perspective was that the mother was dependent on her daughter for taking charge of the entire household. Consequently, the participant’s younger sister, with whom she had enjoyed a close and loving relationship before the divorce, felt excluded and resentful of her older sister’s “power and status” in the family. As a result, she pulled away from the older sister and their close relationship seems to have been damaged irreparably. Such a “negative” case demonstrated that care-

taking perceived as staying within the bounds of the sibling relationship can have a positive impact on the sibling relationship, but care-taking that is viewed as crossing over into the parental sphere can disrupt sibling relationships.

Content Analysis. Once the overall themes were identified, a content analysis was conducted to determine the frequency with which the themes were present in the transcriptions. This content analysis served as a check against potential researcher bias. Specifically, because the coding process was performed by one researcher, it was possible that particular themes may have struck her as more prominent than they actually were. Consequently, the content analysis provided a more objective approach to examining the data. Moreover, the content analysis described the extent to which themes were universally experienced by these participants

Analysis of the Rating Scale Information

The rating scales used in this study were designed to serve as an anchor around which the participants could trace the impact of divorce on their sibling relationships, as well as the degree to which overall closeness and conflict changed over time. The averages of the ratings were calculated, and the ratings were graphically displayed in order to display changes over time. Although the rating scales were helpful to some participants in terms of being able to track changes in their relationship, the rating scales provided limited information. For instance, although the ratings of closeness and conflict provided information about changes in conflict and closeness over time, they did not provide information about what changes in closeness and conflict were related to divorce. Such information only came out in the interview responses. Moreover, many participants expressed difficulty at trying to rate their relationships on a quantitative scale. For

example, several participants divided closeness into emotional and physical closeness, and then rated the two separately. In spite of the limitations of the rating scales, they were included to demonstrate how sibling relationships might be perceived to fluctuate over time.

CHAPTER 4

Results

Table 1 presents the rating scale information for closeness, conflict, and the impact of divorce on sibling relationships. On average, participants perceived their current closeness with their siblings ($M = 3.93$, $SD = 0.82$) as being greater than during the divorce ($M = 3.60$, $SD = 0.92$), $t(28) = -2.06$, $p < .05$, and greater than after the divorce ($M = 3.36$, $SD = 0.97$), $t(27) = -2.65$, $p < .05$. In terms of conflict, on average, participants perceived conflict with their siblings now ($M = 1.45$, $SD = 0.77$) as being lower than conflict before the divorce ($M = 2.42$, $SD = 0.95$), $t(28) = 3.971$, $p < .001$, lower than conflict during the divorce ($M = 2.12$, $SD = 0.91$), $t(27) = 4.007$, $p < .001$, and lower than conflict after the divorce ($M = 2.47$, $SD = 1.12$), $t(27) = 4.208$, $p < .001$. On average, participants perceived the impact of divorce on their sibling relationships as being higher after the separation ($M = 3.20$, $SD = 1.20$) than now ($M = 2.53$, $SD = 1.36$), $t(28) = 2.557$, $p < .05$.

Figures 1, 2, and 3 depict examples of changes in perceived closeness ratings over time. Figure 1 illustrates a rise in closeness at the time of divorce that subsequently falls to pre-divorce levels in the years following the immediate divorce period. Figure 2 represents a decrease in closeness at the time of divorce that subsequently returns to pre-divorce levels in the later years. Finally, Figure 3 demonstrates no change in perceived closeness at the time of the divorce, but there is a decrease in the years following the divorce. Again, although these figures demonstrate some of the patterns that emerged from participants' ratings of closeness over time, they do not reveal the extent to which closeness is directly related to parental divorce.

Table 1

Summary of Rating Scale Information

Scale	Time			
	Before Separation	During Separation	After Separation	Present
<i>Perceived Closeness between Siblings</i>				
<u>M</u>	3.52	3.60	3.36	3.93
<u>SD</u>	0.69	0.92	0.97	0.82
<i>Perceived Conflict between Siblings</i>				
<u>M</u>	2.42	2.12	2.47	1.45
<u>SD</u>	0.95	0.91	1.12	0.77
<i>Perceived Impact of Parents' Separation/Divorce</i>				
<u>M</u>		3.10	3.20	2.53
<u>SD</u>		1.06	1.20	1.36

Conflict Rating Scale

1 2 3 4 5
no conflict at all some conflict lots of conflict

Closeness Rating Scale

1 2 3 4 5
not close at all somewhat close extremely close

Impact of Divorce on Sibling Relationship Scale

1 2 3 4 5
no impact some impact a lot of impact

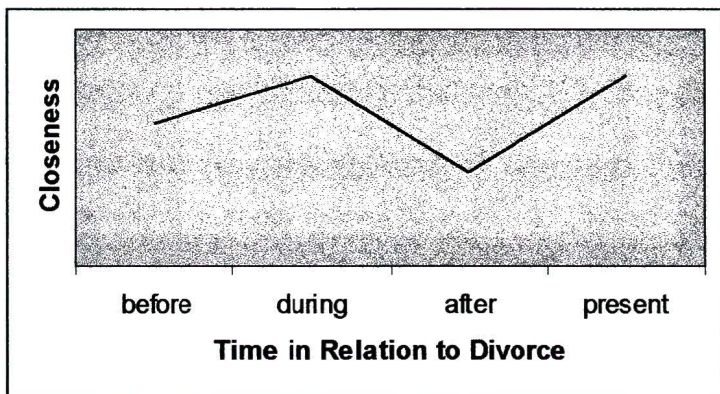


Figure 1. Example of change in closeness over time. Closeness increased during divorce period, but then returned to pre-divorce levels.

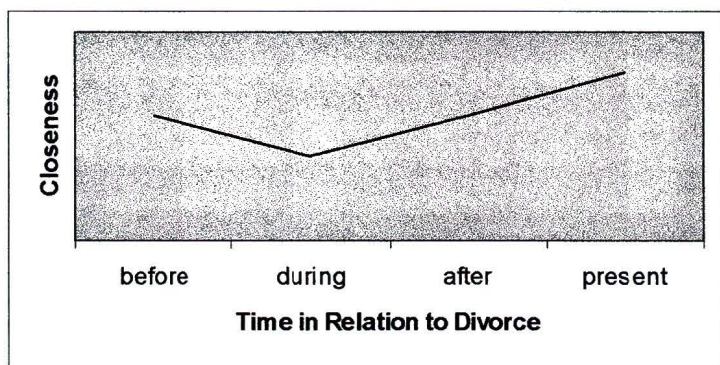


Figure 2. Example of change in closeness over time. Closeness decreased at time of divorce, but returned to pre-divorce levels after the divorce.

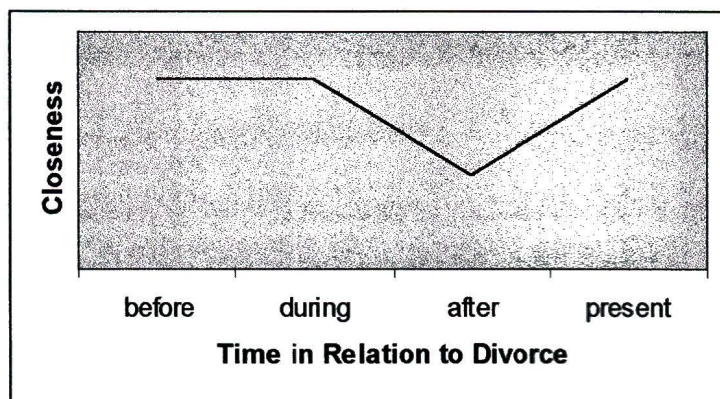


Figure 3. Example of change in closeness over time. No change in closeness at time of divorce, but there is a decrease in perceived closeness in the later years.

Figures 4, 5, and 6 represent examples of perceived changes in conflict ratings over time. As the graphs illustrate, most participants perceived a change in conflict in their sibling relationships over time. For example, in Figure 4, there is an increase in conflict at the time of the divorce, followed by a gradual decline over time. Figure 5, on the other hand, demonstrates a decrease in conflict at the time of the divorce, but the conflict returns to pre-divorce levels after the time of the divorce has passed. Finally, Figure 6 illustrates no perceived change in conflict over time. Again, although these figures demonstrate some of the patterns that emerged from participants' ratings of conflict over time, they do not reveal the extent to which any conflict is directly related to parental divorce.

Figures 7, 8, and 9 illustrates changes in participants' ratings of the impact of divorce on their sibling relationships over time. Figures 7 and 8 demonstrate how the impact of divorce on sibling relationships can fluctuate over time. As Figure 9 illustrates, some participants rated the impact of divorce on their sibling relationships as stable.

Table 2 summarizes the general themes that emerged in the qualitative analysis. Each theme is presented along with respondent and sibling characteristics. Although the themes are discussed in depth in the discussion section, this table can serve as a reference. In addition, Table 3 provides general definitions of each theme listed in Table 2.

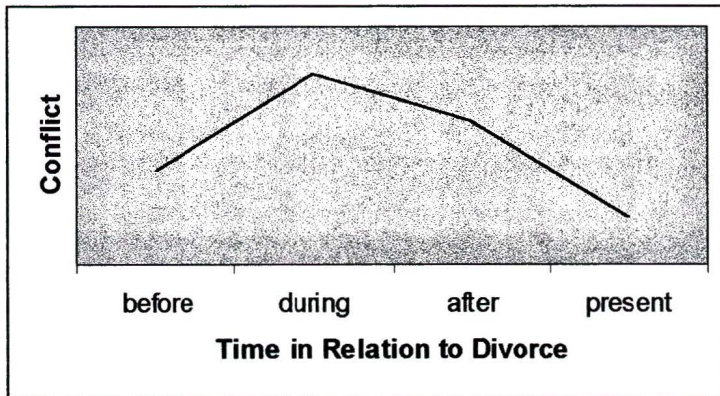


Figure 4. Example of change in conflict over time. Conflict increased during divorce, but returned to pre-divorce levels in later years.

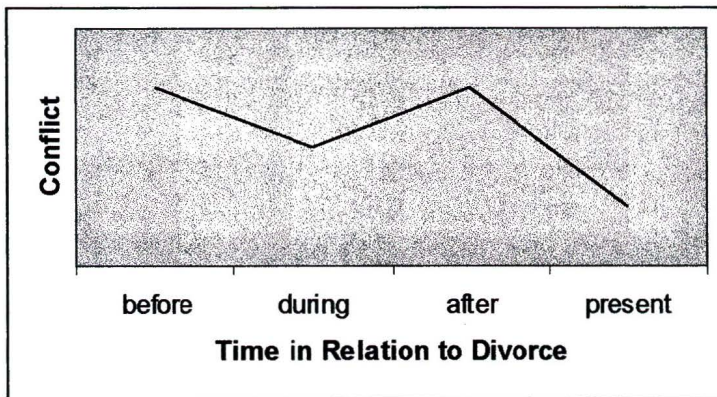


Figure 5. Example of change in conflict over time. Conflict decreased at time of divorce, but returned to pre-divorce level in later years.

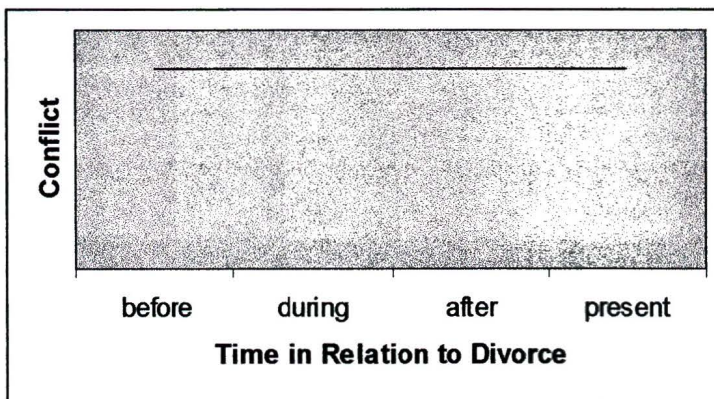


Figure 6. Example of change in conflict over time. Conflict remained stable over time.

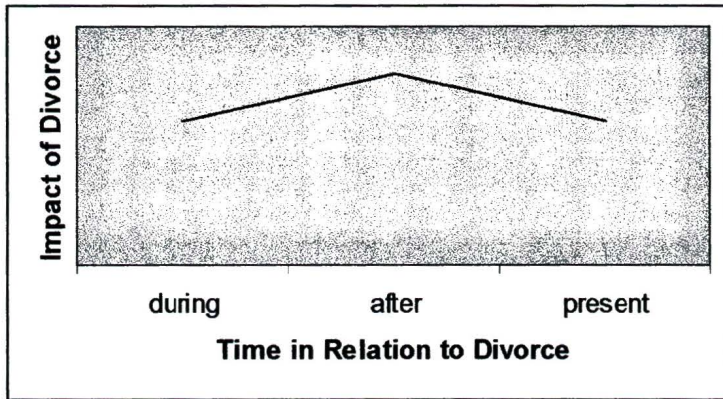


Figure 7. Example of impact of divorce on sibling relationship over time. Impact increased then decreased in years after divorce.

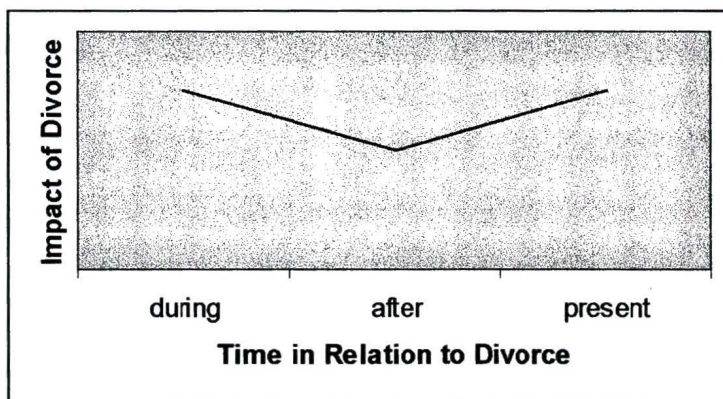


Figure 8. Example of impact of divorce on sibling relationship over time. Impact decreased then increased in the years after the divorce.

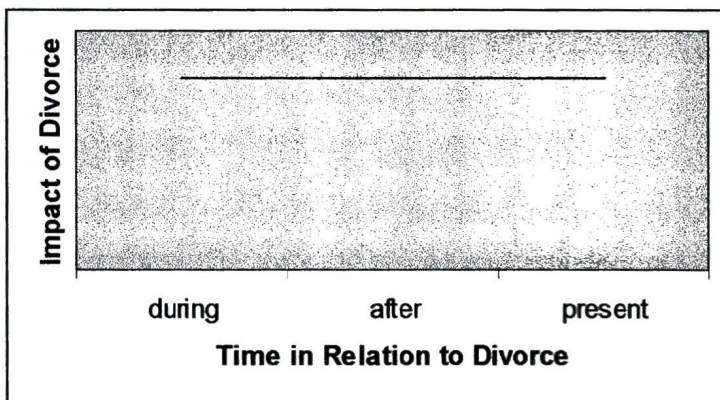


Figure 9. Example of impact of divorce on sibling relationship over time. Impact remained stable over time.

Table 2

Psychological Themes in the Context of Family Transitions

ID	Sex	Age	Age at Sep	C/A	Dyad	Old/ Young	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6	T7	T8
1	F	19	3.5	Mom	s-s	Y	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
2	M	19	9	Mom	b-b	Y	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
3	M	25	8	Mom	b-b	Y	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
4	F	18	11	Mom	ob-ys	Y	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	
5	F	17	11	Joint	os-yb	O	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		
6	F	20	6	Joint	s-s	Y	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
7	M	20	5	Joint	b-b	Y	✓	✓			✓			
8	F	18	13	Joint	s-s	Y	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
9	F	18	13	Dad	ob-ys	Y	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
10	F	17	4	Mom	os-yb	O	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		
11	F	19	6	Mom	ob-ys	Y	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
12	F	18	13	Joint	s-s	O	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	
13	F	22	9	Mom	os-yb	O	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓
14	M	27	7	Both	ob-ys	O	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
15	M	22	6	Mom	b-b	Y	✓			✓	✓			
16	M	18	12	Joint	b-b	Twin		✓		✓	✓			
17	F	18	8	Dad	s-s	Y	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
18	F	22	14	Mom	os-yb	O	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
19	F	17	14	Joint	b-b	O	✓				✓			✓
20	M	18	8	Mom	ob-ys	O	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	
21	M	18	11	Joint	os-yb	Y	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
22	F	18	10	Mom	os-yb	O	✓	✓			✓			
23	F	18	7	Mom	ob-ys	Y	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
24	F	18	14	Mom	s-s	O	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	
25	M	17	11	Mom	os-yb	Y	✓	✓		✓	✓			✓
26	M	20	15	Mom	b-b	O	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
27	F	22	14	Mom	s-s	O	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		
28	M	19	13	Mom	b-b	O				✓	✓			
29	M	19	11	Joint	b-b	O	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
30	F	20	13	Joint	os-yb	O	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		

Type of Sibling Dyad

s-s = sister-sister

b-b = brother-brother

ob-ys = older brother-younger sister

os-yb = older sister-younger brother

Table 3

Definitions of Psychological Themes

Theme	Definition
1. Divorce had Impact on Relationship	Participant believed that the parental divorce had an impact on sibling relationship.
2. Changing Impact of Divorce	The impact of divorce on the sibling relationship changed over time.
3. Continuing Impact of Divorce	Participant perceived the divorce as continuing to have an impact on the sibling relationship.
4. Sibling Relationship Affected Coping	Participant believed that the sibling relationship had an impact on individual coping with parental divorce.
5. Relationship Consistency	Pre-divorce sibling relationship was related to the post-divorce sibling relationship.
6. Permanent Connection	Participant believed that the divorce created a permanent connection with sibling.
7. Care-taking	Care-taking responsibilities stemming from the divorce had an impact on sibling relationship.
8. Separation from Sibling	Participant believed that being separated from sibling because of the divorce had an impact on sibling relationship.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion

The goals of this study were to present the emergent patterns in the data on sibling relationships in the context of family transitions and to note any exceptions. Overall, the main purpose was to collect and describe the data. The findings reported in this study focus on two central themes: the impact of divorce on the sibling relationship, and the impact of the sibling relationship on individual coping with the divorce. Within those two guiding themes, other themes related to the participants' perceptions of the divorce emerged. Although the purpose of the results was to discuss sibling relationships within the context of divorce, two additional themes emerged that need to be considered when examining the divorce-related results. First, a salient theme that emerged was that the developmental course of sibling relationships could not be separated from the impact of divorce on the relationship. In other words, when discussing the impact of divorce on sibling relationships, it is impossible to isolate completely what changes are attributed to divorce and what changes are the result of general development. For example, participants described how as they became older, previously frequent "territorial" squabbles with their siblings decreased. Participants attributed this change to an increase in maturity, an ability to understand their siblings better, and to spending less time together. Similarly, many participants explained that "immediate closeness" decreased as they got older (e.g., playing together), and "emotional closeness" increased (e.g., talking about personal issues). Moreover, as participants entered late adolescence and young adulthood, they explained that although they were not spending time together, the feeling

of closeness and support remained strong. One participant described how although she and her sister drifted apart during their teenage years, they still maintained a connection:

There's always been that closeness is what I am trying to say, but it's, like, during the teenage years on both halves, like when I wasn't, she was, so it's just been in kind of, like, the background. We didn't use it as much. It was like our "get out of jail free card", we didn't use it very much (younger sister of a sister-sister pair).

Moreover, young adulthood appeared to be a transition point in participants' sibling relationships in that as they or their siblings left home and were no longer living together, they felt a renewed closeness to their siblings. Many participants explained that when they were no longer living with their siblings, they were no longer bothered by the usual squabbles, and, as a result, contact with their sibling became more meaningful.

It's almost gotten closer since he's been away. We don't have time to get in little quarrels because it's like, he'd call home and then we'd have to talk and we end up talking more because, "oh, your brother's on the phone, talk to him." Whereas at home, we'd just pass by each other throughout our day and not really talk (younger sister of a brother-sister pair).

In addition, young adulthood appeared to be a time of maturation when developmental differences between the siblings began to disappear; consequently, closeness seemed to increase as siblings understood each other better and realized they had more in common (Newman, 1994).

Thus, the changing nature of the sibling relationship must always be considered when examining the impact of divorce on that relationship. Most participants recognized this issue. For example, one participant described how her parents' divorce accelerated an individual maturation process that she felt would have happened more gradually if the divorce had not occurred:

In the same sense in which your parents are shown as...people, humans, you know, flawed, not the perfect protectors that you thought they were, that they

have their own problems, I saw my sister as, “No, the purpose of her life is not to pick on me and make my life miserable, but she’s hurting, too.” You know? And you have to respect that, you have to realize, “Oh...she has her own issues in the same way I do.”... We both learned from it, and we both developed certain skills that I don’t think people would develop until their mid-twenties, you know? Yeah, I think had we not been forced to deal with something as, at that time, cataclysmic as it was, we probably would have gone on being neutral, with the occasional stupid sibling thing, until she moved out at 22, and I didn’t actually see her until six months later, you know? (younger sister of a sister-sister pair).

A second issue that emerged from the data was how participants perceived the meaning of conflict and closeness in their relationships with their siblings. In terms of conflict, participants clearly differentiated between conflict that was meaningless and conflict that was serious. For example, the most common type of conflict described was “squabbles.” These arguments often were centered on territorial issues, such as who gets to have the remote control or who gets to sit in the front seat of the car. Such squabbles were dismissed as meaningless by the participants, who said that although they may have looked intense to an outsider, they were easily forgotten. Such superficial conflicts, which comprised the majority of conflicts reported by participants, differed from conflicts that had deeper underlying feelings attached to them. For example, one participant, who lived with a brother whom she characterized as “angry” described how she and her brother had fights that were fraught with intense emotions when they were growing up:

There were times, like, um...once I threw a chair at him, I was so mad, and he just grabbed it out of the air and threw it back at me. There was a lot of underlying tension and just frustration and anger towards each other (older sister of a brother-sister pair).

In terms of closeness, participants described how closeness took on many different forms, some which may not have appeared as closeness to an outside observer. For example, some of the more obvious ways that participants described closeness with

their siblings was through talking to each other, playing together, and hugging each other. Many participants, however, described closeness in terms that were subtler. For example, some participants explained how humour, particularly inside jokes that only their siblings understood, was an expression of closeness between siblings. Similarly, participants also described how having their “own language” was a symbol of their closeness with their siblings. As one male participant stated:

Like, we're different, but we still have, like, a respect and a love for each other that comes through in a lot of interesting ways. You know, we still actually have almost kind of like a little language that we only speak to each other, you know, like references that only we get type of thing, you know? Like, if we're in a room, even with my father and mother and other sister, they wouldn't get it, you know? (older brother of a brother-sister pair)

Another subtle way in which participants described developing and expressing closeness with their siblings was through simply being together, not necessarily doing anything in particular. For example, one brother described how he used to sit in his older brother's room and colour while his brother did his homework. Another sibling explained that even though she and her sister did not have a lot of closeness, the little bit of closeness they did share was watching an afternoon soap opera together. Such subtle expressions of closeness are similar to what Eno (1985) labelled “sibling rituals.” Although Eno (1985) commented on sibling rituals in terms of the stability they provide to an individual, participants in this study described such activities as being ways in which they developed and expressed closeness with their siblings.

Finally, some male and female participants with brothers described how closeness often was expressed physically, such as through wrestling. In other words, behaviour that might have been interpreted by an observer as a reflection of a conflict-ridden relationship was actually a manifestation of closeness. As one male participant explained:

I would say that the conflict that we did have was almost a symbol of our closeness, because...I mean, how many people can you really punch, you know? It really does, in terms of brother relationships, that conflict is almost a symbol of how close you are (older brother of a brother-brother pair)

It is critical to have participants explain what they mean by conflict and closeness when discussing their sibling relationships. As one participant summarized:

If you were to look at how we behaved, you would have thought we hated each other (laughs). But we loved each other a lot and felt really close to each other (older sister of a sister-brother pair).

Impact of Divorce on the Sibling Relationship

Consistency

Although participants described perceived changes in their sibling relationship as a result of their parents' divorce, one of the prominent themes that emerged was that divorce did not cause drastic changes in participants' sibling relationships. Consistent with the literature on critical incidents (Ross & Milgram, 1982), participants' sibling relationships after the divorce were similar to sibling relationships before the divorce. For example, a sibling relationship that was close before the parents separated did not suddenly become distant or conflict-ridden at the time of the divorce. Divorce tended to exacerbate positive and negative tendencies that were already present within the sibling relationship. For example, one participant explained how her brother had always been protective of her when she was growing up. She described this protection as falling within the context of his role as her brother. After the divorce, however, this protective tendency increased, to the point where she felt that instead of being her brother, he had become her father. Although this change in the degree of his protection had implications for their relationship, it was not a new development in their relationship.

Although in most cases, the link between the pre-divorce and post-divorce relationship was obvious, in some cases, it was more subtle and difficult to identify. For example, one participant described how before the divorce, she and her sister were extremely close; she described her sister as her “second half.” She explained how this sister was shy and always followed her older sister’s lead. After the divorce, however, the sister began to pull away from her older sister and began to forge a new identity that appeared to be in complete contrast to her sister. The participant explained that during the divorce, she became her mother’s confidante and was drawn into a pseudo-parent role in the family; she was in charge of the family finances, made decisions about when the children saw their father, and stayed home from school to console her grief-stricken mother. The participant explained that her younger sister did not respond well to this change in her sister’s behaviour, and began to withdraw from her. Although this may seem like a drastic change to the relationship, the participant later described that, in some ways, the relationship had already started to change before the divorce occurred. In particular, the participant described that the adoption of their younger brother, who had special needs, resulted in the younger sister feeling left out, because her older sister did not give her as much attention as she had before. In addition, the younger sister was bullied in school, and although her older sister had wanted to help her, she did not see what she could do; consequently, the younger sister again felt abandoned by her older sister. As a result, the younger sister had started to pull away from her older sister. As the participant described:

They were all...things that kind of...kept changing our relationship just a little bit more each time, so when the divorce came, it sort of, there wasn't, there wasn't a whole lot ...left. Like, sort of like a barrel of apples...by the time of the divorce, when we had to get rid of a whole lot of apples, there

wasn't a whole lot to get rid of. It just sort of changed...slowly and a bit with time, and the divorce made us really realize it had changed a lot more than we thought it had (older sister of a sister-sister pair).

Although the dynamics in participants' sibling relationships after the divorce were present before the divorce, divorce still had a significant impact on many participants' sibling relationships. For example, in the above-mentioned case of the two sisters, the participant later explained how the relationship would have been different had the divorce not occurred:

The divorce created us both to be different people. I think we would be, we would probably be closer, we still would have grown to be two different people, but I think we would have been...closer, because I'd, maybe I wouldn't have taken on such a strong role. We would've been different people, but stayed closer under the surface (older sister of sister-sister pair).

Knowledge of the pre-divorce sibling relationship helped elucidate how divorce affected sibling relationships. For example, in one family, the divorce was associated with a decrease in closeness between the brother and sister. In this case, the participant described how the family had been divided into two opposing coalitions; the brother and mother were one close unit, and the father and daughter were another close unit. After the divorce, the father moved out, and the daughter was left in a family where the mother favoured the son. The participant described how she felt that her mother and brother "ganged up" on her, and how her "ally" had left her alone with them:

The divorce was really hard on me, especially because my parent left the house. I was left with two enemy sides. They were the enemy side. So yeah, I think it got worse. The closeness was going away. The relationship between my mother and him got stronger, which led to my relationship with both of them deteriorating. And those dynamics got stronger between my mother and my brother, and I was more left out. And he felt bolstered by that support, you know? And more kind of, you know, they would gang up on me...not just my mother, but him, too. At least that's what it felt like. I

was the only one. It was all there before, but it got worse after the separation (older sister of a brother-sister pair).

As both of the above examples demonstrate, lack of knowledge of the pre-divorce sibling relationship and overall family dynamics makes it difficult to understand completely the impact of divorce on sibling relationships.

Although the dynamics of sibling relationships could be traced to the pre-divorce sibling relationships, 93% (n=28) of participants reported that divorce had an impact on the levels of closeness and conflict in their relationships.

Closeness

Seventy percent (n=22) of participants reported that their parents' divorce brought them and their siblings closer together. This closeness manifested itself not only in obvious ways such as talking to each other, but in subtle ways as well:

It was more positive influence than anything, because it just brought us closer together and more comfortable with each other and being able to talk about things and...and stuff like that. It's hard to explain. It's not like, yeah, I don't know, it's hard to explain. It wasn't just behaviour, but it was an emotional connection, too. It definitely was a feeling, not just how we behaved with each other (older sister of a sister-sister pair).

There were various ways in which this closeness was expressed. For instance, circumstances that emerged as a result of the divorce sometimes brought siblings closer together. For example, visiting the non-custodial parent meant that many siblings spent circumscribed periods of time together, such as travelling on the ferry, sleeping in another home, and co-ordinating their schedules. Consequently, many participants and their siblings were in closer contact with each other than they had been before the divorce. Moreover, many participants wanted to do those things with their sibling in order to garner support during these sometimes stressful visits. For example, one

participant explained how she and her sister would make sure to visit their father on the same week-end, so that neither one would have to be alone with him. The father was not someone they did not like or were afraid of; it was just that the situation was unfamiliar to the siblings, so they derived support from doing it together. This desire to have these visits together was compounded when a step-parent was in the picture. As a result of spending this time together, siblings often became closer to their siblings.

Another way in which the circumstances of the divorce brought siblings closer was through being alone in the house while the custodial parent worked:

I think our spending so much time together. Yeah. My dad had to travel sometimes, like, he'd go away for maybe a week type thing, and it would just be me and him, and...we'd just talk (younger sister of a brother-sister pair)

Well, it, like, kept us close, 'cause... there weren't two parents home all the time. There was, my mom was home or she was away, so a lot of the time we weren't...she couldn't be there, so then we were together. So it was...that helped as well. Yeah. Just being alone in the house together (younger sister of a sister-sister pair).

Um, yeah, see, like, my dad, he didn't play, like, too big of a role in our life, and my mom, she had to work a lot, so...we kind of had to be close in that respect (older sister of a brother-sister pair).

Although circumstances such as being together alone in the home were associated primarily with increased closeness between siblings, there was a negative impact on sibling relationships when there was already a highly conflict-ridden sibling relationship before the divorce occurred. One participant described how he was a physically “rambunctious” boy before his parents divorced. Although he stated that he and his sister had a close relationship, he also admitted that he had a tendency to be dominating, and that often this domination manifested itself physically. The participant explained that while his father was in the home, his dominating nature was held in check. When the

divorce occurred, however, the father was out of the house. Moreover, because his mother was attending medical school and working full-time, he and his sister spent a lot of time alone in the house; as a result, he had “free rein” over his sister. The participant described the divorce as a pivotal point in his relationship with his sister:

I think there's an undeniable impact that the divorce had. Like, I really want to drive at that point. My father would not allow...the conflicts to arise that did had they been together. I think maybe that just by virtue of the fact my father really kept me in line with my use of force with my sister, so if my mother and my father had always stayed together, if they were together now, chances are I never would have been able to really domineer my sister to the extent that I did. He would have said, “Hey, what are you doing?” I remember once when I was actually in my mid-teens, like 15 or so, and we were all together for a visit, and we got into a fight, and I actually hit “J”, and my dad basically just took it upon himself to say, “Oh, you like to hit, you like to hit your little sister, do you? Well, why don't you try me for size?” And, so..., like, that wouldn't have been tolerated if they were together the whole time...So the impact was negative (older brother of brother-sister pair).

As these cases demonstrate, although lack of parent supervision may enhance sibling relationships, it also may lead to violent, conflict-ridden sibling interactions. Given that parent supervision is often lower in single-parent homes than in intact homes, (Conger & Conger, 1996; Hetherington, 1991; McLanahan & Sandefeur, 1994), and that lack of appropriate parental monitoring has been implicated in sibling abuse (Bryant, 1992), the potential impact on sibling relationships is not insignificant.

Another way in which participants felt that divorce brought them and their siblings closer together was through creating a new understanding of their siblings. Participants and their siblings began to see each other as multifaceted people, individuals who had feelings and thoughts.

Yes, it (the divorce) made it (the relationship) stronger. Because then instead of seeing her as the younger bratty sister, I kind of felt compassion for her (older sister of a sister-sister pair).

It gives us something to, like, uh...It's like a gateway to, like, be able to get close to her, to find out more about the way she thinks and stuff like that, because, like, we've never done that, and so, I think without this gateway, like, my parents being divorced, like, the whole, like, experience and stuff and...like, there, there'd be no way to learn about each other more, you know, because, uh, 'cause I don't think the opportunity would ever come up (younger sister of a sister-sister pair).

I would say that the divorce gave me the tools to view my sister in a different light, and in every day, I utilize them to realize that she is an incredible person, which I never would have known. I could say, you know, "K", define her right now, and write six pages, double-sided on the incredible things that she can do, whereas I think that the divorce, had the divorce not happened, she'd be "K", sister, jerk (laughs), you know? (younger sister of a sister-sister pair).

One participant explained how this greater understanding was created:

I got to see her in a new light. I think that was the main thing that, the divorce really sort of...pushed you out of being that kid and being, "That's my mommy, that's my daddy, and that's my sister" into being, "That's my mom. She's a professional woman who's having problems, because her professional husband has issues communicating. That's my sister, who deals with issues with her family by going out." You know? I think we saw...multifaceted aspects of each other...So I saw her not only as...my sister who I have to love because she's my sister, but I saw her as a person who was as torn up inside as I was. She just dealt with it in a different way, you know? (younger sister of sister-sister pair).

This finding suggests that divorce might accelerate the natural process of greater social and cognitive understanding that has been noted to occur between siblings during middle to late adolescence (Boer & Dunn, 1992; Cicerelli, 1995).

A third way in which divorce brought some participants closer to their siblings was through the unique nature of the sibling relationship. Many participants who were reluctant to talk to parents or friends felt that their sibling was the only person to whom they could turn:

There was that closeness, because we knew that we would need each other sometimes, and that...I couldn't, I couldn't really talk to, I didn't talk to

my mom about my dad, because I knew that my mom...didn't want to talk to him, like, they're not..., you know how some parents, they get a divorce, and then, like, a couple of years later they can still be friends? My parents aren't like that at all. My mom and my dad don't talk. And so I could, I could never, like..., like, my mom would always listen if I was, like, "Oh my God, I hate my father, like, he's just so... annoying", and, like, just like stuff like that, she'd listen to that, but if, I would feel bad, like, saying anything good, like if he did something good, I would feel..., like, she wasn't doing anything good? So I would never tell her that, I would tell my sister (younger sister of sister-sister pair).

Um, friends and stuff. Like, who she could tell, who she couldn't tell. They had kind of an influence on our relationship, and I sort of also wasn't sure how to relate to them, so I related to "K" which was easier. I just didn't really want to...I don't know, it was kind of weird. It definitely brought us closer. We were getting through it together (older sister of a sister-sister pair).

Yeah. I had good friends, but the same time, it was just easier to talk to her about it, 'cause she knew exactly what was going on, 'cause obviously she was going through it, too. And not a lot of my friends had experienced that, and not too many of hers either, so it was just good to sit and talk about it, and that brought us closer, too (older sister of sister-sister pair).

I guess just he was going through the same thing, so it was somebody to talk to, somebody to uh...I guess just tell—I don't know, like, maybe they had had a stupid fight or something, and we would just talk about it, because we were the only two who really knew what was going on with us (older sister of a brother-sister pair).

Participants also believed that they became closer to their siblings, because the divorce provided them with something in common. For some participants, this was the first time they felt they had a significant life event in common with their sibling:

We were forced to see each other as people that could be hurt by the same things. We had more in common with each other than we thought. I think the divorce had that effect on us (younger sister of a sister-sister pair)

We were kind of – I don't know. It was finally something that happened to the both of us together, like something we kind of just, like, a friend you know – if you find out you have a common problem it's suddenly like – you work together with it and you can talk about it a little bit more and stuff so I think that must have been why. We had something to talk about. We had something to be mad about. That's probably it. And we don't really have a

lot in common, but this is what we had in common – our parents were divorcing. (younger sister of a sister-sister pair)

Moreover, some participants explained that the divorce led to greater closeness, because it provided siblings with a reason to open up to each other:

We wouldn't have started talking to each other if it wasn't for the separation. Like, I think that was...I guess a reason to talk to each other. Like, it wasn't just something to talk about, but if we were upset, that was the person we'd go to, 'cause, again, like, no one else really knew what was going on (older sister of brother-sister pair).

This participant went on to explain how she felt this closeness due to the opening up process was not fleeting, but was maintained after the immediate divorce.

There's been some other things also. I think he just feels because we used to talk when they were separated that he can talk to me now (older sister of a brother-sister pair).

Some participants believed that when the divorce occurred, they and their siblings realized the importance of family and did not take each other for granted:

Without my father being there, it made him realize how lucky he was to have...our dad there, and how everything was on our shoulders, so it, it made all of us realize how..., how important everything is, whether it's school, family, everything just became more, it came into the spotlight how important family is. Whereas when you're with a family, you take it for granted (older brother of a brother-brother pair).

Similarly, for some participants, the perception of greater closeness with their siblings was part of an overall general family closeness that increased after the divorce occurred.

We kind of had to band together and my mom really needed that we kind of banded together too. She was like a mom bear with her two cubs – we were kind of always together and I think all three of us got a lot closer because we used to sleep together at night and kind of – we didn't have a choice. We were always together. My mom had to do schoolwork so we'd have to go to school with her. We didn't really have anywhere else to go so we had to be together more I think. So I think if anything yeah, we did, we got closer. And we had to go through all the hard times together too – like we didn't have a dining room table for a while, so we'd all have fun and eat Chinese food on the ground. So I think just little things like that will give

us good memories in all – sleeping in the same bed together and the little things like that that we never really did before (younger sister of a sister-sister pair).

Finally, some participants explained that the divorce seemed to create an unspoken coalition in the family, which led to feelings of increased closeness.

Yeah, it's a feeling of connection. We were together. We were one, like, one point. There was Mom and Dad and then...us. We were together. We were a unit (younger brother of a brother-sister pair).

You know, it was Dad against Mom, and we were the ones caught in the middle, so we're the only ones who feel the same way (older brother of a brother-brother pair).

Research from clinical fields suggests that the ability to develop this coalition during a divorce is critical to individual coping (Kaplan, Hennon, & Ade-Ridder, 1993; Nichols, 1986). The importance of this coalition was demonstrated in some cases where participants were not able to form this supportive coalition, because they were separated from each other.

Separated Siblings

Although only 20% of participants (n=6) were separated from their siblings, those participants felt the separation had a significant impact on their sibling relationships.

I think, like, there's, there's a pivotal point from when I moved, when I moved in with my dad, when I left at that, that point, like, I mean, you know, maybe like two years after the divorce, I spent with my mom, all three of us living together, and then I got shipped off to live with my dad. And I think that's a pivotal point there. (older brother of a brother-sister relationship).

None of these cases involved siblings being separated because of a court order of split custody. Participants described various reasons for why they were separated from their siblings. Four sets of siblings were separated because of problems that one sibling was having with their mothers, who were the custodial parents. This is consistent with the

literature, which suggests that often in adolescence, children who do not get along with their custodial parent, usually the mother, may move in with the noncustodial parent, typically the father (Kelly, 2000). Two participants, however, explained that the reason they were separated from each other was because they did not want to leave either parent alone:

We felt bad if one of our parents didn't have someone staying with them (younger brother of a brother-brother pair).

I think we grew apart a little bit...because, especially afterwards, when, uh...I spent some time at my dad's and my mom's, and she basically spent all her time at my mom's. Like, at first, I was spending probably more time with my dad, 'cause I kind of saw my dad as being all alone ...I saw my mom as having, like, us there all the time, "P" was always there, so I was with my dad more, so I think that separated us a little bit (younger brother of a brother-sister pair).

The feeling of responsibility that these participants expressed for their parents' well-being is not uncommon for children of divorce (Arditti & Proudly, 1999). Although some parents may specifically ask children to stay with them to prevent them from becoming lonely, these participants' explanations suggest that children may initiate such decisions without parental knowledge. That siblings were willing to sacrifice the quality of their sibling relationship in order to keep their parents company suggests that parents may need to consider how they make custody arrangements. In other words, allowing children to make their own decisions regarding with whom they live, a trend that seemed to be somewhat common in this sample, may put children in the unwelcome position of having to choose between their sibling relationship and their parents' happiness. Because parents may not be aware of why their children are choosing where to live, careful probing of the underlying reasons for children's decisions may be beneficial. Overall, participants

reported feeling that they and their siblings lost out on a lot of experiences together as a result of being separated; consequently, they perceived a decrease in closeness:

Well, because we were not spending that much time together, we didn't have the same level of..., um, I guess...familiarity with one another, and comfort, so...when we were together, it wasn't as close as before (older brother of a brother-brother pair).

I totally missed him... I didn't like it...like, being away from him. I, I think more of it now, like, looking back or even a few years after I left, looking back, thinking how much I missed, because every time I'd see him, he would be so much bigger. So I missed a lot of his growing up. The divorce took years away. (older sister of a brother-sister pair).

This participant's use of the phrase, "the divorce took years away" is significant, because research suggests that sibling relationships form primarily during childhood and adolescence, when children are living together in the same home (Dunn, 2000; Ross & Milgram, 1982). Shared experiences are the cornerstone of sibling relationships. Separations that occur before they are developmentally appropriate may have a significantly negative impact on sibling relationships (Ross & Milgram, 1982).

On the other hand, however, participants also expressed a positive side to being separated from their siblings. For example, the above participant later described how she feels her relationship with her brother is stronger than it was before her parents divorced:

But...at the same time, you know, because of that happening it's so much stronger now. I don't take it for granted. Like, a lot of brothers and sisters just 'cause they grow up together their whole life, they kind of take it for granted, but I know what it felt like to not have it, so it's even more important now...for it to be close. So it had a very negative impact—like, it was very negative, 'cause I wasn't there, but now it's almost reinforced...do you know what I mean? Like, it's reinforced the fact that we need to be close (older sister of brother-sister pair).

It is important to note that the above participant had an opportunity to live with her brother again when she was 17 years old, during which time the two of them were able to

renew their close relationship. Other separated siblings, however, who may not have the chance to live together again, may not have the same opportunity and that closeness may never be restored (Drapeau, Simard, Beaudry, & Charbonneau, 2000).

In addition to losing contact with a sibling, some participants felt that being raised in vastly different child-rearing environments had an impact on their sibling relationships. One participant described how he and his sister were raised in two polarized homes:

Yeah, we were both exposed to, like, just a completely different style of child-rearing, and a totally different environment, you know? My mother and father's outlooks on the world and just the way they, you know, they view right and wrong are completely black and white. My mom and my dad were like night and day at that point, right? My, my dad started moving into, like, things like construction, and then, like, into Employment and Immigration, he married a banker, right? So I was, like, kind of, uh, getting this, uh, sort of, like, outlook on the world from him, where my mother was still, you know, uh, giving my sisters, like, the same outlook that had put me in the Greenhouse school and everything. She was just a total hippie, feeding them, feeding them tofu and dressing them in, like, flowery sort of dresses, like a hippie to the 20th degree. So we started growing apart, just because, you know, like, the differences that we were receiving in, in childrearing, you know? (older brother of a brother-sister pair)

The participant explained that he had internalized his father's negative perception of his mother's lifestyle. Finally, when the participant went back to his mother's house to live, the conflict between him and his sister escalated:

My sister had grown up with my mother, and kind of almost felt like... Mom was hers and Dad was mine almost sort of thing, right? So when I moved in, still domineering like I was, you know, she kind of felt like I was on her territory now, but I just wasn't having it. You know, like, it was all my territory, and they, like, I gave her what I thought she deserved type of thing, you know?

This case is significant, because it demonstrates how splitting children can result in the perception of two coalitions within a family. Rather than the siblings being a united pair within a family, they had aligned themselves with a different parent and had their own

“territories.” Research has indicated that when children within a family align themselves with different parents, the sibling relationship invariably suffers (Eno, 1985; Kaplan et al., 1993; Nichols, 1986). In this case, when the older brother returned to his mother’s house, there was a perception that he was crossing into a camp in which he did not belong. Consequently, his sister resented his domineering behaviour, behaviour that was exacerbated by the negative attitude towards his mother’s lifestyle that he had acquired when he was living with his father.

In a variation of the coalition theme, one participant explained how he felt betrayed by his older brother’s decision to live with their father, a man who had not been actively involved in their lives and who was fighting with their mother over child support:

Well, yeah it was a bit of a hurt for me, you know, since he had lived with our mom ‘til he was 16 and then he goes and lives with him, and he’s so heavily dependent on our father, it was kind of like, you know... I don’t know, it was kind of like he switched sides – a little bit of a traitor (younger brother of a brother-brother pair).

This young man’s construction of the family structure is noteworthy. After the divorce, the participant perceived the family as consisting of him, his brother, and his mother, who was “against” his father. After the brother moved in with their father, however, he perceived the family as divided into two different coalitions, with each brother favouring a different parent; his brother’s crossing over into “enemy territory” was a “heavy blow” to him. In other words, when both brothers were allied with their mother, there were no loyalty conflicts, and the sibling relationship was fine; once the older brother moved in with their father, however, the younger brother perceived him as rejecting that alliance and forming a new one with their father. This finding is consistent with research

suggesting that loyalty conflicts can have a negative impact on individual adjustment (Buchanan, Maccoby, & Dornbusch, 1991). Of particular interest is that after some time, the brothers were able to recognize their situation and pulled themselves back into a sibling coalition:

When we realized that we shouldn't be part of what they are doing, we worked it out. We were like, this is stupid, let's talk about it. And we did. And we just realized that it is their fight and we should stay out of it, have nothing to do with it.

It is likely that the long history of closeness shared by these brothers enabled them to overcome the developing loyalty conflicts that were beginning to affect their relationship with each other. Children who are younger when they are separated may not be able to renew their sibling coalition later (Kaplan et al., 1993). Remarkably, these brothers cared enough about their own relationship to recognize that it was in trouble and made subsequent efforts to repair it.

Conflict

Thirty-three percent of participants (n=10) reported an increase in conflict at the time of their parents' divorce. Most participants described this conflict as an increase in squabbles, "nattering," and irritability:

It would mostly be, like, fighting about random things, like, stupid things that didn't really matter, but it was just kind of an outlet, like, uh...like somebody wouldn't change the channel on the TV or something, and it would turn into a big fight. Just little things (younger brother of a brother-sister pair).

The most common explanation for this increase in conflict was that the divorce caused feelings of insecurity and confusion that often manifested itself as aggression between siblings:

Their separating did make us, it kind of changed the world, you know? It put the world on its side, and we had to kind of find ourselves again. It

redefined what things meant...so we had to...redefine our roles in a way. It did make me feel more insecure. I don't know about her. I am pretty sure it was her, too...And that would, you know, affect anything (younger brother of a brother-sister pair)

This perception that divorce forced the participant to confront his understanding of what being a “family” meant, and what everyone’s roles in the family were, suggests that the divorce “crisis period,” during which many changes occur and emotions are volatile, involves more than just an emotional reaction to the divorce and its practical consequences; it also appears to involve a cognitive-perceptual reorganization of one’s sense of self and sense of family. Family members have to redefine who they are in relation to each other, what it means to be a family, and what each person’s role is. Such restructuring corresponds to family systems theory, which suggests that when a family disruption occurs, a complete reorganization and redefinition of the family ensues (Emery & Dillon, 1994). Although this confusing process of cognitive restructuring may be associated with an increase in conflict between siblings, many participants stated that the stability of the sibling relationship also provided them with support during this period. As will be examined later, such participants explained that the sibling relationship was the one thing that remained the same during the divorce process. In other words, although participants may have been questioning their place in the family, their relationships with their parents, and their parents’ relationships with each other, their sibling relationships seemed to be relationships that needed little reconstruction.

In some cases, divorce-related changes, such as moving, repeated parental separations and reunions, and ongoing parent conflict compounded the feelings of confusion and insecurity and extended the period of conflict between siblings. For

example, one participant reported that for years after the divorce, her parents denigrated each other in their children's presence:

When the divorce first happened, there was big conflict, and that affected us quite a lot, the continuing... We'd get in the car with my dad, and he would rant and rave about, "Your mom did this, your mom said that, your mom is a bitch." And that was very hurtful. And the same with my mom. She would make jokes about Dad, like how he was a flake or whatever, he's done this and that, blah, blah, blah. That was very painful. It just added to the personal stress we both had. I would dread getting in the car with my dad. And it lasted for about two years, my dad's ranting about my mom, And us kids had to be finally like, "Okay, Dad. Stop it. We don't want to hear it anymore." (older sister of sister-brother pair).

Similarly, some participants described how their frustration at feeling powerless over the divorce situation spilled over into their sibling relationships:

That year was a very, like, just emotional, and that would manifest into aggression, 'cause, like, I just wasn't really..., like, I wasn't really in touch with that aspect of myself at that point, so...I did...all those feelings that I felt would just manifest into me..., you know, just burning things and stuff like this, that I did back then. But I'm sure that also manifested itself into our relationship, and that we would fight more often, 'cause we'd both feel...almost powerless against the whole situation (older brother of a brother-brother pair).

One participant suggested that some of the conflict between him and his brother might have been associated with an increased insecurity due to the joint custody arrangement that existed in his family:

I think, and it is going to be speculation again, but when I finally moved to my dad's house and just stayed there, the reason was I was getting towards the teen years and I was starting to feel like I needed stability and just a place which was my space, for me, where I was safe and secure and "J" being 5 years older than me, for the last 5 years, hadn't had that. So I don't know if he had the same need as me, but... if not, then that situation of bouncing between two parents could have been very difficult for him, in terms of just feeling like he had a safe place which was his space (younger brother of a brother-brother pair).

The possibility that joint custody arrangements may contribute to feelings of insecurity or not feeling settled in one's own space is significant given the increase in joint custody

arrangements over the years (Bauserman, 2002; Lowenstein, 2001). Moreover, it is noteworthy that the participant implied that the joint custody arrangement became particularly problematic in adolescence, a time when children have a greater need for privacy and their own space. This is consistent with research that suggests that custody arrangements may alter throughout a child's life as the child's needs change (Amato, 2000; Buchanan, Maccoby, & Dornbusch, 1996; Kelly, 2000).

Many participants explained that even though they did not attribute any blame to their siblings for their parents' divorce, they took their feelings out on their siblings, because the siblings were available, and because they were reluctant to express their anger to their parents:

Because he was there. I mean, I spent, I was still living with him...um...so maybe instead of saying what I felt to my parents, I was maybe just, like...I felt angry at him just because he was there, and I didn't in any way think that it was, like, his fault or that there was any reason for me to be doing that, but think it was just 'cause...he was there, and I was mad, and I probably took it out on him...He did the same to me (older sister of a brother-sister pair)

It was really tough, because I had no idea what was going on, and I was...I used to get, like, really mad, so I would..., I would just freak out at anyone even my brother, and my brother was the same way, too, like, a lot of times we would say stuff that we, we knew was really hurtful, just because we were, like, really mad, even though we didn't mean it. So it kind of, our relationship went a little bit downhill then (older sister of a brother-sister pair)

I think it was just frustration and you take it out on each other or something. Frustration being your parents splitting up, obviously, and stuff like that and you can't really complain to them about it, so you let it out on him (younger brother of a brother-brother pair).

I was probably doing everything, like fighting with him, because I was mad and probably just kind of was an outlet for that, like, I released some of my, uh, anger (older sister of brother-sister pair).

An additional explanation for increased conflict that several participants cited was that the loss of a parent's attention led to increased competition for attention from the

custodial parent at a time when that parent was less available to give it to them (Cicerelli, 1996; Hetherington et al., 1992; McLanahan & Sandefeur, 1994):

Just because there wasn't, like, my dad around, so instead of competing for two parents' attention, now we had, like, only one. And my dad used to take my brother to hockey and certain soccer games and stuff. So it was also the fact that he lost my dad's attention, but the fact that he wasn't getting the...this is so hard to explain (laughs slightly), I'm not making, it's not sounding very clear here. Um, he lost my dad's attention, and then he didn't...get...necessarily get more from my mom, like, she tried to give more attention, but it's, it was really hard, because she had to work all the time, so...Like, at the end of the day, like, we would go home and watch a movie together, and then that would be, like, our time together (older sister of brother-sister pair).

Although some participants stated that conflict with their siblings seemed to increase during the divorce, they also felt that this conflict was transient and was confined primarily to a circumscribed period of time that is consistent with the two-year "divorce crisis" period. Moreover, most participants explained that the conflict was meaningless and had no lasting impact on their sibling relationships. In the few cases where the conflict was perceived as more damaging, the sibling relationship before the divorce was characterized as highly conflict-ridden. Interestingly, in these cases, it appeared that it was the absence of closeness rather than the presence of conflict that appeared to cause the conflict to have an impact on sibling relationships. One participant described how she and her brother had a lot of conflict before the divorce, but they had a "little bit" of closeness as well. After the divorce occurred, however, she and her sibling lost the shred of closeness they had, and, consequently, the previously meaningless conflict became meaningful:

Well, the conflict was always there. I think the difference is the closeness. Yeah, the conflict was always there. As far as I can remember, we've always fought. The difference is that the closeness started to go. The conflict, that's when it started impacting the relationship. Before it was just, you know. But now, the more we fought, the conflict, the more the relationship deteriorated into

conflict. There wasn't the closeness to hold it all together (older sister of brother-sister pair).

So, because I was still prone to those little outbursts of violence, but we were no longer so close, that's when I mean, you know, how the fights started getting bigger, whereas before, when we were really close and, you know, still sleeping together and playing together, we'd have fights, but, you know, we were so dear to each other that everything was forgiven the next day, right? Now we were kind of, you know, growing apart, and then when I'd get violent or have these little, have these fights with her, we were kind of, you know, not on the same page anymore, and things would get remembered, and maybe we'd be fighting about things like who is stupid, whereas before it was mainly territorial (older brother of a brother-sister pair).

Although most participants reported a perceived increase in conflict at the time of their parents' separation, 17% of participants (n=5) felt that conflict with their siblings seemed to diminish during the separation. Participants gave several explanations for why they thought this decrease occurred. First, some said that they did not want to upset their parent, so they monitored their level of conflict. Similarly, some siblings did not want to upset each other, because they knew they were feeling bad enough already and did not want to contribute to more stress or unhappiness. Sometimes this decrease in conflict was subtle:

We did little things to help each other through the divorce, you know, although... in some senses, we completely tried not to talk to each other, because we didn't need that sort of, we didn't need any more conflict or anything—there were, I know that there were times when she'd come downstairs and start haggling me for something, you know, the remote or something like that, and I would just give it to her, because I knew that she had just gotten into a fight with my mom, and in the same sense, there would be times where I was doing something really annoying, and she wouldn't say anything about it, because she knew that the more upset I am, the louder I get. So if I'm running around singing a really loud song, it's because I just had to watch my dad drive away or something like that, you know? So we both...for the first time in our lives, we both realized, we knew that we were feeling the exact same thing at the exact same time. So despite the fact that we dealt with it in different ways, we knew that we were both, the same thing I felt, she was feeling, so if we could help each

other out in any way, and we felt like doing it (laughs slightly), we could (younger sister of a sister-sister pair)

In addition, some participants said that they did not want to fight with their sibling, because then they would feel alone at a time when they needed their sibling's support:

I think we knew that it was only us. If we fought with each other, than who were we going to be with? (younger sister of a brother-sister pair).

I would feel a little bit more isolated, a little bit more alone if I had just finished nattering with him, and I felt like I had no one to go talk to (older sister of a brother-sister pair).

Several participants attributed the diminishing conflict to a greater maturity resulting from the divorce. For example, one participant who had experienced conflicts with his brother over his brother's refusal to do homework or help out with family chores explained how he believed the divorce changed his brother and, by extension, their relationship:

The divorce caused him to grow up a lot quicker. Becoming more independent, 'cause when you have two parents, you can rely on one or the other, whereas when you have a single parent, you can't rely on that parent the whole time. And when you are not living with both people, both parents, you have to rely on yourself more and be more independent. That was a positive thing. We didn't have that conflict, because he became more self-motivated in doing things on his own. Within the family and for himself (older brother of a brother-brother pair).

This participant's perception that divorce accelerated the maturation process is congruent with research suggesting that divorce causes some children to grow up faster (Hetherington, 1988). Although this has been seen by some as negative, in that children are seen as missing out on their childhood, studies have demonstrated that it is associated with increased social competence (Hetherington, 1998; McLananhan & Sandefeur, 1994;

Wallerstein, 1985). Consequently, this greater social competence may be reflected in more positive sibling relationships.

Although in presenting these results, conflict and closeness have been separated, one of the prominent themes that emerged was that divorce often was associated with simultaneous increases in conflict and closeness. Specifically, 60% (n=6) of participants who reported an increase in conflict also reported an increase in closeness:

I do kind of remember being fairly close. At the same time, we weren't. Yeah, I remember both. I remember it kind of, in a way, bringing us really close, closer together, but at the same time, in a different way, pushing us apart (younger brother of brother-sister pair).

I guess we were all just more forgiving of each other because we knew things weren't all normal. At the same time, there was more irritability, everyone was kind of on edge. So little things that would normally not bother you, they would (older sister of a sister-sister pair).

Overall, most participants seemed to think that any sibling conflict stemming from the divorce was fleeting. Ten percent of participants (n=3), however, believed that the divorce had a lasting negative impact on their sibling relationships. Two of these cases were remarkably similar to those described by other researchers. For example, both involved physically stronger brothers domineering their sisters (Hetherington, 1988; MacKinnon, 1989). Although one of these pairs involved a sister who was a year older, her brother was physically larger and capable of bullying her. This result is consistent with MacKinnon (1989)'s study in which older brothers tended to dominate their younger sisters during a divorce. Similarly, congruent with Hetherington (1988)'s observation that older brothers sometimes display "negative power" over their younger sisters, such that their interactions are characterized by coercion, aggression, and teasing, the sibling relationships in these two cases were characterized by high levels of physical and verbal

aggression directed from the brothers to the sisters. This contrasted with other participants who described conflicts with their siblings as trivial and meaningless. Second, these two cases were notable, because they were the only two cases where participants mentioned that for years after the separation, there was a great deal of ongoing conflict between parents who were, from their perspectives, blatantly contemptuous of each other. Although many other participants stated that their parents did not get along after the divorce, they were not exposed to continuous conflict for years after the divorce; typically, the divorce reduced contact between parents, so opportunities for parent conflict rarely arose. In these two cases, however, the conflict was unending, and it was severe. Moreover, both cases involved brothers who identified with their fathers, fathers who typically had negative attitudes towards the mothers:

My dad always said my mom was nuts,...and she is kind of nuts. My sister is like her, too, a bit flaky (older brother of a brother-sister relationship).

I think my brother, um, he doesn't respect my mom, really. That could be partly because he has taken my dad's side of things, or, has maybe not taken his side, but has internalized his points of view and doesn't realize that they are his points of view (older sister of brother-sister relationship).

The above young woman described how her brother's modelling of their father's attitudes might have affected their sibling relationship:

Possibly "M" maybe emulating my dad, and me being more like my mom, and that could have caused some conflict, 'cause my parents haven't got along, like, they had problems for a very long time before they actually got divorced.

This participant's description of how she and her brother seemed to model their parent's characteristics is similar to MacKinnon (1989)'s observation that the behaviour of some siblings seems to mirror the husband/wife structure in the marital relationship, and that such siblings appear to model conflict they have seen between their parents.

Third, the brothers in both cases were perceived as externalizing their distress about the divorce and the sisters were seen as internalizing their distress:

I think that he...was deeply affected by the divorce. It, it sort of changed both of us, and, um, we both...were dealing with it at that time. Like, I'm only realizing now how long it took me to deal with it...to really get over it. I think he externalized it, and I internalized it. So I would turn it on myself, the negative feelings, and he would turn the negative feelings onto everybody else (older sister of a brother-sister pair).

These findings are consistent with research demonstrating that children who are exposed to severe, ongoing conflict between parents have difficulties in their adjustment to divorce (Cherlin et al, 1991; Harrist & Ainslie, 1998; Hetherington, 1999; MacKinnon, 1989; Vandewater & Lansford, 1998). In both of these cases, such difficulties were perceived as being highly damaging to sibling relationships.

Even in these cases, however, the participants demonstrated optimism that their relationships could be repaired in the future. For example, the participant described earlier who dominated his sister, explained that when he matured, he was able to try to repair his relationship with his sister:

I trace, like, uh, the source of the conflict from the early ages and the resolution of the conflict basically all to myself. You know, I mean, like, I think I was the, the, the cause of it and the cure of it, you know? I would attribute that to me, uh, growing up, getting less violent and less domineering, you know, um...When I was out in the real world, you know, just my, my whole outlook, you know, I had a few relationships, like, actually, you know, romantic relationships with women, and, uh, just, yeah, just growing up(older brother of brother-sister pair).

The noteworthy aspect of this case is that the participant's sister, whom he had beaten up a number of times, was, from the participant's perspective, willing to forgive him and try to develop some kind of relationship with him. A female participant who lived with a

similarly domineering brother expressed her hopefulness that she and her brother will be able to build a relationship in the future:

I think one day I will get my brother back. Like, 'cause I really did love him when he was younger, and, uh... We will have a—I think he has the potential, like he has a big heart, like, I think he has the potential to have a good relationship together. And I do love him, so I think one day maybe (older sister of a brother-sister pair).

This young woman's wistful declaration of her optimism for a renewed relationship with her brother was striking, since she was visibly overcome by emotion at this moment in the interview, an interview in which she had described numerous acts of emotional and physical abuse from her brother. These cases reflect the unique nature of sibling relationships, namely, the ongoing tie that allows sibling relationships to never completely dissolve (Cicerelli, 1995). The extraordinary optimism and forgiveness demonstrated in these cases, cases where significant and extensive violent behaviour occurred, suggests that there is an unbreakable bond between siblings that perhaps only the most reprehensible behaviour, such as sexual assault, would break irreparably. This is likely common of all sibling relationships, not just those in divorced families.

Withdrawal

Twenty-three percent of participants (n=7) explained that the divorce seemed to lead siblings to withdraw from their sibling relationship. This was most common among the older members of the sibling dyads, most of whom were in early to middle adolescence at the time of the parental separation. Many of these participants described the time of the separation as a "fuzzy" period, one in which they do not really remember their relationships with their siblings. These participants explained that they were so

focussed on themselves and what was happening between their parents that they did not really remember the presence of their sibling at all:

It's really fuzzy for me. I mean I remember incidents. I remember lots of, it was more, I guess I totally withdrew from my sister, but there was a lot of conflict between me and my parents. Those are the memories that stick out. But according to "A", I was pretty absent. There wasn't much interaction between her and I (older sister of sister-sister pair).

I don't even think there really was a relationship for me. I just was in my own total headset, like I...I don't even really remember him during that time. He was just kind of a vague face that I saw every so often (older sister of brother-sister pair).

I can't really remember my relationship with him...as much then. And I think that's probably because I didn't spend as much time with him and stuff. Like, I...I don't know, that whole period is kind of... fuzzy almost. I don't really remember...how I was, like, I know how I was feeling, but I think I may have pushed him away (older sister of brother-sister pair).

Participants explained that they believe sibling withdrawal occurred for several reasons. One reason was that they were feeling hurt, angry, and confused about the divorce and needed to be alone to cope with the divorce and to attempt to "figure it out." It was almost as if they had to retreat to "lick their wounds" before joining with their sibling:

So both of us were pretty much, like, we didn't want to get close to anybody. Because we really didn't trust or... I guess we were both pretty hurt, and we didn't understand it, so we kind of just stuck to ourselves. He did the same thing (younger sister of brother-sister pair).

I just kind of took myself...out of that situation. Like, how it was before, it wasn't the same, like, I was focused more on, like...how I was feeling, and the way it was affecting me. I was probably, like, fairly selfish and, like, reserved, and I wasn't interacting with him as much as I usually was (older sister of brother-sister pair).

Just being concerned for, you know, your individual self, like, you got to worry about yourself before you're, you're worrying about your sibling or whatever, so I think that probably affected it. Just trying to get through it yourself, and then...and then, you know, go to other people. And being so young, you don't

really know, you know, that it would be easier if we were sticking together (younger sister of brother-sister pair).

Participants also explained that sometimes they had a greater understanding of the divorce issues and withdrew from their younger siblings, because they wanted to protect them from knowing the details. Moreover, because they could not discuss the details with their younger siblings, they felt they had to seek support outside of the sibling dyad. Consequently, what may have appeared to younger siblings as rejection from their older siblings was actually an attempt on the part of older siblings to protect their younger siblings. Younger participants explained that as they got older and realized that their older siblings understood the divorce issues more than they had at the time, the relationship became just as close as it had been before.

Participants also attributed the withdrawal to different coping methods. For example, one sibling explained how she was an emotional person who cried during the separation. Her brother, however, was not emotional at the time, so she felt she had to hide in her room whenever she was upset:

My brother doesn't express emotions, and this might be a stereotype about guys but it works in my family; if you cry, they freak out (laughs slightly). And so...I would always, like, if I was upset, I'd go in my room, because if I was crying, they'd be, "What's so wrong with you? Why are you crying?" or get mad at me for crying. So I'd always try and hide it (younger sister of brother-sister pair).

Similarly, their own reactions to the divorce also caused older siblings to sometimes withdraw from the sibling relationship. For example, some older siblings became involved in drugs and negative peer relationships, which drew them away from their siblings; moreover, their younger siblings typically did not like their sibling's behaviour or new friends and tried to stay out of the sibling's way.

Sibling withdrawal typically had a negative impact on sibling relationships, because they left the younger sibling feeling abandoned or alone. One participant described his sadness at his brother's withdrawing behaviour:

Our relationship became distant. Even though we both still lived in the same house, I didn't see him that much. Um..., yeah, I think I was, I was, um, disappointed, um...It probably, it probably depressed me a bit (younger brother of a brother-brother pair).

Although younger siblings reported that they missed their older sibling's presence during the divorce, an older sibling's withdrawal from the sibling relationship was not always perceived as negative, however. One participant, who had a heavily conflict-ridden relationship before her parents' separated, explained that although her sister's withdrawal caused distance between them, it also served an adaptive function in that it prevented conflict during the separation:

In a sense, it may have even been positive that she withdrew herself, so I did not have the conflict that we might have had before. So that she lifted herself out is a factor that could have been positive (younger sister of a sister-sister pair).

In spite of withdrawal creating distance between siblings, it typically did not involve complete isolation. Older siblings described how they still tried to be available to their siblings if they needed support during the divorce:

We didn't do things together as much. Um...but I would still talk to him and stuff like that, like...Um, I think we were fairly close in sort of being there for each other in certain ways, like if he was upset, like, I would, at least I would understand why, and could maybe talk about it, or maybe not so much talk about it, but just kind of, like, hang out (older sister of a brother-sister pair).

This tendency for older siblings to withdraw from their younger siblings is consistent with the findings of Hetherington, who found that divorce accelerated a disengagement process that naturally occurs between siblings in adolescence. Similarly, consistent with

Hetherington et al. (1999), siblings who withdrew from their younger siblings emphasized that although they were not physically present in their younger siblings lives, their emotional connection to their siblings was just as strong.

Regardless of the impact of the divorce on closeness or conflict in the sibling relationship, 47% of participants (n=14) reported that the divorce created a permanent, unbreakable bond that will always be a connection between the two of them:

I think we'll always be close, connected somehow. Like, obviously we probably won't always stay as close as we are now when we're not living together, because I won't see him everyday and just casually talk about everything. But I think it will always be, like, 'cause I know...the effect that my parents' thing had on me personally will always be a part of me, and he is the only one who really knows exactly what it is that we did, so I think that'll always kind of be the tie that binds (younger sister of a brother-sister pair).

Participants explained that this ongoing bond may never be discussed and characterized it as an unspoken bond that connects them:

I think now we know that we both went through it, you know, and that it was, despite the fact that she saw it coming, and I was blindsided completely, we both had to deal with it, so I think...just in that sense, we associated with each other. That, that was a bond between us, you know? I think, yeah, it's just a bond between us, that we both realize that we, we, we had to go through it, and we're all the better for it. The divorce, it's definitely an underlying bond between us. There will just always be, yeah there will just be an unspoken bond between us that we don't share with anybody else (younger sister of a sister-sister pair).

Care-taking

An additional impact of divorce on sibling relationships was the care-taking role that some older siblings assumed over their younger siblings. Forty percent of participants (n=12) stated that their siblings were parent figures for them, or that they were parent figures for their younger siblings. Brothers and sisters were equally likely to serve as a care-taker. Care-taking typically involved taking a greater interest in younger

siblings' overall well-being. For instance, older siblings spent more time with younger siblings; they helped with homework, played games, monitored younger siblings, comforted them, and allowed them to spend more time with them. Consistent with results of earlier studies which found that disrupted parenting often occurs as a function of emotional or economic circumstances (Conger & Conger, 1996; Simons & Johnson, 1996), parent unavailability typically was cited as the reason for care-taking responsibilities. For example, brothers and sisters became parent figures when mothers had to work or were unavailable because they were preoccupied with making divorce arrangements and/or were coping with the emotional impact of the divorce.

My mom was so busy... planning on how to leave and what to do, and how to leave her job, and if she was going to have one over here, down here, and...yeah, so I didn't, didn't have anyone else...but my sister (younger sister in a sister-sister pair)

Um, I think it was my mom's attitude, because she changed a lot...in that time. Like, um...I think she had some, I think she had some mental problems during that time and stuff, but I don't really know, and it really scared me and stuff. And so I looked, I looked more towards "T". Because, uh, because, uh, like, my mom had changed so much, but I was close to my mom before that, too. And, like, but then it was like she wasn't anymore, and "T" became sort of my mother instead of...my, my real mom. She was pretty good at doing that (younger sister in a sister-sister pair).

Moreover, for many siblings, this care-taking role began before the actual separation occurred. Whereas some participants explained that the pre-separation care-taking role was related to vulnerabilities of younger siblings, such as lack of friends or a disability, other participants related the care-taking before the separation to stressful family dynamics:

A large part was because of my parents fighting all the time. Like, they didn't try and make it public, like in front of us, but it happened. Like, my mom would just get fed up with my dad, and just, like, say things, and then he'd go off into the backyard, and then my mom would just be upset, like in the kitchen or

whatever, doing stuff. And then my sister and I would have to be together. And she, like, she took on a motherly role with me, and she had to, like, look after me, because...my mom was always...recovering from my dad. So she had to do that (younger sister of sister-sister pair).

Care-taking also was motivated by a desire to help younger siblings cope with the divorce. One older brother described the interest he took in his younger sister during the divorce:

I would spend a lot of time just getting her mind off it. I mean, I even went as far as playing barbies with her or whatever, you know, she was just a little girl. So I'd just, you know, do whatever, read with her, play barbies, take her for a bike ride or whatever (older brother of a brother-sister pair).

Many participants explained that this care-taking role had a positive impact on their sibling relationships, because it brought them closer together:

Just because they had separated, it brought us closer together. It was kind of a time where I felt protective over her, 'cause I didn't want her to feel horrible about it, so I felt like, I kind of parented her, I guess, type thing while my parents were going through that (older sister of a sister-sister pair).

Some participants felt that had the divorce not occurred, their sibling relationships would not have been as close as they are, because the older siblings would not have taken such a special interest in their younger siblings:

I may have moved off and done other things, because there wasn't that need for me to be around, 'cause there would have been a parent around to help him out with homework or something like that. So we probably wouldn't be as close (older brother in a brother-brother pair).

Moreover, some participants felt they may not have led the same life had their sibling not taken an interest in their well-being. For example, several younger sister participants explained that their brothers got them involved in sports which protected them from engaging in a negative pattern of behaviour during their adolescence:

I started sports when I was young, like, he got me into it, and that's kind of what kept me out of trouble. If my parents had stayed together, I don't

know if he would have...done those kinds of things. So growing up, he was mostly my role model growing up, because I didn't have my dad there for a long time, so he was kind of—even though he wasn't that much older than me, he was still kind of, you know, he was my big brother, he was looking out for me kind of thing (younger sister in a brother-sister pair).

Although, participants stated that this care-taking had a positive impact on their sibling relationships, there were several ways in which care-taking appeared to have a negative effect. First, such responsibilities placed older siblings in a dual role. They had to perform traditional parental duties, such as assigning chores or telling a younger sibling to do homework, while still being a sibling. As a result, younger siblings sometimes resented their older siblings, feeling that the older sibling was acting outside of the boundaries of the sibling relationship:

I also was the boss over them a little more. Like, I told them to do this and that, and they did. You know, making sure they are up in time for school and stuff. I think that sort of interfered a little bit because, yes, although we were friends, it was like, I'm kind of her parent at the same time, which kind of sucked. I think that might have been the main conflict. I don't know, it's like sometimes hard to be friends with your boss, at work you know. You kind of like them, but you get along but you know what I mean and you can even do fun stuff together, but it's still not the same (sister-sister pair).

I don't know, it was, it was different, like, it definitely brought us closer, but at the time it was really funny, because my brother, he was like, "You're not my mom you can't control me", you know, but, but it definitely did bring us closer, because, I mean, if I had to make dinner, because my mom was, like, my mom and my dad were busy, then obviously him and I would spend time together, where normally we wouldn't, um....yeah (laughs slightly) (older sister of sister-brother pair).

This finding that care-taking is associated with increased conflict and closeness is consistent with findings from Hetherington (1988), who suggested that the increased positive and negative sibling interactions she found in a subsample of her participants was a result of an increase in care-taking responsibilities at the time of the divorce.

Although care-taking behaviour of older siblings drew siblings together during the divorce, if such parental roles were not relinquished as the younger siblings grew up, it began to interfere in the sibling relationship. Consistent with earlier studies, over time, mothers were able to adjust to the divorce and resumed their roles as primary caretakers (Hetherington, 1993); consequently, older siblings were able to let go of some of their care-taking responsibilities and become siblings again. If this role was not relinquished, however, then the sibling relationship seemed to suffer, because the siblings were limited in how close they could become. Specifically, younger siblings felt that they could not talk to their siblings about their feelings and their experiences for fear of being reproved. Because, as mentioned earlier, as siblings become older, closeness changes from being a physical closeness to more of an emotional closeness that manifests itself through talking, this can be a significant impediment to the development of the sibling relationship. For example, one younger sister explained how she is struggling in her relationship with her older brother, who took on a father figure role after her parents separated. Although he had a tendency towards a care-taking role before the divorce, when the divorce occurred, he took on more of a parenting role, and the care-taking left the province of the sibling relationship and crossed over into the parent realm:

He sort of took on the role of my dad, because my dad left, and...so he kind of took it upon himself to be the one that was the father role, to look after me, to... make sure I was doing everything okay and...instead of, whereas it was, before it was more of a friend relationship, we played together, it was, now it was more like...he dominated over me...which affected our relationship. At certain times, it was...I didn't like it, and then other times it was comforting to know that he was always there (younger sister of a brother-sister pair).

The participant explained how the natural development of her sibling relationship with her brother became impeded by his strong father role in her life:

I became really, like, resentful, like, I started to notice...him...pulling back kind of as a friend and more of being a dad, and that was, "Like, I just want to talk to you" and he was always telling me what to do, and, like, "Make sure you don't get involved in this," and "Watch out here," and I really became really withdrawn, I guess, from him, like, I didn't talk to him as much. I think I was afraid of what he'd think of me. That he'd just, he'd condemn me or he'd, like, put me down, or he'd just give me advice instead of just listening and offering me, like, comfort and stuff. I'd always, I'd always think that he would, yeah, like, put me down or, like, not approve or...I was always worried what he would think of me, so I didn't want to share anything that I'd think he'd think bad of me.

This finding is significant, because research suggests that siblings reach an important milestone in their relationship during adolescence, in that that older siblings have less responsibility over their siblings, so the balance of power shifts and sibling relationships become more egalitarian; consequently, siblings become more equal, and they begin to develop a more meaningful relationship (Buhrmester, 1990). If older siblings in divorced families can not give up their care-taking role, the growth of their sibling relationship may be stunted. This theme of older siblings not being able to relinquish their care-taking role appeared, within this sample, to be unique to older brother-younger sister dyads. For the most part, older sisters were able to let go of their care-taking roles and accommodate their younger siblings as they got older. Older brothers of sisters, however, seemed to have more difficulty with this. Although in this sample, there were only three cases where participants were unable to relinquish their care-taking roles, two out of those three cases were older brothers of sisters. In the other case, the older sister had to continue her care-taking role, because the mother was unable to return to her pre-divorce level of functioning. In the cases of the two brothers, however, their inability to relinquish their care-taking roles was voluntary. There may be several explanations for this phenomenon. First, the permanent absence of fathers may have played a role. Specifically, whereas

mothers were physically present in the home and eventually re-claimed primary responsibility for the younger siblings, it may have been easier for sisters to return to a primarily sibling relationship once the divorce crisis passed; because fathers remained absent from the home, however, brothers may not have felt they could let go. This is consistent with the finding that older brothers' inability to relinquish care-taking was evident in mother-custody homes only. If this explanation were complete, however, it should apply to older brother-younger brother dyads as well; in this sample, older brothers were able to relinquish their care-taking responsibilities over younger brothers. Because the phenomenon seemed to be specific to older brother-younger sister relationships, another dynamic may have been operating. Perhaps older brothers, in general, tend to be protective of their younger sisters, and when a divorce occurs, that protection becomes magnified. For example, high school may be a time when older brothers naturally feel protective over their younger sisters. Partial evidence for this came from the study. For example, one participant explained how her brother did not take on a father-figure role until she entered high school:

He became more of a protective older brother. Which is a double edge, you know? It is so annoying, why is he getting involved, why does he care, and it's also, like, oh, he cares, you love it. So we got closer as we grew up. You asked about conflict did you? Yeah, there was conflict but it wasn't the same, he wasn't teasing me anymore. It wasn't like that type of stuff, arguing over a T.V. show. It was more like conflict with like, him sort of like coming down and being protective. Like why and that type of stuff. There would be conflict about who I should be with, what my friends should be doing and things like that (younger sister of a brother-sister pair).

Similarly, an older brother who stated that he took on a father role with his sister following his parents' divorce explained how this role became even stronger when his sister entered high school:

Well, just, you know, she was getting older and starting to take a liking to guys and that and, you know, starting to want to do the things that I did. I mean, when she was in Grade 7, I was in Grade 11, and she looks up to me a lot, and I was into things that I would never want her to get into at all (laughs slightly), so I, I really became protective over her. And that was, that was a real big thing—I didn't want her doing what I had done, 'cause I know what happens and, you know, I am male, I know how males think (older brother of brother-sister pair).

Consequently, perhaps divorce exacerbates a natural protective tendency that older brothers have for their younger sisters. Although younger sisters may like this father-figure role, it may also impede the development of closeness with their brothers.

Care-taking also had a negative effect when the care-giving responsibilities became too “parental” in that the sibling became the dominant parent figure in the household. Most of the participants described care-taking responsibilities that were more of an assistance to the custodial parent, such as helping siblings with homework, making lunches, playing with younger siblings, and generally being more available for guidance and advice if younger siblings needed it. In one case, however, the older sibling apparently took charge of the entire household, because her mother was too distraught to cope. The participant became the primary care-giver in the home. The participant described how she was forced into taking that role because of the circumstances around the divorce:

If I wasn't going to do it, who was? So I was the one who was turned to, and if I lost it, then what was going to happen next? We weren't going to get anywhere (older sister of a sister-sister pair).

The participant explained that she felt the need to protect her sister from knowing the details of the divorce. Moreover, the participant became her mother's confidante and primary support.

I knew things that she didn't. She was very close in age to me, but, you know, we were worried that things would really affect her, and would really upset her,

so we didn't tell her a whole lot, so she didn't know it, and I was, I became the...support for our mom, and, and so there were a lot of times where I was home from school and she was at school, but I was home from school, because Mom needed me. My mom would just cry in the morning, she just cried and cried, and, you know, she wouldn't go to "M" to cry and cry, she'd just go to me to cry and cry, so "M" just kind of felt left out. And there became issues about money and things like that, which I don't think "M" knew to the extent that they got to. I knew, and I don't know what that ever did to me, but I knew, so I always had the upper hand with what was going on, and what the next move was going to be.

She perceived that playing this role in her mother's life had a devastating impact on her relationship with a sister to whom she once had felt quite close. The participant described how her new position led her sister to withdraw from her:

I think she kind of feels that I sort of got favoured. She knew that I had a whole lot more influence on what was going on than she did, and I think she probably sort of resented me We lost a lot of what we used to have. We lost a lot of time not, you know, not doing things and not talking as much as we used to.

In this case, the care-taking duties appeared to cross a threshold from helping a custodial parent with younger siblings to becoming a real parent figure, which involved making adult decisions, helping to support the mother, and withholding information from her sister out of an attempt to protect her. Consequently, although the older sibling was attempting to take care of her sister and protect her, the younger sibling began to perceive that her older sister was being favoured over her and withdrew. This finding is consistent with studies on perceived differential treatment (Dunn, 1988; Kowal & Kramer, 1997) in which siblings who perceive their siblings are being favoured by parents resent those siblings. Similarly, this finding is consistent with clinical research that has found that when a divorce occurs, the family forms a triangle, and sometimes the parent and one child become close, making the other child feel left out (Eno, 1985; Shapiro & Wallace, 1987). Thus, whereas care-taking that supplements the custodial parent's role appears to

have a positive impact on sibling relationships, care-taking that crosses the boundary into becoming the custodial parent's confidante can damage a sibling relationship.

No impact of divorce on sibling relationship

Although most participants reported that their parent's divorce affected their sibling relationships in some way, two participants reported no change in their sibling relationship. Both of these participants were members of brother-brother pairs. Both participants stated that the divorce did not affect the sibling relationship, because it was a completely separate relationship from the parents' relationship. In other words, they were able to compartmentalize various subsystems in the family.

I don't know, I was his brother, I suppose, and it didn't really change if our parents split up, so...I always see the two as running separate (brother-brother).

Just that the relationship was, like our relationship didn't have, our parents didn't really have an effect. I mean, them splitting up, that's their problem that type of thing, you know what I mean? So we didn't really get it, let it affect our relationship because their relationship was on the rocks (brother-brother pair).

Fluidity of impact of divorce on sibling relationship

Seventy-three percent of participants (n=22) reported that the impact of the divorce on sibling relationships changed over time. For example, some participants explained that although the divorce did not have an immediate impact on their sibling relationships, there was a delayed effect of the divorce. For instance, one participant described how her relationship with her brother did not change at the time of the divorce, but when she entered early adolescence, she became extremely angry with her father, which she thinks had a negative impact on her relationship with her brother. Although this participant was not able to articulate exactly why she became angry with her father, she was adamant that that was the reason for her later problems with her brother. Such an

account is consistent with the notion that divorce can have a “sleeper” effect for girls, such that the adverse effects do not become evident until early adolescence (Forehand et al., 1991; Wallerstein, 1991). The participant also pointed out, however, that although she and her brother went through a negative period at the time when she was coping with her anger at their father, as she became better able to cope with her issues with her father, her relationship with her brother improved, and closeness between them returned.

Another way in which divorce can have a delayed impact on sibling relationships is that it can set the stage for closeness later on. In other words, although siblings may not be able to discuss the divorce at the time at which it is occurring, either because they are too young to discuss it, or they are too busy coping with it, it can lead to greater closeness later on, because it provides siblings with something to discuss at a deep level:

It brought us closer, because we're able to...especially now we're able to talk about it, and how it, how it kind of affected us then. Like, before it's not really anything you really talk about. It's just like, "Well, it happened. Big deal." But now it's better. We, we can talk about it, and, and even just talking about everyday things—being able to talk about the divorce, you know, we've been able to open up to each other more (younger sister of a brother-sister pair).

Finally, a delayed impact of divorce may occur as a result of events stemming from the divorce. For example, one participant explained how she felt her mother's behaviour towards her following the divorce caused her to leave home and live with a relative in a distant province. As a result, she feels she missed out on growing up with her younger brother:

My mom changed after the divorce, so the reason I left, indirectly, even though it was delayed, I think was kind of because of that, because she totally changed after. That's when she started being weird with me, like, not nice to me and stuff. So the relationship directly after was still the same, up until I was 13, and that's when I left, and then I wasn't there... the reason my relationship with my mom, I totally connect that with the divorce, looking back, because that was when she started acting different,

then I would say that in that way, you know, that way, it totally did after. But not directly after. It was like a delayed impact. That was a big change. I guess that's why I really don't think about it, because it wasn't right at the same time, like, at the actual time as the divorce, but it was kind of like the chain reaction for later (older sister of a brother-sister pair).

In addition to there being a delayed impact of divorce on the sibling relationship, the nature of the impact of divorce on the sibling relationship can change as well. For example, divorce may lead to greater closeness at the time of the separation, but that closeness may fade after the immediate crisis of the divorce has passed. For example, several participants explained that after the time of the actual separation passed, other factors, such as personality and development, which had previously been dominant influences on their sibling relationship, regained prominence. Moreover, although an initial increase in closeness may occur at the time of the separation, as the impact of the divorce on siblings continues, the greater closeness may disappear. For example, one participant described how he and his brother became closer at the time of the separation, because the older brother wanted to protect the younger brother and ensure that he was “okay.” As time passed, however, the effect of the divorce had a significant impact on the older brother’s behaviour:

We were closer during and immediately after, and then it quickly deteriorated over a few years. It deteriorated probably over a couple of years, and then it started to get better. He wasn't very close to me anymore, he didn't spend any time with me, and he was, you can imagine, he was drinking and smoking pot and stuff like that, and hanging out with a bad crowd, and I didn't like any of his new friends at that time. I guess he was a bit rougher on me, and he became angry and frustrated and stuff at the world. And he attributes it pretty well to the divorce (younger brother of a brother-brother pair).

Just as greater closeness can give way to diminished closeness after the immediate impact of the divorce, increased conflict can turn into increased closeness as time passes.

Often the conflict declined as the family situation stabilized and siblings began to cope with the divorce:

Yeah, we really got close, like, after, when it really settled down, we got really close, my brother and I, because, well, this is after everything that we had been through (older sister of a brother-sister pair).

This finding of less conflict after the immediate separation is consistent with previous research findings demonstrating that conflict between siblings diminished approximately two to three years after the actual separation (Anderson & Rice, 1992; Hetherington, 1988).

Ongoing impact

In addition to changes in the impact of divorce on sibling relationships, 70% of participants (n=21) reported that divorce continues to have an impact on their sibling relationships. Specifically, continuing effects of the divorce kept siblings connected, which led to ongoing closeness between them. This ongoing impact manifested itself in several different ways. One reason for a continuing impact of divorce was the introduction of a step-parent. Although previous research suggests that a parent's remarriage is a source of conflict between siblings, all but one participant in this study felt that the presence of a step-parent actually brought them closer to their siblings:

My stepdad ended up moving in and stuff, and that was kind of...kind of affected us in a different way. Well, like, we just, you know, new guy in your house, you don't really like him, so...we would get together and plot against him (laughs slightly) (younger sister of brother-sister pair).

We definitely banded together against my mom's partner! We didn't like him! That was a whole different, um...struggle for us. You know, the separation was one thing, and then we had that other battle with, with this new man coming into our lives, who we really uh, didn't get along with. So... that made us closer, I think (older sister of sister-sister pair).

We both don't get along with my step-dad so much that, um, like, without her there, or without me there in her life, it would have been, like, in essence, um..., I gave her more confidence to stand up to (step-dad), because I always did, like when he said something, I would just be, like, "No, you are not my father", and...she, she's told me now that she just always admired that...So, yeah, we can just talk about it and...bond even more...about how retarded my step-father is (laughs) (younger sister of a sister-sister pair).

This above participant explained how the impact of the remarriage compared to the impact of her parents' divorce:

Well, they kind of intertwined, because the divorce started us off on the closeness, but then the remarriage just kept us together, because we needed each other to live in that house, so...it's just all kind of followed us getting, like, going...along with life and then getting closer with it.

Although most participants felt that the introduction of a step-parent led to increased closeness, one participant explained how her mother's new partner exacerbated her already conflict-ridden relationship with her brother:

That had a big effect, because the new man really liked "M", and, um, you would think that would be a good thing, but it wasn't, because when they got together, it was like the full testosterone thing, and they'd be, like, 'Arhhhh'. They'd have racing competitions, they'd wrestle... "W", oh God, he's not a very nice person, that's my mom's partner, and he was very mean. "W" and I fought and argued. Um, now I don't even talk to "W". Like, if I come in the house, the most I'll say to him is hello. The most. We don't talk. He's very mean to my sisters. My sisters hate him. So he would get on my brother's side, and, uh, they would...um...both be mean to us. It sort of reinforced the meanness (laughs slightly) to us. It made him feel stronger. I don't know.

This case is noteworthy, because it illustrates how the introduction of a step-father, which has been shown to have a positive effect on boys living in mother-custody homes (Hetherington, 1993; Hetherington & Clingempeel, 1992), also may have a negative impact on siblings. From this young woman's perspective, the stepfather allied himself with her brother and the two teamed up against her. This is consistent with family

systems theory, in that an alteration to the family's organization had an impact on all relationships within the family.

Participants also cited "parent management" as a source of ongoing closeness between them and their siblings:

We have to, you know, we have to get along and stuff, and we have to help each other out with our parents. My mom still harbours a lot of anger at my dad, so, you know, we have to be very diplomatic, even, you know, 17 years or whatever after the divorce, you still have to, yeah, you still have to, we have to still have to play a lot of games to get our parents to..., well, it's mostly my mom, to keep her happy. It is a big effect, having to balance my mom with my father. I mean, I can't tell my mom that I've seen my dad or whatever that much, you know, like, I came back from a trip, and what did I do, I ended up seeing my dad a couple of days after I got back, and I can't tell my mom that I saw my dad, and my brother has exactly the same problem (younger brother of a brother-brother pair).

It brought us together. In the sense that we got pretty good at planning things out. Like, whenever my mom would come back to try and visit, like, you could literally pick up scissors and cut the tension in my house when she's there. Like, it's really bad. So we got really good at how to just play our parents sort of thing, like keep them apart and how to, we'd come up with plans on how to, like, make this trip as simple as we can, like...that sort of thing.. It's pretty big. (younger sister of a brother-sister pair).

We still talk about issues concerning both our parents and how to treat it. 'Cause my parents did not have a happy divorce, so they are not friends to this day, so it's really hard to have them in the same place at the same time, so stuff definitely has to be juggled (younger sister of a sister-sister pair).

That some participants felt that managing their parents brought them closer to their siblings is significant given research that suggests that feeling caught between parents is stressful for children (Maccoby, Buchanan, and Dornbusch, 1991).

Related to managing their parents, participants reported that they collaborated with each other on decisions that are unique to children of divorce. For example, one participant explained how she and her sister had many discussions about whether their father or their step-father should walk them down the aisle when they get married.

Divorce-related issues also kept siblings connected over the years. In particular, the unique difficulties that some children of divorce have in handling intimate relationships in young adulthood were communicated to their siblings, because participants felt they were the only ones who would understand:

We've experienced all this stuff that nobody else knows about that it just makes sense that...some of the things that we feel when it comes to, like, the two of us being in a relationship, like, with different people, the fears that we have, and, like, that sort of thing, no one else can really grasp it, because they don't know why we're seeing that, or why we're even thinking that, because to them it's like, "Why would you even think that could happen?" Like...So I think that has a big impact (younger sister of a sister-brother pair)

A lot of my, like, esteem issues and confidence issues with men are because of the divorce and my sister knows that, so...and hers as well, so she knows... yeah, she just understands, 'cause we've both been through the same thing, so it's just made us have that, like, unspoken bond, so that we just, we just know when something's wrong, we know when the other needs to talk kind of thing (younger sister of a sister-sister pair).

This finding suggests that sibling relationships may be of particular significance to individuals in young adulthood, a time when the effects of divorce may resurface (Chase-Lansdale et al., 1995). Specifically, some research suggests that some young adults who experienced the divorce of their parents may grapple with issues, such as trust, intimacy, fear, commitment, and problem-solving in their relationships (Amato, 1996; Walker & Ehrenberg, 1998; Zill et al, 1993).

Another divorce-related issue that kept some siblings connected was trying to figure out their relationships with non-custodial parents. This was cited by females trying to handle their relationships with their fathers. One participant speculated as to how her sister will be able to help her cope with her relationship with her father:

I'll be able to get closer, and then, like, ask her what to do, like, 'cause she's been through it with my dad, like, I don't know, I don't know what to do with him, he's just kind of there, and I happen to be, like, from him (laughs slightly),

that's the way I look at it. But she knows more, and as I get older, and...I'm at that very denial stage that I don't need a father, and as I get older, and I realize that I do, 'cause I know that's going to hit me like a ton of bricks (laughs), but, um..., I know that she'll be there, and she'll be able to...help me talk to him and help me deal with that...aspect of it.

Similarly, another participant described how she had worked through some difficulties in her relationship with her father and was trying to help her younger sister to understand their father better, so she could improve her relationship with him as well.

...especially the way we relate to my dad differently—that, that has an effect on each other, because I've reached a point where my dad and I, you know, we get along really well, so I try and just teach her the ropes, 'cause I really feel like I've not conquered my father, but we've got to this level where we work well together (older sister of a sister-sister pair).

Given that research suggests that young adults often have strained relationships with their divorced parents, particularly the non-custodial parent, the assistance of a sibling in coping with these difficult relationships is not insignificant (Amato & Booth, 1996; Zill et al., 1993).

Another source of ongoing impact that participants reported was trying to develop their ideas of what constitutes a healthy relationship, and formulating their own values and desires regarding family and marriage:

I don't think the part that they are no longer married – I don't really think that's a problem but I think the fact that it's something that we still talk about. It's still a source of information. Like, how could they be married for 11 years and not even talk? How could they do this? Let's talk about our marriage. We only want to be married once, like both of us have kind of talked about stuff like that so (younger sister of a sister-sister pair).

The finding that divorce has a continuing impact on many sibling relationships is not surprising given research that suggests that divorce is not an isolated incident with a one-time impact on a child. One participant captured this feeling:

I would almost say that the separation is , it's been a really long process. I mean it hasn't, it is definitely not..., like, there was maybe six months of real change that took place, but...it, the process is almost continuous change. It is never really over (older brother of a brother-brother pair).

Although the majority of participants reported that the divorce had an ongoing impact on their relationships with their siblings, 30% of participants (n=9) stated that there was no impact on the relationship beyond the immediate effects of the divorce. These participants explained that the divorce was over, and they are used to it. Moreover, participants explained that their current relationships with their siblings are less influenced by externals, such as their parent' divorce; instead, they and their siblings are creating their own relationship:

I think because we're both creating our own lives instead of being influenced by someone else's life that I think it won't, it will, the effect will diminish over time as we both deal with it and come to grips with what's happened and...heal ourselves (older sister of a brother-sister pair).

Impact of Sibling Relationship on Coping with the Divorce: Positive, Negative, and No impact

Sixty-seven percent (n=20) of participants stated that their relationship with their sibling had a positive impact on how they coped with their parents' divorce. Some participants reported that they, "would not have made it" without their sibling, or that, "If I was an only child I would have been a mess." Moreover, some siblings described how their sibling made them feel safe in a tumultuous and frightening time:

Having "T" just kind of...just, like, made it a little safer, that, like, everything wasn't wrong in this whole world (younger sister of a sister-sister pair).

The mechanisms by which siblings seemed to help participants cope operated in obvious and subtle ways. For example, one of the obvious ways in which siblings helped participants was in being available to talk about the separation:

I guess there'd be some things that I wouldn't want to tell my mom about how I was feeling, 'cause, I mean, maybe I was mad at her, 'cause there are times where you blame them for it, right? So I think that maybe I talked to him about that. I don't really remember, but I'm sure that I kind of talked to him about that, and that got it out of me (older sister of a brother-sister pair).

I think we were more understanding of each other. I think we took into consideration...more of what we were feeling. Like I said, like, I think he did the same for me, like, he would come into my room or something, and he'd just be like, "Oh, why are you upset?" So, we would really, like, listen to each other. It wasn't a heart-felt conversation or anything, but we kind of, we kind of looked out for each other more (older sister of a brother-sister pair).

Older siblings played a role in reassuring their younger siblings that things would be okay. For example, one participant was reluctant to visit her father after the separation, but her brother would attempt to reassure her that it would be okay:

"L" would come back, you know, he'd be like, "You know, 'M', it's really not that bad. You should, you should come." And I'd always go over, and then I'd just want to go back home to my mom, but just having "L" come back and reassure me that it would be, you know, I'd survive it (younger sister of a brother-sister pair).

Older siblings also helped confused younger siblings to understand their own feelings about the divorce:

My brother didn't know how to convey his thoughts to my parents. Like, he would just end up crying and not too sure what to say, and so I guess talking with me allowed him to, for me to, like, put words in his mind which, what he was thinking. Like, I, I wasn't trying to put words in his mind, but trying to explain or sort of...allow him to convey his thoughts out loud and to say them to my parents (older brother of a brother-brother pair).

This participant's experience was unique in that his parents, recognizing that the younger brother may not be able to express himself directly to them, sent the brothers to a room to discuss the matters alone. Consequently, parents can have an active role in encouraging their children to work together to cope with the divorce. This result is consistent with

findings from the clinical literature, which suggests that sibling therapy often is effective in helping children to learn to use each other as support systems during a family transition (Nichols, 1986; Rosenberg, 1980; Schibuk, 1989). Although siblings in this study appeared to be able to derive support from their siblings in many different ways, they may have been too young to appreciate that there were other ways that they may have helped each other.

Although some participants reported that they talked to their siblings about the divorce, and that such talking was helpful, the majority of participants explained that their siblings helped them cope in subtler ways. For example, some participants described how their older siblings modelled coping strategies to them. For example, one participant explained how his brother's reaction to the divorce helped reassure him that things would be okay:

'Cause he was going through the same thing, and I saw that he wasn't freaking out or overly affected by it, that maybe I shouldn't be either (younger brother of a brother-brother pair).

Through modelling, older siblings also helped teach their siblings how to cope with the divorce:

I think he taught me how to deal with the situation, from watching him. I kind of took on how he dealt with it, and so...that probably impacted how I dealt with the situation. He was very open about it and... that's what I probably took on (younger sister of a brother-sister pair).

Older siblings' modelling of their own coping was not restricted to the period within which their parents' separated. Sometimes older siblings helped younger siblings cope years after the divorce. For example, one participant described how seeing her older sister's adjustment once she left home helped her cope with living with a difficult step-father:

She says to me all the time, "Once you get out of the house, everything will be fine, you'll be able to go over there, you'll be more friends with...our parents. " Right now I can't see that, but just the fact that she's telling me that... that that can happen, and that she's okay now, it makes me see the light at the end of the tunnel. So it's refreshing when I talk to her, 'cause I can get everything off my chest, and then I'll just feel ...better. Because I can talk to my friends about it, but they don't understand (younger sister of a sister-sister).

Another subtle way in which siblings helped participants cope with the divorce was through the unspoken knowledge that their siblings were going through the same experience. Although participants were not able to articulate just how this was helpful, many participants emphasized that it was essential to their coping:

It helped in the whole situation to have someone who was going through the same thing, because...we both knew what it was like for the other person. So having someone else there who...knows what's going on definitely helped. I don't know how it helps. It's just kind of an unspoken support that you have for one another (older brother of a brother-brother pair).

Even if the participant and sibling were not close, the participant was still able to derive support from the knowledge that they were experiencing the same event:

I think it was good that I was able to see that I wasn't the only one going through this. You know, I could sort of get strength from the fact that we both had to deal with it. Just that she was dealing with it in her own way, and I was dealing with it in my own way. I could see that she didn't do it easily. She acted like she did, but I knew she was still having problems with it, so I knew that I wasn't the only one (younger sister of a sister-sister pair).

Some participants obtained support and comfort from the presence of a sibling, even one to whom they were not particularly close:

We just relied on each other a lot. We didn't really talk about what was going on, not that I can remember. But it was the little things. Like, we'd watch TV together and just be together as much as we could and stuff. If I had been by myself, it would have been so hard. And I wouldn't have had anybody to feel a comfort from. I mean, if I had been by myself, I think I would have gotten

angry more. I think she was important to me at that time (younger sister of a sister-sister pair).

If he was upset, at least I would understand why, and could maybe talk about it, or maybe not so much talk about it, but just kind of, like, hang out (older sister of a brother-sister pair).

Participants also stated that the stability of the sibling relationship during the chaotic divorce period was a way in which they derived support from their siblings.

I'd say, overall, the level of difficulty of going through that was reduced by having a sibling, because there was still a support structure in place that wasn't completely torn apart (older brother of a brother-brother pair).

Most definitely my sister had an impact. You know that you still have a bond. When your family breaks up, you're kind of feeling pretty crappy about it, that you don't have a family, you know, but when you go and spend some time with your brother or sister, you, you still feel that it's there. And that's important (older brother of a brother-sister pair).

The adverse conditions that took place during the separation kind of brought us together, because we both had to deal with the tension and the fighting, you know? It's, we had to..., we had to deal with that, so in a sense the separation forced us to come together, because you do need support going through that, so...we turned to each other for support, because it was so awful. I mean that relationship was the only thing that remained unchanged throughout the whole, the whole process, the whole...divorce, I guess. So we, um..., in that sense it's brought us closer together. In the long run, it made us closer (older brother of a brother-brother pair).

As the last case demonstrates, the support and closeness that arise from the divorce experience seem to be reciprocal in nature. That is, divorce appeared to bring some siblings together in order to derive support during a difficult period; at the same time, that need for support led to increased closeness between the siblings, which, in turn, fostered the support between the siblings. Thus, the impact of divorce on sibling closeness and support can not be separated; they appear to occur simultaneously.

Humour was another subtle way in which siblings helped each other cope with the divorce. For example, one participant explained that whereas she could not go to her older brother for emotional support, because he was not emotionally expressive, his sense of humour had an impact on her ability to handle her parents' separation:

We'll just joke. It's easier to cope because we joke. Like my Dad's fridge has mustard, salad dressing, and beer, that kind of thing. He just has food for that night at the dinner table type thing. Like, we'll joke about that or stuff like that. Or some of my Dad's girlfriends or something, like, maybe joke about her. He's (brother) pretty funny. We can laugh and connect on that type of level. Yeah, it helped me, because we were speaking a different language.

This finding is consistent with the literature on stress and humour, which suggests that humour can be an effective means of combating stress, particularly when coping with major life events (Martin, Kuiper, Olinger, & Dance, 1993).

Finally, another way in which the sibling relationship helped participants cope with their parents' divorce was by diverting attention away from the stress of the situation. Both older and younger siblings stated that spending time with their siblings helped them to take their minds off their parents' separation.

Children's need to be with their siblings was reflected in one participant's description of how custody arrangements were made in his family:

I know it was up to me, who I wanted to stay with. And...they just wanted to stay, my brother and sister just wanted to stay with me, so they just stayed where I did (older brother of a brother-brother pair).

This finding that preferring to stay with siblings supersedes a desire to be with a particular parent points to the importance of the sibling bond in times of family transitions; moreover, it is consistent with some judges' experiences in custody and access cases (Kaplan, Ade-Ridder, & Hennon, 1991).

Overall, 84% of participants (n=25) reported that any conflict in their relationship with their siblings did not have an impact on their ability to cope with their parents' divorce. Most participants felt that the conflict did not impact their relationship, because they were meaningless squabbles that were quickly forgotten. Although some participants stated that it sometimes felt good to unleash their anger on their siblings, that benefit was offset by the negative side of the conflict, which was fighting with a sibling during a difficult time, and losing any comfort that may have been gained from that sibling:

Even though the conflict might have seemed like an outlet for anger, it probably made me more upset to be fighting with my brother. If I was fighting with "L", I was probably more likely to be upset and angry, and so other things would be magnified (younger sister of a brother-sister pair).

In some cases, conflict between siblings was somewhat helpful in that it provided some sense of stability during the divorce:

I guess I could have taken some morbid reassurance that things were still normal, certain things hadn't been affected by it. In the same sense that I could take reassurance in that my dad still drove me to school every day. The basic foundation of the family hadn't been...disturbed. And I guess the main interaction I had with my sister that was memorable would be getting into a fight with her, so if I was still able to get into a fight with her over something stupid like the remote, then it meant that everything wasn't cataclysmically wrong, you know? There were changes, but some (laughs), some basic things stayed the same (younger sister of sister-sister relationship).

This suggestion that conflict may provide support to siblings is consistent with speculations that it is the stability of a sibling relationship that is supportive rather than the degree of closeness or conflict in a sibling relationship (Caya & Liem, 1998; Rosenberg, 1980). In the above case, the sister had experienced a fairly conflict-ridden relationship with her sister before her parents' divorce. The continuing conflict after the divorce may have provided her with a certain continuity that was reassuring. It is

noteworthy, however, that the conflict in this case was fairly mild, in that it involved territorial squabbles; conflict between siblings that was violent or emotionally-laden was not seen as helping participants cope with divorce.

Although most participants reported that conflict during the separation did not have an impact on how they were coping with their parents' divorce, 10% of participants (n=3) stated that such conflict actively interfered with their ability to handle the separation. For example, one participant who explained that she and her brother had always had an emotionally conflict-ridden relationship described how the ongoing, intense conflict with her brother impeded her ability to cope with the divorce.

It really (sighs) helped my self-esteem get lower. And, therefore, it was more difficult for me to deal with the separation. I seemed to just go in a downward spiral (older sister of a brother-sister pair).

The relationship between siblings was able to interfere slightly with a participant's coping even if there was no conflict. Specifically, how their siblings coped with the divorce hindered some participants' ability to handle the divorce. For example, one participant explained how his older sister's reaction to the divorce affected his own coping:

I think "P" saw it, saw it better than I did, and I didn't realize that at first. I guess she knew more 'cause she was older...and, like some faults of my dad and stuff like that, and...I think after I figured it out, I was still more forgiving than her, like, still hung out with my dad, and I, I had a lot of sympathy for him, but, um...when I saw her, her doing it, like, I, I couldn't understand, like, why... so I think that kind of set me back a bit in coping with it, with, with the divorce (younger brother of a brother-sister pair).

Although the above example suggests that differences in understanding of the divorce circumstances may affect how siblings cope with the divorce, differences in how some siblings cope with the divorce may affect another sibling's ability to handle the

separation. For example, one participant described how she and her sister reacted to the divorce differently:

I remember it as if it were yesterday. My sister and I were downstairs watching T.V. My parents come down, and they say, "Can you turn off the T.V.?" "And they say, "We've decided to get a divorce." And I'm just, like, my jaw drops, you know, my sister...didn't change her emotion at all really, and I freak out, I, like, burst into tears and bury my face into a pillow, and my sister said, "Can I turn the T.V. back on now?" You know, that's the kind of, my, my sister's very, uh, I'd say passive-aggressive. She became, sort of, yeah, she... Yeah, I'd say we were definitely more distant...during the time of the divorce. She withdrew from the family, and I threw myself into the middle of it to see what was going on, not, not—I, I try and fix conflicts, I never tried to get my parents back together in any sort of...sitcom type situation (laughs), but I just wanted to know...what had happened and what was going on, what was going to happen, what the repercussions were, you know? I'm the kind of person that I have to look at something from every single angle and delve into it. But just in personalities, she withdrew and...I mean, I, I remember using this sort of...analogy when I was a kid that, you know, of this big, brick box, and my mom and dad had built one in between the two of them, you know, and announced it to us, and my sister...built one just fencing her off and opened a door outside. She was with her friends a lot, she went out, did little, mild rebellious things towards my parents, and I just...I kind of ran around into everybody's own, little, individual room, trying to figure out what was going on, you know? (younger sister of sister-sister pair).

This young woman then went on to describe how her sister's reaction to the divorce affected her own coping with the divorce:

I couldn't understand some of the things that she did. When she kind of withdrew from the family, that caused my parents a bit of grief, you know, late night worry or... something like that, you know? There were certain things that she did that I, I didn't understand, and...I resented her for causing pain to my parents at, what I saw, was a time that they didn't need it.

The impact of the sibling relationship in helping participants to cope with their parents' divorce suggests that being an only child may make it harder to cope with divorce. In the research to date, the focus has been on comparing the adjustment of children of divorced families with children from intact families. Rarely are only children

of divorced families included in these studies (see Kempton et al., 1991 for an exception). Without including only children in their studies, researchers are missing an important piece. When investigating the impact of sibling relationships on individual coping, one of the key comparison groups in those studies should be children of divorced families who do not have any siblings. One participant's experience with her mother's subsequent marriage break-up provided a hint of what an only child's experience might be like. Although her brother was living at home when their mother's first marriage ended, her brother had moved out by the time of the second divorce:

My mom got remarried, and then she divorced again. That happened when he was away at school, and I was at home, so I was the only one going through it. He was going through it, too, but I was right in the middle of it, because he didn't live there, and so I think that had a big impact, because he didn't understand what was going on, because he wasn't there every day-to-day while I was. I needed someone to talk to about Mom and what's going on, but he didn't really understand, and so I think that, like, a couple of years there that...it was hard because he wasn't there, so I was kind of going through it by myself, and...yeah, that was...that was hard (younger sister of a brother-sister pair).

Although most participants stated that their sibling relationship had an impact on their ability to cope with their parents' divorce, 23% of participants (n=7) reported that their relationships with their brothers or sisters had no impact on how they coped with the divorce. Eighty-six percent (n=6) of these were older siblings. Some participants explained that the divorce was not something with which they had to cope:

My coping with the separation, I think I was...it didn't affect me, I don't feel that it did affect me that much (younger brother of a brother-brother pair).

It seemed like the separation really didn't impact me that much. I really didn't feel too bad about it. Like, I'm not saying that I was happy or anything, but...like, I didn't really see it as that much of a major deal as the other...but, um, I don't know if I was just bottling it up or what, but...it didn't really seem that bad, so I don't think it had too much (older brother of brother-brother pair).

One participant explained that she felt like she had never actually coped with the separation:

I don't think I really handled the separation. It just...kind of happened, like I still...Yeah, I don't know if I'd say I handled it. I'm actually kind of worried of it coming up later in my life, 'cause I just seemed to, I think I just tried to get over it as quickly as I could and not dwell on it, 'cause it was abnormal, kind of...(older sister of a brother-sister pair).

Finally, some participants explained that they coped with the separation on their own:

I don't know, it just seems that my ability to handle the separation seemed to be things that I was doing. I think it was more of a personal thing. Like, for me being able to deal with the separation, I don't think it had to do with our closeness (older sister of brother-sister pair).

'Cause I'm independent with that type of...I don't lean on people for support (older brother of brother-brother pair).

Like, I was really...angry after the whole separation, and I was kind of reserved, and I wasn't...Like, where we lived, we had a, I've always been into horses, I've always ridden, we had our barn in the back, and I would be in the barn all the time...I probably should have talked about it more, but I don't think I did. I rode a lot. I found, like, the horses were my escape (older sister of a sister-brother pair).

Summary and Implications

This study was designed as a first step in understanding how young adults perceive their sibling relationships in the context of family transitions. To date, studies of sibling relationships in families of divorce have focused primarily on how siblings behave with one another during the time of the divorce; specifically, researchers have found that compared to siblings from intact families, children experiencing a family transition display higher levels of conflict in their sibling interactions. On the other hand, some research findings suggest that sibling relationships may also serve a potentially buffering effect for children experiencing a family transition. This study was an attempt to look beyond sibling behaviour and consider the development and meaning of their

relationships from the perspective of the siblings themselves. To this end, young adults participated in interviews in which they traced the course of their sibling relationships before, during, and after their parents' divorce. The overall focus centered on how sibling relationships changed over time as a function of family changes, and how sibling relationships impacted their ability to cope.

There are three noteworthy points regarding the impact of divorce on sibling relationships. First, consistent with existing research on sibling behaviour, many participants reported an increase in conflictual interactions at the time of their parents' divorce (Anderson & Rice, 1992; Hetherington, 1988). Participants' construction of the meaning of that conflict was revealing, however. Most participants who reported an increase in conflictual interactions felt that it was not important; they dismissed the conflict as meaningless, stating that it was a natural reaction to the confusion, tension, and insecurity at the time of the separation. This finding has implications for future research in that it suggests that measures which focus solely on behaviour may not be reflecting fully the impact of divorce on sibling relationships. In other words, knowledge of the level of sibling conflict may reveal little about the relevance of that conflict to the siblings. That most participants did not attribute great significance to any conflict at the time of the divorce suggests that researchers should be cautious in drawing conclusions about sibling relationships based on conflictual interactions; specifically, researchers need to include measures of the meaning of behaviour to participants.

Second, many participants who reported an increase in conflict also reported that they felt closer to their siblings at the time of the divorce. In other words, closeness and conflict often increased simultaneously. In addition, it seemed that it was not sibling

conflict, *per se*, that had a negative impact on their sibling relationships in the context of family transitions, but rather the presence of conflict in the absence of closeness. For some participants, the loss of earlier closeness in their sibling relationship, because of factors related to their parents' divorce, suddenly made the conflict seem much more meaningful. Consequently, treating conflict or closeness in isolation rather than examining possible interactions between the two may lead to misleading conclusions regarding the impact of divorce on sibling relationships.

Third, pre-divorce sibling relationships were related to post-divorce relationships. For example, participants who described a history of severe, ongoing conflict with their siblings reported that divorce exacerbated this conflict. Without knowledge of the quality of the sibling relationship prior to the parents' divorce, it is difficult to understand the nature of the sibling relationship post-divorce. This finding has implications for researchers and clinicians working with families in transition.

In terms of the long-term impact of divorce on the sibling relationship, most participants stated that although they felt that their parents' divorce ultimately brought them closer to their siblings, these sibling relationships were also characterized by change. Consistent with previous research, some participants explained how initial increases in conflict at the time of the divorce decreased as the family situation stabilized (Anderson & Rice, 1992; Hetherington et al., 1999). This study extends these earlier findings, however, by demonstrating that the impact of divorce on sibling closeness and conflict can fluctuate over time. In some cases, perceived conflict between siblings surfaced years after the divorce for reasons such as changes in individual coping with the divorce, situational changes such as being separated from siblings, and loyalty conflicts

that arose over divorce-specific issues such as child support. Similarly, closeness between siblings that increased during the "crisis" period of the divorce sometimes returned to pre-divorce levels as other factors, such as developmental stages and personality differences, regained prominence. Finally, closeness between siblings often increased or was maintained over time as siblings continued to cope with the ongoing consequences of divorce, such as the need to manage their parents. Such fluidity of the impact of divorce on sibling relationships suggests that researchers should be cautious about drawing conclusions about how divorce affects sibling relationships based on measurements made at one point in time. Moreover, researchers would be well advised to adopt a life course perspective in their studies of sibling relationship and family transitions. Because divorce may affect individuals in different ways as they progress through the life span, the impact of divorce on sibling relationships may change as well. For instance, some participants explained that their siblings are particularly important to them now as they struggle with romantic relationships; these participants felt that their siblings were the only people who understood why they may be having specific difficulties in this area. Talking about these issues fostered closeness between siblings in young adulthood. Moreover, the striking optimism that some participants who had experienced severely conflict-ridden relationships with their siblings expressed further points to the need to examine sibling relationships from a life course perspective. Consequently, although it is natural to study the impact of divorce on childhood sibling relationships, focusing exclusively on childhood and adolescence may lead researchers to overlook the impact of divorce on sibling relationships at later stages in the life span.

More generally, it is possible that sibling relationships in families that have experienced a family transition may follow a different developmental trajectory than siblings from intact homes. For instance, specific life events, such as marriage and children, may hold particular significance for siblings who experienced a parental divorce in childhood than siblings from intact homes. Similarly, how individuals value their sibling relationships as a result of a divorce may differ from individuals from intact homes. For example, some participants mentioned that their parents' divorce made them not take their sibling relationships for granted; perhaps divorce creates an awareness that family relationships can be tenuous, and, as a result, sibling relationships have a unique meaning to individuals who experienced a parental divorce. Kier and Fouts' (1989) study of sibling play in divorced and married families provides initial evidence for the possibility of different developmental trajectories for siblings from divorced backgrounds and sibling living in intact homes; specifically, these researchers found that whereas boys in married homes preferred to play with older brothers, boys in divorced homes were equally likely to play with older sisters as with older brothers. The authors speculated that because the fathers were absent from the home, there might have been less sex-role stereotyping in the divorced group. Thus, sibling relationships in divorced families may follow a different developmental path than sibling relationships in other family types.

Overall, most participants believed that their sibling relationships provided them with support during their parents' divorce. Although an objective measure of participants' adjustment at the time of their parents' divorce was not a part of this study, participants' descriptions of how their siblings helped them to handle the divorce provided insights into the possible mechanisms by which a buffering effect may occur. Notably, many of

the ways in which siblings provided support were subtle. For example, many participants stated that the mere knowledge that their sibling was experiencing the same event was comforting. Similarly, participants derived support and comfort from the physical presence of their siblings and from sibling rituals. Finally, some participants felt that the overall stability of the sibling relationship served as an anchor during the chaotic experience of the parental divorce. This finding has implications for how researchers measure support between siblings. To date, most researchers have conceptualized support in more traditional terms, such as talking, hugging, and seeking comfort from siblings. Although these definitions of support are important, the current findings suggest that we need to broaden our measures of support to include subtler forms. For example, researchers could ask children, “When you visit your dad, do you like to have your brother with you, or would you prefer to go alone?” The need to incorporate subtle manifestations of support in measures is particularly important, given that they may be less salient to participants. For example, one young adult who identified her brother’s sense of humour as providing support recalled that she did not initially feel that her brother was being supportive. Like researchers in this area, when she was first asked the question regarding support, this participant interpreted it in terms of traditional forms of support, such as talking about the divorce, and stated that her brother did not help her to handle her parents’ divorce. It was only later in the interview that she mentioned her brother’s use of humour and stated that his use of “comic relief” helped her to cope. In other words, siblings may not even be aware of the ways in which their siblings may be helping them; consequently, measures that tap into these subtle aspects of support may help further our understanding of sibling support during family transitions. In addition,

measuring multiple aspects of support would enable researchers to examine whether one type of support, such as talking, is more effective than other types of support, such as humour.

That some participants felt their siblings had no impact on their ability to cope with their parents' divorce points to the need to compare the impact of sibling support with other sources of support during divorce. Children experiencing a parental divorce may have various sources of support within their means. Such sources may include grandparents, friends, teachers, pets, books, sports, and intrapersonal characteristics. Although siblings may provide support, that support may be minimal compared to support from other areas. Moreover, sibling support may have a unique contribution to child adjustment. For example, whereas siblings may be particularly helpful in situations such as managing parents, travelling to a noncustodial parent's house, or dealing with romantic difficulties, pets may help by providing affection and comfort during the stressful divorce period. In other words, child adjustment may be multifaceted, and various sources of support may contribute independently to different areas. Studies that include other sources of support, particularly those that are relevant to children and adolescents, may help to elucidate further the benefit of sibling relationships to children experiencing family transitions.

Moreover, the nature of support that participants derive from their siblings may change over time. For instance, support at the time of the divorce may involve providing a sense of stability during a tumultuous period. Later, support may be needed in other areas, such as managing parents, or in coping with divorce-related issues in romantic

relationships. Consequently, measures of support need to accommodate these changes in types and patterns of support.

That most participants believed their sibling relationship helped them to handle their parents' divorce has one final research implication. It suggests that children without siblings who are experiencing a parents' divorce may have greater adjustment difficulties than children who have siblings. Although it is important to compare children from intact homes with children from divorced homes, it is also critical to include the experiences of only children in order to understand fully the impact of siblings on children's adjustment. To date, only one published study has compared the adjustment of children without siblings to children with siblings (Kempton et al., 1991). This study, which did not look at support specifically, found that children with siblings demonstrated fewer externalizing behaviours than only children did. Without including only children as an additional comparison group, our knowledge of the impact of sibling relationships on children's adjustment is severely limited.

In addition to having research implications, the finding that siblings provide support to each other in subtle ways may have particular significance for clinicians working with families in transitions. There are several ways in which clinicians might use this information. First, if clinicians are involved in custody and access assessments, they may need to attend to the possible significance of the sibling relationship. Because children may have difficulty communicating verbally what their siblings mean to them, clinicians need to explore carefully the nature and role of the sibling relationship. For example, clinicians may use projective drawing techniques and objective measures to assess sibling relationships. Based on the assessment, the importance of the sibling unit

can be used in making decisions about custody and visitation. For example, if the sibling relationship is deemed supportive, clinicians may suggest that siblings be kept together when visiting the non-custodial parent. On the other hand, a careful examination of the sibling relationship, as well as more general family dynamics, may help uncover possible problem areas. For example, although decisions to leave children unattended while custodial parents work can foster sibling closeness and support, in some cases it could damage the sibling relationship and children's ability to cope. In particular siblings who engage in severe, ongoing conflict may need to have other arrangements made for them. A careful examination of the sibling relationship may help avoid such situations, in that clinicians could help parents develop more creative access schedules, at least to the extent that this is practically possible.

Second, clinicians working with families in transition who are sensitive to the subtle ways in which siblings provide support to each other may be able to help parents understand the importance of the sibling relationship. For example, clinicians could encourage parents to ensure that siblings are able to continue to perform their sibling rituals, such as colouring in an older sibling's room or watching particular programs on television together. Similarly, parents might help foster the natural support process between siblings by allowing them to make changes to their routine. For example, if siblings who have their own bedrooms suddenly want to sleep in the same room with each other, parents could be encouraged to allow such arrangements; likewise, allowing siblings to talk a little longer at bedtime may help them to support one another. Findings from this study suggest that siblings have their own ways of coping with divorce, and although adults may be oblivious to or may be puzzled by some of their methods, it may

be important to respect that they may well know how to console each other. This may require that parents are particularly attuned to what their children need to help each other; since parents may be too involved in their own pain and distress to recognize the ways in which their children may help each other, clinicians may be of particular assistance in ensuring that parents are supportive of their children's efforts to help each other.

A second role for clinicians may be in teaching parents how to foster greater support between siblings. For example, some participants stated that they might have been too young to know that their sibling could be a source of support, and, consequently, they tried to cope on their own. Clinicians may be able to teach parents and children how siblings may use each other as support systems. This should be done carefully, however, because siblings may know best how to help each other, and outside interference may disrupt the natural sibling support process. A careful assessment of the sibling relationship may be helpful in maximizing sibling support.

Finally, that many participants in this study perceived their siblings as providing support for years beyond the circumscribed divorce "crisis period" suggests that clinicians who are working with adults who experienced a parental divorce in childhood may be able to use the client's sibling as a source of assistance. For example, if a client is seeing a therapist because of intimacy issues stemming from divorce, the therapist may suggest that the client use her sibling as a source of support. Because each family's divorce experience is different, the sibling may be someone who can provide a unique understanding to the client's difficulties. Obviously, this would depend on the nature of the sibling relationship; a sibling relationship that is conflict-ridden or strained likely will be unhelpful, and, in some circumstances, may be potentially harmful. Even a relatively

detached relationship may be useful, however. For some siblings, the encouragement to talk about their issues may promote greater closeness between the two siblings.

Overall, participants felt that any conflict with their siblings had minimal impact on their ability to cope with their parents' divorce. This finding is significant, because it contrasts with earlier research, which suggests that sibling conflict during a parents' divorce is associated with lower functioning (e.g., Anderson & Rice, 1992). Two explanations may be possible. First, participants' subjective recollection of the impact of conflict on their adjustment to the divorce may be questionable. Given the possibility that recollections of past events may be biased, this explanation is quite plausible. Prospective studies that examine the impact of sibling conflict on children's functioning at the time of divorce may help uncover whether participants' later perceptions of the impact of conflict on their coping is congruent with objective measures of the perception of conflict and coping at the time. Even if a discrepancy exists, however, any incongruence between subjective and objective measures of the relationship between sibling conflict and individual adjustment may be irrelevant. Since perceptions of past events rather than objective facts determine how individuals construct their personal relationships, the long-term perception of conflict may be more important. In other words, even if conflict has a negative impact on children's adjustment to divorce in the short term, the long-term significance of that conflict may be negligible. Moreover, given that the whole divorce situation is tumultuous and scary, perhaps it is not surprising that sibling conflict may, objectively, have an impact on individual adjustment at the time of divorce, but participants do not remember it as being significant.

Second, the type of conflict that participants experienced with their siblings may account for the discrepancy between studies that have demonstrated a relationship between sibling conflict and individual functioning during divorce. Participants who perceived the conflict as being irrelevant in their adjustment to the divorce also characterized that conflict as typical “squabbles” that were forgotten easily. In contrast, participants who felt their sibling conflict had a significant, negative impact on their ability to cope described that conflict as continuous, violent, and emotionally-laden. This finding suggests that researchers may need to differentiate among different types of conflict when examining the impact of sibling conflict on children’s ability to cope with divorce. In addition, researchers need to assess the meaning of the conflict to the particular participant; conflict, such as teasing, that may be inconsequential to one person may have great significance to another.

Parents.

Although participants were not asked directly about the role of parents in their sibling relationships, a strong parental influence was evident in many of the participants’ accounts. Parents influenced sibling relationships in ways that are consistent with earlier findings, such as through disrupted parenting (Simons & Johnson, 1996), through parent conflict (Cumming & Davies, 1994), through coalitions (Eno, 1985), and through parent management (Maccoby et al., 1991). Concern for parents also had an influence on sibling relationships, in that some participants reported that out of concern for their parents, they had less conflict with their siblings. The influence of parenting on sibling relationships in the context of divorce is consistent with family systems theory, in that the impact of divorce affects all subsystems in a family, and, moreover, the subsystems are

interdependent. Consequently, when examining the impact of divorce on sibling relationships prospectively, it will be imperative that measures of parenting be included to elucidate the nature of the connections between parent-child relationships and sibling relationships.

Strengths and Limitations of the Current Study

The findings of this study should be considered in the context of its strengths and limitations. In terms of strengths, the format of the interview was useful with this population. Although the interview was comprised of open-ended questions that were designed to minimize leading participants' responses in a particular direction, the structure of the interview seemed to help participants formulate their thoughts. When participants were asked the initial question of what their sibling relationships are like, many of them struggled to answer. This is consistent with the experiences of other researchers and clinicians, who have found that asking people to talk about their siblings typically results in blank stares or information about where the sibling lives (Bank, 1992). Spontaneous comments by many participants suggested that they had not thought about their sibling relationships in great detail until participating in this study. The process of tracing sibling relationships from early childhood until the present may have facilitated the reflective process for some participants, in that it provided participants with a specific order for thinking about their siblings. If the interview had simply been composed of one question, such as "Tell me how your parents' divorce affected your sibling relationship," many participants in this study likely would have had difficulty answering, and, consequently, less would have been learned from them.

Although the interview was successful in guiding participants through the course of their sibling relationships, it is possible that some of the questions, although designed to be as non-directive as possible, may have been interpreted in a particular way. The most salient of these was the question, “Do you think your parents’ divorce/ separation had an impact on your relationship with your sibling?” Based on some responses, it seemed that some participants assumed that this question was asking whether the divorce had a negative impact on their sibling relationship. For instance, one participant answered, “Well, no. Nothing bad. I mean, if anything, I think it brought us close together.” Consequently, although the interview questions were supposed to avoid a bias towards a particular response, some participants interpreted them in specific ways. This corresponds to research on the use of questionnaires and interviews (e.g., Schwarz, 1999), in which it is common to find discrepancies between the intent of interview/questionnaire questions and the interpretation of those questions by participants. Conducting a thorough pilot study may have been helpful in uncovering potential misinterpretations of questions before the study began. For example, pilot participants could have been asked what they thought the researcher meant with particular questions, and then research questions could have been re-written based on the pilot participants’ responses. On the other hand, individuals’ interpretations of a relatively neutral question in more positive or negative directions may in themselves be meaningful.

Another limitation of the current study is that the sample used was composed of university students. Many researchers have written about the appropriateness of using university undergraduate students as participants (e.g., Wintre, North, & Sugar, 2001), arguing that many young adults do not attend university, and university undergraduates

are therefore not representative of their age group. Moreover, in terms of families in transition, that all of the participants in the present study are pursuing post-secondary education suggests that they are fairly well-functioning, and, consequently, do not represent all young adults who have experienced a parental divorce in childhood. Although the use of university undergraduates certainly limits the generalizability of the present study's findings, the findings are still useful. On the contrary, the findings provide potentially valuable information as to how sibling relationships may have played a role in helping participants adapt to their parents' divorces. In other words, given that divorce increases the risk of academic problems (Morrison & Cherlin, 1995; Zill et al., 1993), the present findings may illuminate some of the success stories in families in transition. Although many studies of families in transition naturally focus on what factors contribute to difficulties in children's adjustment to divorce, less is known about what helps children adjust to divorce. Moreover, rarely are the potentially positive outcomes of divorce examined. The overall finding in this study that divorce is perceived as creating greater closeness between siblings suggests that the divorce process can have positive consequences.

Another limitation of the current study is that participants based their responses to the interview on their relationship with one sibling only. In this sample, 47 % of participants (n=14) had more than one sibling. Although the original intention was to ask participants about their relationships with each sibling, time constraints forced the interview to focus on only one sibling relationship. There are two drawbacks to this process. First, there was no information about the potential impact of other siblings. It is possible that participants with more than one sibling may have greater opportunities for

support, in that if one sibling relationship is not supportive, there is another sibling to whom the person can turn. Second, it is possible that participants chose to talk about the sibling with whom they have a more positive relationship. This second issue may have been less problematic in this study. Some participants stated that they have a more complex relationship with the sibling they chose to focus on than they have with their other siblings. Asking participants why they chose to talk about a particular sibling may have helped to assess the degree to which this second limitation may have been damaging. Future studies that look at sibling relationships in the context of family transitions should look at every sibling dyad in the family in order to fully appreciate how divorce affects siblings.

A similar drawback of the current study is that only one member of the sibling dyad provided information about the sibling relationship. Although one sibling dyad was fully represented in this study, and the perceptions of the relationship were remarkably congruent, it is possible that other sibling dyads may hold different views of their relationship. Knowing the views of both members of a sibling dyad would be helpful in unravelling further the influence of divorce on sibling relationships. For example, within a sibling dyad, both siblings may have derived support from each other, but the type of support that was perceived as helpful may have been different for each sibling.

Another limitation is the potential for research bias. Although attempts were made by the researcher to examine the data in an objective manner, it is always possible that some bias existed. One method that would have been helpful in uncovering potential flaws in interpretation would have been to solicit feedback from the participants involved (Maxwell, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994). For instance, providing participants with an

outline of the findings, and checking to see if they feel that they captured their experiences might have been helpful in checking against bias. It should be noted, however, that the content analysis and the negative case analysis procedures recommended for this type of research served as important checks against potential bias (Creswell, 1994; Maxwell, 1998).

A final limitation is the small sample size. Although thirty participants are more than adequate for a qualitative study, it was too small to draw any conclusions about possible relationships in the themes among various dyad compositions. Although this is a legitimate concern, this was an exploratory study, in which the goal was to describe themes in participants' perceptions of their sibling relationships in the context of family transitions. Future research studies should be able to begin to examine relationships between some of the current findings and factors, such as gender make-up of dyads.

Future Research Directions

Although the implications of the current research findings for future research have been scattered throughout this thesis, a summary is warranted. Perhaps the central finding in this study involves how we measure sibling relationships in the context of family transitions. Focusing on behavioural indices of closeness and conflict is revealing, but it is also limited in reflecting the quality of sibling relationships. That conflict between siblings increases during a family transition is clear, but what does that really tell us? According to most participants in this study, such conflict is relatively meaningless. What seems to matter is the type of conflict that exists. Consequently, when conflict between siblings is measured, measures of the type of conflict need to be incorporated, and the meaning of that conflict to participants must be taken into account.

Measuring closeness, however, is much more complicated. The elusiveness of closeness was clear in this study. Consistent with other studies in which participants were asked to describe closeness with their siblings (e.g., Ross & Milgram, 1982), participants in this study found that whereas it was easy to describe conflict, they found it a challenge to describe closeness. This struggle is understandable given that closeness between siblings is quite different to closeness in other relationships, such as parent-child relationships, friendships, or romantic relationships. Closeness between siblings is subtle. It is an unspoken connection; it is a shared history; it is humour; it is a secret language; it is spending time together engaged in separate activities, such as one sibling colouring and one sibling doing homework; finally, adding to the mystery, it sometimes is expressed as “conflict” such as brothers wrestling. Typical measures of closeness in research with families in transition have involved traditional conceptualizations, such as hugging, seeking advice, and talking together. Although this operationalization of closeness may be useful when studying other relationships, sibling relationships appear to be unique in their expressions of closeness. Consequently, researchers studying families in transition need to revise measures of closeness to incorporate these other dimensions of closeness. Although some researchers in the general sibling research area have developed multidimensional measures of the quality of sibling relationships (e.g., Furman & Buhrmester, 1985), the measures continue to focus primarily on sibling behaviour and tend to disregard more subtle aspects of sibling closeness. Moreover, such measures ignore the meaning of closeness in the sibling relationship to the participant.

Similarly, future research should focus on developing measures that capture the multiple dimensions of support between siblings experiencing family transitions; in

particular, the subtle manifestations of support need to be included as a dimension.

Similarly, measures of support need to be able to accommodate the potentially changing nature of support between siblings involved in family transitions.

Finally, longitudinal studies of families in transition that focus on sibling relationships are needed. The ideal design would include several elements. First, because sibling relationships before divorce are related to sibling relationships after divorce, the study would begin before any transitions occurred. For example, researchers could begin following families before any children have been born. That way, researchers would be able to understand family dynamics as the family is created; for instance, parent-child and marital relationships before a second child is born could be assessed in order to understand how the sibling's subsequent birth affects such family relationships. Following the birth of the sibling, researchers could measure each family subsystem, and the relationships between the subsystems, over the life course. That way, researchers could uncover the exact nature by which family transitions affect sibling relationships. Second, because the study would begin before a transition occurred, it should be able to follow three groups of families: families that remain intact, families that eventually divorce with one child, and families that eventually divorce that include multiple children. In this way, researchers could compare the adjustment of children from divorced families that have siblings to the adjustment of children without siblings. Moreover, the developmental trajectories of siblings from intact homes and children from divorced homes could be compared as the siblings are followed from childhood into adulthood. Third, measures of the sibling relationship and sibling support would be multidimensional, and they would be able to accommodate the possibly changing quality

of the sibling relationship, including changes in support that siblings from divorced homes may provide each other. Fourth, appropriate measures of other family dynamics, such as parent conflict, would be included to further explore the complexities of sibling relationships in families in transition. For example, although all participants in the present study rated their parents' level of conflict before the divorce as being high, there was no sense of the intensity of the parent conflicts, how long the conflicts had existed, or whether the conflict were expressed in participants' presence. Finally, sample sizes would be large enough that quantitative measures could be combined with qualitative measures in order to trace changes in sibling relationships, assess meaning of those changes, and examine relationships among various factors, such as dyad sex composition.

Conclusion

Sibling relationships in the context of family transitions are complex. They involve closeness, conflict, striking sensitivity, compassion, understanding, selfishness, and tolerance. As Nichols (1986) stated, "Answering the question of what happens to the sibling subsystem during divorce is more difficult than answering how divorce affects children." (p.25). This study was a first step in exploring the impact of family transitions on the sibling subsystem from the siblings' perspectives. As such, it provided some insights into how divorce affects sibling relationships. Future research that builds on this beginning information will be valuable in furthering our understanding of these unique and remarkable relationships.

References

- Abramovitch, R., Corter, C., & Pepler, D. (1980). Observations of mixed-sex sibling dyads. *Child Development, 51*, 1268-1271.
- Allison, P.D., & Furstenberg, F.F. (1989). How marital dissolution affects children: Variations by age and sex. *Developmental Psychology, 25*, 540-549.
- Amato, P. (1994). The implications of research findings on children in stepfamilies. In A. Booth, & J. Dunn (Eds.), *Stepfamilies: Who benefits? Who does not?* (pp.81-87). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Amato, P. (1996). Explaining the intergenerational transmission of divorce. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 58*, 628-640.
- Amato, P. (2000). The consequences of divorce for adults and children. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 62*(4), 1269-1287.
- Amato, P.R., & Booth, A. (1996). A prospective study of divorce and parent-child relationships. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 58*, 356-365.
- Amato, P.R., & Keith, B. (1991). Parental divorce and the well-being of children. *Psychological Bulletin, 110*, 26-46.
- Amato, P.R., Loomis, L.S., & Booth, A. (1995). Parental divorce, marital conflict, and offspring well-being during early adulthood. *Social Forces, 73*, 895-915.
- Anderson, E.R. (1999). Sibling, half-sibling, and stepsibling relationships in remarried families. In E.M. Hetherington, S.H. Henderson, & D. Reiss (Eds.), *Adolescent siblings in stepfamilies: Family functioning and adolescent adjustment. Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development, 64*, (4, Serial No. 259).

- Anderson, E.R., & Rice, A.M. (1992). Sibling relationships during remarriage. In E.M. Hetherington & W.G. Clingempeel (Eds.), *Coping with marital transitions: A family systems perspective. Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development*, 57, 149-177.
- Azmitia, M., & Hesser, J. (1993). Why siblings are important agents of cognitive development: A comparison of siblings and peers. *Child Development*, 64, 430-444.
- Bank, L. (1992). Remembering and reinterpreting sibling bonds. In Boer, F., & Dunn, J. (Eds.), *Children's sibling relationships: Developmental and clinical issues* (pp.139-150). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Bank, L., & Kahn, M.D. (1982). *The sibling bond*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Bank, L., Patterson, G.R., & Reid, J.B. (1996). Negative sibling interaction patterns as predictors of later adjustment problems in adolescent and young adult males. In G.H. Brody (Ed.), *Sibling relationships: Their causes and consequences* (pp.197-229). Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Corporation.
- Bauserman, R. (2002). Child adjustment in joint custody versus sole-custody arrangements: A meta-analytic review. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 16 (1), 91-102.
- Boer, F., & Dunn, J. (Eds.). (1992). *Children's sibling relationships: Developmental and clinical issues*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Boer, F., Goedhart, A.W., & Treffers, P.D.A. (1992). Siblings and their parents. In Boer, F., & Dunn, J. (Eds.), *Children's sibling relationships: Developmental and clinical issues* (pp.41-54). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

- Booth, A., & Amato, P.R. (2001). Parental predivorce relations and offspring postdivorce well-being. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 63, 197-212.
- Brody, G.H., & Stoneman, Z. (1987). Sibling conflict: Contributions of the siblings themselves, the parent-sibling relationship, and the broader family system. *Journal of Children in Contemporary Society*, 19, 39-54.
- Brody, G.H., & Stoneman, Z. (1996). A risk-amelioration model of sibling relationships: Conceptual underpinnings and preliminary findings. In G.H. Brody (Ed.), *relationships: Their causes and consequences* (pp.231-247). Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Corporation.
- Brody, G.H., Stoneman, Z., & McCoy, J.K. (1994). Forecasting sibling relationships in early adolescence from child temperaments and family processes in middle childhood. *Child Development*, 65, 77-784.
- Brody, G.H., Stoneman, Z., & McCoy, J.K., & Forehand, R. (1992). Contemporaneous and longitudinal associations of sibling conflict with family relationship assessments and family discussions about sibling problems. *Child Development*, 63, 391-400.
- Bryant, B.K. (1982). Sibling relationships in middle childhood. In M.E. Lamb & B. Sutton-Smith (Ed.), *Sibling relationships: Their nature and significance across the life-span* (pp.87-121). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Bryant, B.K. (1992). Sibling caretaking: Providing emotional support during middle childhood. In F. Boer & J. Dunn (Eds.), *Children's sibling relationships: Developmental and clinical issues* (pp.55-69). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

- Bryant, B.K., & Crockenberg, S.B. (1980). Correlates and dimensions of prosocial behavior: A study of female siblings and their mothers. *Child Development, 51*, 529-544.
- Buchanan, C.M., Maccoby, E.E., & Dornbusch, S.M. (1991). Caught between parents: Adolescents' experience in divorced homes. *Child Development, 62*, 1008-1029.
- Buchanan, C. M., Maccoby, E. E., & Dornbush, S. M. (1996). *Adolescents after divorce*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Buhrmester, D. (1992). The developmental course of sibling and peer relationships. In F. Boer & J. Dunn (Eds.), *Children's sibling relationships: Developmental and clinical issues* (pp. 19-40). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Buhrmester, D., & Furman, W. (1990). Perceptions of sibling relationships during middle childhood and adolescence. *Child Development, 61*, 1387-1398.
- Campbell, L.D., Connidis, I.A., & Davies, L. (1999). Sibling ties in later life. *Journal of Family Issues, 20(1)*, 114-148.
- Caya, M.L., & Liem, J.H. (1998). The role of sibling support in high-conflict families. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 68(2)*, 327-333.
- Chase-Lansdale, P.L., Cherlin, A.J., & Kiernan, K.E. (1995). The long-term effects of parental divorce on the mental health of young adults: A developmental perspective. *Child Development, 66*, 1614-1634.
- Cherlin, A.J., Furstenberg, F.F., Chase-Lansdale, P.L., Kiernan, K.E., Robins, P.K., Morrison, D.R., & Teitler, J.O. (1991). Longitudinal studies of effects of divorce on children in Great Britain and the United States. *Science, 2*, 1386-1389.

- Cicerelli, V.G. (1980). A comparison of college women's feelings toward their siblings and parents. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 42, 111-118.
- Cicerelli, V.G. (1982). Sibling influence throughout the lifespan. In M.E. Lamb & B. Sutton-Smith (Ed.), *Sibling relationships: Their nature and significance across the life-span* (pp.267-284). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Cicerelli, V. (1995). *Sibling relationships across the life span*. New York, NY: Plenum Press.
- Cicerelli, V. (1996). Sibling relationships in middle and old age. In G.H. Brody (Ed.), *Sibling Relationships: Their Causes and Consequences*. (pp. 47-74). Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Corporation.
- Coffey, A., & Atkinson, P. (1996). *Making sense of qualitative data*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Conger, R.D., & Conger, K.J. (1996). Sibling relationships. In R.L. Simons & Associates (Eds.), *Understanding differences between divorced and intact families: Stress, interaction, and child outcome*. (pp.104-121). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Conger, R.D., & Reuter, M.A. (1996). Siblings, parents, and peers: A longitudinal study of social influences in adolescent risk for alcohol use and abuse. In G.H. Brody (Ed.), *Sibling Relationships: Their Causes and Consequences*. (pp.1-30). Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Corporation.
- Conger, K.J., Conger, R.D., & Elder, G.H. (1994). Sibling relations during hard times. In R. Conger & G.H. Elder, Jr. (Eds.), *Families in trouble times: Adapting to change in rural America* (pp.235-252). New York, NY: Aldine.

- Creswell, J.W. (1994). *Research design: Qualitative and quantitative approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Crouter, A.C., McHale, S.M., & Tucker, C.J. (1999). Does stress exacerbate parental differential treatment of siblings? A pattern-analytic approach. *Journal of Family Psychology, 13*(2), 286-299.
- Cummings, E.M., & Davies, P.T. (1994). *Children and marital conflict: The impact of family dispute and resolution*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Dolgin, K.G., & Lindsay, K.R. (1999). Disclosure between college students and their siblings. *Journal of Family Psychology, 13*, 393-400.
- Drapeau, S., Simard, M., Beaudry, M., & Charbonneau, C. (2000). Siblings in family transitions. *Family Relations, 49*, 77-85.
- Duncan, T.E., Duncan, S.C., & Hops, H. (1996). The role of parents and older siblings in predicting adolescent substance abuse: Modeling development via structural equation latent growth methodology. *Journal of Family Psychology, 10*(2), 158-172.
- Dunn, J. (1983). Sibling relationships in early childhood. *Child Development, 54*, 787-811.
- Dunn, J. (1984). Sibling studies and the developmental impact of critical incidents. In P.B. Baltes & O.G. Brim (Eds.), *Life span development and behavior* (vol. 6, pp. 335-353). Orlando, FL: Academic Press.
- Dunn, J. (1988). Connections between relationships: Implications of research on mothers and siblings. In R.A. Hinde & J. Stevenson-Hinde (Eds.), *Relationships within families: Mutual influences* (pp.168-180). Oxford, England: Clarendon Press.

- Dunn, J. (1992). Introduction. In F. Boer & J. Dunn (Eds.), *Children's sibling relationships: Developmental and clinical issues* (pp.xiii-xvi). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Dunn, J. (1993). *Young children's close relationships: Beyond attachment*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Dunn, J. (2000). State of the art: Siblings. *The Psychologist*, 13(5), 244-248.
- Dunn, J., Brown, J., Slomkowski, C., Tesla, C., & Youngblade, L. (1991). Young children's understanding of other people's feelings and beliefs: Individual differences and their antecedents. *Child Development*, 62, 1352-1366.
- Dunn, J., Deater-Deckard, K., Pickering, K., & Golding, J. (1999). Siblings, parents, and partners: Family relationships within a longitudinal community study. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry and Allied Disciplines*, 40(7), 1025-1037.
- Dunn, J., & Kendrick, C. (1982). Siblings and their mothers: Developing relationships within the family. In M.E. Lamb & B. Sutton-Smith (Ed.), *Sibling relationships: Their nature and significance across the life-span* (pp.39-60). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Dunn, J., Slomkowski, C., & Beardsall, L. (1994). Sibling relationships from the preschool period through middle childhood and early adolescence. *Developmental Psychology*, 30(3), 315-324.
- Dunn, J., Slomkowski, C., Beardsall, L., & Rende, R. (1994). Adjustment in middle childhood and early adolescence: Links with earlier and contemporary sibling relationships. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 35(3), 491-504.

- East, P.L. (1996). The younger sisters of childbearing adolescents: Their attitudes, expectations, and behaviors. *Child Development, 67*, 267-282.
- East, P.L., & Rook, K.S. (1992). Compensatory patterns of support among children's peer relationships: A test using school friends, nonschool friends, and siblings. *Developmental Psychology, 28*(1), 163-172.
- Ehrenberg, M.F., & Walker, T.R. (1996, June). *The influence of early family transitions on young adults' attachment styles: A first look at a retrospective data set.* Poster presented at the Family Research Consortium Summer Institute, San Diego, CA.
- Emery, R.E., Cummings, E.M., & Fincham, F.D. (1992). Parenting in context: Systemic thinking about parental conflict and its influence on children. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 60*(6), 909-912.
- Emery, R.E., & Dillon, P. (1994). Conceptualizing the divorce process: Renegotiating boundaries of intimacy and power in the divorced family system. *Family Relations, 43*(4), 374-379.
- Eno, M.M. (1985). Sibling relationships in families of divorce. *Journal of Psychotherapy and the Family, 1*(2), 139-156.
- Erel, O., Margolin, G., & John, R.S. (1998). Observed sibling interaction: Links with the marital and the mother-child relationship. *Developmental Psychology, 34*(2), 288-298.
- Fauber, R.L., Forehand, R., Thomas, A.M., & Wierson, M. (1990). A mediational model of the impact of marital conflict on adolescent adjustment in intact and divorced families: The role of disrupted parenting. *Child Development, 61*, 1112-1123.

- Fauber, R.L., & Long, N. (1991). Children in context: The role of the family in child psychotherapy. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 59*(6), 813-820.
- Fincham, F.D., Grych, J.H., & Osborne, L.N. (1994). Does marital conflict cause child maladjustment? Directions and challenges for longitudinal research. *Journal of Family Psychology, 8*(2), 128-140.
- Floyd, K. (1995). Gender and closeness among friends and siblings. *The Journal of Psychology, 129*, 193-202.
- Forehand, R., Wierson, M., Thomas, A.M., Fauber, R., Armistead, L., Kempton, T., & Long, N. (1991). A short-term longitudinal examination of young adolescent functioning following divorce: The role of family factors. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology, 19*, 97-111.
- Furman, W., & Buhrmester, D. (1985). Children's perceptions of the qualities of their sibling relationships. *Child Development, 56*, 448-461.
- Garcia, M.M., Shaw, D.S., Winslow, E.B., & Yaggi, K.E. (2000). Destructive sibling conflict and the development of conduct problems in young boys. *Developmental Psychology, 36*(1), 44-53.
- Gano-Phillips, S., & Fincham, F.D. (1995). Family conflict, divorce, and children's adjustment. In M.A. Fitzpatrick, & A.L. Vangelisti (Eds.), *Explaining family interactions*. (pp.206-231). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Goetting, A. (1986). The developmental tasks of siblingship over the life cycle. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 48*, 703-714.
- Goldenberg, I., & Goldenberg, H. (1995). Family therapy. In R.J. Corsini, & D. Wedding (Eds.), *Current psychotherapies, 5th Ed.*, Hasca, IL: F.E. Peacock Publishers, Inc.

- Graham-Bermann, S.A., & Cutler, W.E. (1994). The Brother-Sister Questionnaire: Psychometric assessment and discrimination of well-functioning from dysfunctional relationships. *Journal of Family Psychology, 8*(2), 224-238.
- Harrist, A.W., & Ainslie, R.C. (1998). Marital discord and child behavior problems: Parent-child relationship quality and child interpersonal awareness as mediators. *Journal of Family Issues, 19*(2), 140-163.
- Hetherington, E.M. (1988). Parents, children, and siblings six years after divorce. In R. Hinde & J. Stevenson-Hinde (Eds.), *Relationships within families: Mutual influences* (pp. 311-331). Oxford, England: Clarendon Press.
- Hetherington, E.M. (1989). Coping with family transitions: Winners, losers, and survivors. *Child Development, 60*, 1-14.
- Hetherington, E.M. (1991). Presidential address: Families, lies, and videotapes. *Journal of Research on Adolescence, 1*(4), 323-348.
- Hetherington, E.M. (1993). An overview of the Virginia Longitudinal Study of Divorce and Remarriage with a focus on early adolescence. *Journal of Family Psychology, 7*, 39-56.
- Hetherington, E.M. (1999). Should we stay together for the sake of the children? In E. M. Hetherington (Ed.), *Coping with divorce, single parenting, and remarriage: A risk and resiliency perspective* (pp. 93-116). Mahwah NJ: Erlbaum.
- Hetherington, E.M., Henderson, S.H., & Reiss, D. (1999). Adolescent siblings in stepfamilies: Family functioning and adolescent adjustment. *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development, 64*, (4, Serial No. 259).

- Hetherington, E.M., & Clingempeel, W.G. (1992). Coping with marital transitions: A family systems perspective. *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development, 57* (Serial No. 227).
- Hetherington, E.M., Bridges, M., & Insabella, G.M. (1998). What matters? What does not? Five perspectives on the association between marital transitions and children's adjustment. *American Psychologist, 53*(2), 167-184.
- Howe, N., & Ross, H.S. (1990). Socialization, perspective-taking, and the sibling relationship. *Developmental Psychology, 26*(1), 160-165.
- Jekielek, S.M. (1998). Parental conflict, marital disruption, and children's emotional well-being. *Social Forces, 76*, 905-935.
- Jenkins, J.M., & Smith, M.A. (1990). Factors protecting children living in disharmonious homes: Maternal reports. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 29*(1), 60-69.
- Jenkins, J.M., & Smith, M.A. (1992). Sibling relationships in disharmonious homes: Potential difficulties and protective effects. In F. Boer & J. Dunn (Eds.), *Children's sibling relationships: Developmental and clinical issues* (pp.125-138). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Jenkins, J.M., Smith, M.A., & Graham, P.J. (1989). Coping with parental quarrels. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 28*(2), 182-189.
- Kahn, M.D., & Lewis, K.G. (1988). *Siblings in therapy: Life span and clinical issues*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company

- Kaplan, L., Ade-Ridder, L., & Hennon, C.B. (1991). Issues of split custody: Siblings separated by divorce. *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage*, 16, 253-274.
- Kaplan, L., Hennon, C.B., & Ade-Ridder, L. (1993). Splitting custody of children between parents: Impact on the sibling system. *Journal of Contemporary Human Services*, 30, 131-143.
- Kelly, J.B. (2000). Children's adjustment in conflicted marriage and divorce: A decade review of research. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 39(8), 963-973.
- Kempton, T., Armistead, L., Wierson, M., & Forehand, R. (1991). Presence of a sibling as a potential buffer following parental divorce: An examination of young adolescents. *Journal of Clinical Child Psychology*, 20(4), 434-438.
- Kier, C.A. & Fouts, G.T. (1989). Sibling play in divorced and married-parent families. *Journal of Reproductive and Infant Psychology*, 7, 139-146.
- Kowal, A., & Kramer, L. (1997). Children's understanding of parental differential treatment. *Child Development*, 68(1), 113-126.
- Lamb, M.E. (1978). The development of sibling relationships in infancy: A short-term longitudinal study. *Child Development*, 49, 1189-1196.
- Lamb, M.E., & Sutton-Smith, B. (1982). *Sibling relationships: Their nature and significance across the life-span*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Lowenstein, L.F. (2001). Joint custody and shared parenting—Are the courts listening? *Justice of the Peace*, 169(49), 963-966.

- MacKinnon, C.E. (1989). An observational investigation of sibling interactions in married and divorced families. *Developmental Psychology*, 25(1), 36-44.
- Martin, R.A., Kuiper, N.A., Olinger, J. L., & Dance, K.A. (1993). Humor, coping with stress, self-concept, and psychological well-being. *International Journal of Humor Research*, 6(1), 89-104.
- Maxwell, J.A. (1998). Designing a qualitative study. In L. Brickman & D.J. Rog (Eds.), *Handbook of applied research methods* (pp.69-100). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- McClanahan, S.S., & Sandefeur, G. (1994). *Growing up with a single parent: What hurts, what helps*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Miles, M.B., & Huberman, A.M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded Sourcebook* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Minuchin, P. (1988). Relationships within the family: A systems perspective on development. In R.A. & J. Stevenson-Hinde (Eds.), *Relationships within families: Mutual influences* (pp.7-26). Oxford, England: Clarendon Press.
- Morrison, D.R., & Cherlin, A.J. (1995). The divorce process and young children's well-being: A prospective analysis. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 57, 800-812.
- Morrison, D.R., & Coiro, M.J. (1999). Parental conflict and marital disruption: Do children benefit when high-conflict marriages are dissolved? *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 61, 626-637.
- Munn, P., & Dunn, J. (1989). Temperament and the developing relationship between siblings. *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, 12(4), 433-451.

- Newman, J. (1991). College students' relationships with siblings. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 20*, 629-644.
- Newman, J. (1994). Conflict and friendship in sibling relationships. *Child Study Journal, 24*(2), 119-152.
- Nichols, W.C. (1986). Sibling subsystem therapy in family system reorganization. *Journal of Divorce, 9*(3), 13-31.
- Pidgeon, N., & Henwood, K. (1996). Grounded theory: Theoretical background and practical implementation. In J.T.E. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of qualitative research methods for psychology and the social sciences*. Leicester: British Psychological Society.
- Ponzetti, J.J., & James, C.M. (1997). Loneliness and sibling relationships. *Journal of Social Behavior and Personality, 12*, 103-112.
- Patterson, G.R. (1986). Performance Models for Antisocial Boys. *American Psychologist, 41*(4), 432-444.
- Pukalos, J. (1989). Young adult relationships: Siblings and friends. *The Journal of Psychology, 123*, 237-244.
- Rosenberg, E.B. (1980). Therapy with siblings in reorganizing families. *International Journal of Family Therapy, 2*(3), 139-158.
- Ross, H.G., & Milgram, J.I. (1982). Important variables in adult sibling relationships: A qualitative study. In M.E. Lamb & B. Sutton-Smith (Eds.), *Sibling relationships: Their nature and significance across the life-span* (pp.225-249). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

- Schibuk, M. (1989). Treating the sibling subsystem: An adjunct of divorce therapy. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 59(2), 226-237.
- Schwarz, Norbert (1999). Self-reports of behaviors and opinions: Cognitive and communicative processes. In N. Schwarz & D.C. Park (Eds.), *Cognition, Aging, and Self-reports*. (pp.17-43). Hove, England: Psychology Press/Erlbaum.
- Shapiro, E.K., & Wallace, D.B. (1987). Siblings and parents in one-parent families. *Journal of Children in Contemporary Society*, 19(3-4), 91-114.
- Simons & Associates (Eds.). (1996). *Understanding differences between divorced and intact families: Stress, interaction, and child outcome*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Simons, R.L., & Johnson, C. (1996). Mother's parenting. In R. Simons & Associates (Eds.), *Understanding differences between divorced and intact families: Stress, interaction, and child outcome*. (pp.81-93). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Smith, M.A., & Jenkins, J.M. (1991). The effects of marital disharmony on prepubertal children. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, 19(6), 625-644.
- Smith, T.E. (1990). Academic achievement and teaching younger siblings. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 53(4), 352-363.
- Statistics Canada. (March 25, 2002). Health Statistics: Divorce database.
- Stewart, R.B. (1983). Sibling attachment relationships: Child-infant interactions in the strange situation. *Developmental Psychology*, 19(2), 192-199.

- Stocker, C.M., Burwell, R.A., & Briggs, M.L. (2002). Sibling conflict in middle childhood predicts children's adjustment in early adolescence. *Journal of Family Psychology, 16*(1), 50-57.
- Stocker, C., Dunn, J., & Plomin, R. (1989). Sibling relationships: Links with child temperament, maternal behavior, and family structure. *Child Development, 60*, 715-727.
- Stoneman, Z., & Brody, G.H. (1993). Sibling temperaments, conflict, warmth, and role asymmetry. *Child Development, 64*, 1786-1800.
- Stormshak, E.A., Bellanti, C.J., & Bierman, K.L. (1996). The quality of sibling relationships and the development of social competence and behavioral control in aggressive children. *Developmental Psychology, 32*(1), 79-89.
- Vandewater, E.A., & Lansford, J.E. (1998). Influences of family structure and parental conflict on children's well-being. *Family Relations, 47*, 323-330.
- Volling, B.L., & Belsky, J. (1992). The contribution of mother-child and father-child relationships to the quality of sibling interactions: A longitudinal study. *Child Development, 63*, 1209-1222.
- Wallerstein, J.S., & Kelly, J.B. (1980). *Surviving the breakup: How children and parents cope with divorce*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Wallerstein, J.S. (1985). Children of divorce: Preliminary report of a ten-year follow-up of older children and adolescents. *Journal of the American Academy of Child Psychiatry, 24*(5), 545-553.
- Wallerstein, J.S. (1991). The long-term effects of divorce on children: A review. *Journal of The American Academy of Child Psychiatry, 30*(3), 349-361.

- Wallerstein, J.S., Lewis, J.M., & Blakeslee. (2000). *The unexpected legacy of divorce: A 25-year landmark study*. New York, NY: Hyperion.
- Walker, T. R., & Ehrenberg, M.F. (1998). An exploratory study of young persons' attachment styles and perceived reasons for parental divorce. *Journal of Adolescent Research, 13*(3), 320-343.
- Waters, B. (1987). The importance of sibling relationships in separated families. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Family Therapy, 8*(1), 13-17.
- White, L.K., & Riedmann, A. (1992). Ties among adult siblings. *Social Forces, 71*, 85-102.
- Wilson, J.G., Calsyn, R.J., & Orlofsky, J.L. (1994). Impact of sibling relationships on social support and morale in the elderly. *Journal of Gerontological Social Work, 22*, 157-170.
- Wintre, M.G., North, C., & Sugar, L.A. (2001). Psychologists' response to criticisms about research based on undergraduate participants: A developmental perspective. *Canadian Psychology, 42*(3), 216-225.
- Wishart, J.G. (1986). Siblings as models of early infant learning. *Child Development, 57*, 1232-1240.
- Zill, N., Morrison, D.R., & Coiro, M.J. (1993). Long-term effects of parental divorce on parent-child relationships, adjustment, and achievement in young adulthood. *Journal of Family Psychology, 7*, 91-103.

Appendix A

Consent Form

You are being invited to participate in a study entitled ***Sibling relationships in the context of family transitions*** that is being conducted by Jacqueline Bush. Jacqueline Bush is a Graduate Student in the department of Psychology at the University of Victoria and you may contact her if you have further questions by calling 721-8589.

As a graduate student, this research is part of the requirements for a degree in Clinical Psychology and it is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Marion Ehrenberg. You may contact the supervisor at 721-8771.

The purpose of this research project is to investigate sibling relationships in the context of divorce. The effect of divorce on sibling relationships in the long run is unknown. To date, sibling studies have focused almost exclusively on sibling behaviour. The way siblings behave towards one another, however, may not be an accurate reflection of how siblings think or feel about one another; consequently, the central objective of this study is to understand how young adults perceive their sibling relationships to have developed or changed over time as a result of the parental divorce they experienced in childhood.

Research of this type is important because divorce affects all relationships in a family. Although researchers have demonstrated the effects of divorce on marital and parent-child relationships, sibling relationships may also be affected. Research suggests that sibling relationships are important across all stages of the life span. In childhood, sibling relationships are associated with cognitive development, social relationships, and self-esteem; in later adulthood, siblings become important sources of companionship and support. Consequently, it is necessary to understand the effect of divorce on this significant relationship.

You are being asked to participate in this study because you have at least one natural sibling (i.e., adopted or biological) with whom you grew up, and you experienced your parents' divorce before the age of fifteen.

If you agree to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include being interviewed about your family experiences and your sibling relationship(s). This interview is expected to last approximately 60-90 minutes.

Participation in this study may cause some inconvenience to you. Given that the focus of the study is on sibling relationships in the context of divorce, you may experience some mild discomfort in discussing your parents' divorce or your sibling relationship(s).

Participating in this research may pose some potential risks to you. Because the experience of a parents' divorce is an emotional experience, one that can remain somewhat painful throughout a person's lifetime, you may feel some mild emotional discomfort. If you become emotional during the course of the interview, you are free to interrupt or stop the interview at any time. In addition, copies of the University

Counselling Centre pamphlets will be available to you if you desire professional assistance. To reiterate, you have the right to refuse to participate, and you can withdraw from the study at any time during the course of the interview without being penalized in any way.

There are some benefits to your participation in this research. Specifically, your participation will be helpful in developing an understanding of the experience of siblings during divorce. Moreover, such information may be helpful in developing treatment programs designed to help siblings cope with family transitions. Finally, you may benefit from the opportunity to reflect on your sibling relationship(s); in particular, tracing your sibling relationship(s) from early childhood to the present may provide a chance for you to examine how your family and other experiences may play a role in your relationship with your sibling(s).

As a way to compensate you for any inconvenience related to your participation, you will be given bonus course credit points. It is important for you to know that it is unethical to provide undue compensation or inducements to research participants and, if you agree to be a participant in this study, this form of compensation to you must not be coercive. If you would not otherwise choose to participate if the compensation was not offered, then you should decline.

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation. If you do withdraw from the study, your data will be used only if you agree.

In terms of protecting your anonymity, although the interviews are tape-recorded and transcribed, no identifying information will be included in the transcription. Instead of your name, a research number will be assigned to the interview to protect your anonymity.

Your confidentiality and the confidentiality of the data will be protected by locking the tapes and transcribed interviews in a secure filing cabinet in a locked research office. The interview will be assigned a research number, and no identifying information will be included in the transcriptions; names, places, professions, and any other identifying information will be replaced with codes.

Data from this study will be disposed of five years after any publication of research findings in professional journals. Subsequently, the tapes will be erased, and the transcriptions will be shredded.

It is anticipated that the results of this study may be discussed in classes, may be presented at professional conferences, and may be published in scholarly journals. Moreover, if you are interested in the results of the study, copies of the research findings will be provided you. You will also be able to access up-to-date summaries of the research findings through the research project's web site.

In addition to being able to contact the researcher and the supervisor at the above phone numbers, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Associate Vice President Research at the University of Victoria (250-721-7968).

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers.

PARTICIPANT SIGNATURE _____ DATE _____

A COPY OF THIS CONSENT WILL BE LEFT WITH YOU, AND A COPY WILL BE TAKEN BY THE RESEARCHER

Appendix B

The Adult Divorce & Sibling Relationship Interview (ADSRI)

PART A: DEMOGRAPHICS (Ehrenberg & Walker, 1996)

1. Gender: F M

2. Date of Birth: _____ / _____ / _____
(month) (day) (year)

3. Are either of your parents no longer living?

No

Yes.....Which parent? M F SM SF
How old were you when he/she died?

4. Are your parents separated or divorced? Separated Divorced

5. When did your parents separate or stop living together/divorce? _____

6. Is your **mother** now:single _____ separated/divorced _____ remarried _____
married _____ living common-law _____ widowed _____Is your **father** now:single _____ separated/divorced _____ remarried _____
married _____ living common-law _____ widowed _____

7. How many brothers and sisters do you have?

full brothers _____ half-brothers _____ stepbrothers _____
full sisters _____ half-sisters _____ stepsisters _____

Where do you fit in among the children in your family?

the only child _____ the oldest child _____ the youngest child _____
somewhere in the middle _____ a twin _____

8. For each sibling identified:

a. What is _____'s name? (**Note:** let participant know that he/she does not have to give the name if he/she does not want to---name is for the ease of interviewing only--names will not be used in transcripts or results)

b. How old is _____?

9. Do you have any children of your own?

No

Yes.....Child 1: M F age:

Child 2: M F age:

Child 3: M F age:

10. Are you Canadian? Yes No.....What is your nationality?

11. Do you identify with any particular ethnic or cultural group or background?

No Yes (specify) _____

12. Do you identify with any particular religion?

No Yes (specify) _____

13. As a child, were you raised in a particular religion?

No Yes (specify) _____

14. What are your current living arrangements?

with parents _____ alone _____ with roommates _____

with spouse/partner _____ other (specify) _____

15. *for participants not living with their parents only* How old were you when you moved away from home? _____ years

When you left home, what kinds of feelings were there between you and your parents?

positive _____ negative _____ positive & negative _____ neutral _____

16. How far have you gone in school? _____

How far do you have to go? _____

17. *for university students only* What year are you in? _____

18. How far did your mother and father go in school?

a. Mother _____

b. Father _____

19. Are you employed at this time?

No

Yes.....What do you do? _____

How many hours do you work each week? _____

20. What did your father do for a living while you were growing up?

21. What did your mother do for a living while you were growing up?

22. What would you estimate your current household income to be?

Less than \$10,000 _____	\$20,000-\$24,999 _____	\$40,000-\$49,999 _____
\$10,000-\$14,999 _____	\$25,000-\$29,999 _____	\$50,000-\$59,999 _____
\$15,000-\$19,999 _____	\$30,000-\$39,999 _____	\$60,000 or more _____

23. People often think of themselves as belonging to one social class or another. If you had to make a choice, which of the following classes would you consider yourself as belonging to?

working class _____	upper middle class _____
lower middle class _____	upper class _____

24. **For participants still living at home.** Sometimes the economic circumstances of a family can change. Is there a difference between the class you consider your family belonging to while you were growing up and the class you would consider them belonging to now?

working class _____	upper middle class _____
lower middle class _____	upper class _____

For participants not living with their parents. While you were growing up, which of the following classes would you consider your family as belonging to?

working class _____	upper middle class _____
lower middle class _____	upper class _____

25. Was there any time during your childhood when either of your parents were away from home for an extended period? For example, due to a serious illness or a long trip.

No

Yes..... Which parent? M F SM SF

Why? _____

For how long? _____

How old were you? _____

PART B: SIBLING RELATIONSHIP

“Now, I just want to talk a little bit more about your brother(s)/sister(s). Why don’t we start with _____?”

1. How long did you live with _____ before the divorce? _____ years
2. Were you living with _____ during the divorce? Y N
 If No, what were the arrangements? _____
 How often did you have contact? _____
 What percentage of the time was spent with ___? _____%
3. Were you living with _____ after the divorce? Y N
 If No, what were the arrangements? _____
 How often did you have contact? _____
 What percentage of the time was spent with ___? _____%

General Question

1) What is your relationship with _____ like?

A. Before Divorce:

- 1) What was your relationship with _____ like before your parents’ divorce/separation?
- 2) What were the main influences on your relationship with _____ before your parents’ divorce/separation?
- 3) Was there conflict in your relationship with _____ before your parents’ divorce/separation?
- 4) On a scale of 1 to 5, how much conflict would you say there was, with 1 being no conflict at all and 5 being lots of conflict?

1	2	3	4	5
no conflict at all		some conflict		lots of conflict

5) *If indicated “2” or more*

- a) What was this conflict like?
- b) Why do you think there was conflict?

c) Do you think these conflicts affected your relationship with ____? If yes, how so? If no, why not?

6) *If indicated "1"*

Why don't you think there was conflict in your relationship with ____?

7) Were you and ____ close at this time?

8) On a scale of 1 to 5, how close would you say you and ____ were?

1	2	3	4	5
not close at all		somewhat close		extremely close

9) *If answered "2" or more*

a) How would you describe this closeness?

b) Why do you think you and ____ were close?

10) *If answered "1"*

Why do you think you and ____ were not close?

***If indicate simultaneous levels of conflict and closeness, probe why this might be so.

e.g. Why do you think your relationship with ____ was high in both conflict and closeness?

B. During the divorce

1) What was your relationship with ____ like during your parents' divorce/separation?

2) What were the main influences on your relationship with ____ during your parents' divorce/separation?

- 3) Do you think your parents' divorce/separation had an impact on your relationship with _____?

Yes No

If Yes, how did it have an impact?

Would you say the impact was positive or negative?

If no impact, why not?

How would you rate the impact of the divorce on your relationship with _____?

1	2	3	4	5
no impact		some impact		a lot of impact

- 4) Was there conflict in your relationship with ____ during your parents' divorce/separation?
- 5) On a scale of 1 to 5, how much conflict would you say there was, with 1 being no conflict at all and 5 being lots of conflict?

1	2	3	4	5
no conflict at all		some conflict		lots of conflict

6) *If indicated "2" or more*

- a) What was this conflict like?
- b) Why do you think there was conflict between you and _____ during your parents' divorce?
- c) Do you think this conflict affected your relationship with _____? If yes, how so? If no, why not?

7) *If indicated "1"*

Why don't you think there was conflict in your relationship with ____?

8) Were you and ____ close during your parents' divorce/separation?

9) On a scale of 1 to 5, how close would you say you and ____ were?

1	2	3	4	5
not close at all		somewhat close		extremely close

10) *If answered "2" or more*

- How would you describe this closeness?
- Why do you think you and ____ were close?

11) *If answered "1"*

Why do you think you and ____ were not close during your parents' divorce/separation?

12) Do you think your relationship with ____ had an impact on your ability to handle your parents' divorce/separation? If yes, how so? If no, why not?

If previously indicated conflict in the sibling relationship:

13) Do you think the conflict in your relationship with ____ had an impact on your ability to handle your parents' divorce/separation? If yes, how so? If no, why not?

14) Do you think the conflict in your relationship with ____ helped you to handle your parents' divorce?

15) Do you think the conflict in your relationship with ____ interfered with your ability to handle your parents' divorce? If yes, how so?

If previously indicated closeness in the sibling relationship:

16) Do you think the closeness in your relationship with ____ had an impact on your ability to handle your parents' divorce/separation?

***If indicate simultaneous levels of conflict and closeness, probe why this might be so.

e.g. Why do you think your relationship with ____ was high in both conflict and closeness?

C. After the divorce

1) What was your relationship with ____ like after your parents' divorce/separation?

2) What were the main influences on your relationship with ____ after your parents' divorce/separation?

3) Do you think your parents' divorce/separation had an impact on your relationship with ____ after your parents' divorce/separation?

Yes No

How would you rate the impact of the divorce on your relationship with ____?

1	2	3	4	5
no impact		some impact		a lot of impact

4) Was there conflict in your relationship with ____ after your parents' divorce/separation?

5) On a scale of 1 to 5, how much conflict would you say there was, with 1 being no conflict at all and 5 being lots of conflict?

1	2	3	4	5
no conflict at all		some conflict		lots of conflict

6) *If indicated "2" or more*

- a) What was this conflict like?
- b) Why do you think there was conflict?
- c) Do you think this conflict affected your relationship with ____? If yes, how so? If no, why not?

7) *If indicated "1"*

Why don't you think there was conflict in your relationship with ____?

8) Were you and ____ close after your parents' divorce/separation?

9) On a scale of 1 to 5, how close would you say you and ____ were?

1	2	3	4	5
not close at all		somewhat close		extremely close

10) *If answered "2" or more*

- a) How would you describe this closeness?
- b) Why do you think you were close?

11) *If answered "1"*

Why do you think you and ____ were not close?

***If indicate simultaneous levels of conflict and closeness, probe why this might be so.
e.g. Why do you think your relationship with ____ was high in both conflict and closeness?

D. Current relationship

- 1) What is your relationship with ____ like now?
- 2) What are the main influences on your relationship with ____ at this time?

- 3) Do you think your parents' divorce/separation is having an impact on your relationship with _____ now?

Yes No

- 4) If Yes, what is this impact like?

Would you say the impact is positive or negative?

If no, why not?

How would you rate the impact of the divorce on your relationship with _____ now?

1	2	3	4	5
no impact		some impact		a lot of impact

- 5) Is there conflict in your relationship with _____ now?

- 6) On a scale of 1 to 5, how much conflict would you say there is in your relationship with _____ now?

1	2	3	4	5
no conflict at all		some conflict		lots of conflict

- 7) *If indicated "2" or more*

- What is this conflict like?
- Why do you think there is conflict?
- Do you think this conflict is affecting your relationship with _____? If yes, how so? If no, why not?

- 8) *If indicated "1"*

Why don't you think there is conflict in your relationship with _____ now?

- 9) Are you and _____ close now?

10) On a scale of 1 to 5, how close would you say you and ____ are?

1	2	3	4	5
not close at all		somewhat close		extremely close

11) *If answered "2" or more*

- a) How would you describe this closeness?
- b) Why do you think you are close?

12) *If answered "1"*

Why do you think you and ____ are not close?

13) Overall, do you think your parents' divorce/separation has had an impact on your relationship with ____? If yes, how so? If no, why not?

E. Future Relationship

1) Looking ahead, do you think your parents' divorce/separation will affect your future relationship with ____? If yes, how so? If no, why not?

F. Reflection

- 1) We have spent some time tracing the course of your relationship with ____ before, during, and after your parents' divorce. As you reflect back on our discussion, do any particular or additional thoughts about ____ come to mind?
- 2) What do you think your relationship with ____ would have been like if your parents hadn't divorced?

"I just want to switch gears a little bit here, and ask you about other things that were happening in your or your family's life when you were growing up with ____"

G. Other life events

1. Are there any other events in your life or your family's life that you think have had an impact on your relationship with _____? (can be non-normative or normative)

If yes, address each event separately.

- a) How did this event affect your relationship with _____?
 b) How would you rate the impact of this event on your relationship with _____?

1	2	3	4	5
no impact at all		some impact		a lot of impact

- c) How does this event compare to your parents' divorce in terms of its impact on your relationship with _____?

- d) Please rate the extent to which this life event affected your relationship with _____ compared to your parents' divorce/separation.

1	2	3	4	5
not as big an impact as the divorce/sep.		about the same impact as the divorce/sep.		a greater impact than the divorce/sep.

H. Culture

“Again, I just want to switch topics a little bit.”

1. Do you think your cultural/ethnic identity has had an influence on your perception of your parents' divorce? If yes, how so?

2. Do you think your cultural/ethnic identity has had an influence on your perception of your relationship with _____? If yes, how so?

“Now, I would just like to ask you some basic questions about your parents' divorce”

DIVORCE BACKGROUND INFORMATION (Ehrenberg & Walker, 1996)

“I recollect you saying that...”

1. Did your parents ever separate? N Y (If yes) How old were you at the time? _____ years

Did you spend any time in a single parent family?
 No Yes.....Which parent? M F Both
 Length of time: _____

Did your parents get back together? N Y age _____?
 Did your parents get a divorce? N Y age _____?
 Did either of your parents get remarried? N Y age _____?

Which parent? M F Both
 Did you spend time living with your parent and stepparent?
 No
 Yes.....Length of time: _____ Who with? M & SF F & SM Both

Did a stepsibling join your family N Y _____ years
 Did your remarried parents break up? N Y _____ years

2. How long had your parents been married when they separated? _____

3. How much conflict was there in your parents' relationship?

- a) While they were married:

1	2	3	4	5	DK
no conflict		some conflict		lots of conflict	
- b) While they were separating/divorcing

1	2	3	4	5	DK
no conflict		some conflict		lots of conflict	
- c) After they were separated/divorced

1	2	3	4	5	DK
no conflict		some conflict		lots of conflict	

4. How much happiness was there in your parents' relationship with each other before they broke up?

- | | | | | | |
|--------------|---|----------------|---|-------------------|----|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | DK |
| no happiness | | some happiness | | lots of happiness | |

5. While you were growing up (and currently), how able were your parents to get along with each other when it came to matters concerning you? For example, did they agree when you asked permission to do something or on how to raise you?

a) While they were married:

1	2	3	4	5	DK
not at all able		somewhat able		very able	

b) While they were separating/divorcing:

1	2	3	4	5	DK
not at all able		somewhat able		very able	

c) After they were separated/divorced:

1	2	3	4	5	DK
not at all able		somewhat able		very able	

6. Which parent had custody of you when you were growing up?

M	F	Joint	DK
---	---	-------	----

7. While you were growing up, what percentage of all the time spent with your parents did you spend with your mother and father?

a) before your parents separated: _____% time with mother _____% time with father
_____% both

b) after your parents separated: _____% time with mother _____% time with father
_____% both

8. If you were living with one parent while you were growing up, how often did you see the parent you did not live with?

a) One year after your parents had separated:

rarely or never	at least 8 hours of daytime contact or one overnight every 2 weeks over the school year _____
-----------------	---

2 weeks or more of vacation but low contact during the school year _____	2-3 overnights every 2 weeks during the school year _____
--	--

b) Five years after your parents had separated:

rarely or never at least 8 hours of daytime contact
or one overnight every 2 weeks
over the school year _____

2 weeks or more of vacation 2-3 overnights every 2 weeks
but low contact during the during the school year _____
school year _____

9. Currently, how many days a year would you estimate you see or talk to:
your mother _____ your father _____

10. In your opinion, who initiated your parents' separation?
mother _____ father _____ both _____

11. Do you have an understanding of why your parents broke up?

12. How concerned were you about your parents' divorce, while you were growing up?
1 2 3 4 5
not at all concerned somewhat concerned very concerned

How much concern does your parents' divorce cause you currently?
1 2 3 4 5
not at all concerned somewhat concerned very concerned

VITA

Surname: Bush

Given Names: Jacqueline Elaine

Place of Birth: Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Educational Institutions Attended:

University of Victoria	1999 to 2002
University of Western Ontario	1990 to 1995

Degrees Awarded:

B.A. (Honours)	University of Western Ontario	1995
----------------	-------------------------------	------

Honours and Awards:

University of Victoria Graduate Fellowship	1999-2001
--	-----------

Publications:

Maio, G.R., Olson, J.M., & Bush, J. E. (1997). Telling jokes that disparage social groups: Effects on the joke teller's stereotypes. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 27(22), 1986-2000.

UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA PARTIAL COPYRIGHT LICENSE

I hereby grant the right to lend my thesis to users of the University of Victoria Library, and to make single copies only for such users or in response to a request from the Library or any other university, or similar institution, on its behalf or for one of its users. I further agree that permission for extensive copying of this thesis for scholarly purposes may be granted by me or a member of the University designated by me. It is understood that copying or publication of this thesis for financial gain by the University of Victoria shall not be allowed without my written permission.

Title of Thesis:

Sibling Relationships in the Context of Family Transitions

Author


Jacqueline E. Bush

June 6, 2002