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SIBLING RELATIONSHIPS DURING THE YOUNG ADULT YEARS:
AN ANALYSIS OF CLOSENESS, RELATIONAL SATISFACTION,
EVERYDAY TALK, AND TURNING POINTS

A Dissertation

Presented to

the Faculty of Arts and Humanities

University of Denver

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

by

Jennifer Kellie Corti

November 2009

Advisor: Mary Claire Morr Serewicz

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the sibling relationship during the young adult years. Specifically, this study explored how turning points and everyday talk related to closeness and relational satisfaction among college age siblings. One-hundred and ninety-nine young adult participants completed a detailed questionnaire about their relationship with a sibling. Results indicated that (a) geographic distance does not have a significant effect on the closeness among siblings, (b) everyday talk was expressed in terms of three categories: expressions of intimacy, maintenance talk, and relationally risky talk, (c) all three categories of everyday talk related to closeness, while only expressions of intimacy was related to relational satisfaction, (d) there were nine turning point categories (time together, school, family issues, support, moving, change in the family structure, avoidance, conflict, and graduation) that siblings experienced during the young adult years and each related uniquely to closeness, and (e) seven unique patterns of closeness (gradual increase in closeness, sustained high degree of closeness, single disruption of low closeness, single disruptions of high closeness, multiple disruptions of closeness beginning low, sustained moderate degree of closeness, gradual decrease in closeness, and multiple disruptions of closeness beginning high) that siblings experienced during the young adult years.

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Chapter One: Introduction and Literature Review

Family relationships are often the most enduring relationship we experience in our lifetime. As a result of this longevity, family relationships may be the type of relationship in which we experience the most change. Understanding the transitional process within and among family members has been difficult and challenging for researchers (Anderson, 1988; Baxter, Braithwaite, & Nicholson, 1999; Goldscheider & Goldscheider, 1989; Golish, 2000; Graham, 1997; Sullivan & Sullivan, 1980). This study will also face the challenge of exploring the enduring and changing process of relationships among and within the family. Specifically, the present study focuses on how sibling dyads manage and negotiate their changing relationship in young adulthood. As families change, members must respond and learn how to manage and negotiate these changes through the use of complex communication strategies. These strategies are typically employed during critical turning points in the relationship. Therefore, through the examination of turning points, researchers are able to explore how families manage change. Specifically, turning points allow for the examination of how change impacts concepts in family communication such as expressions of closeness. In addition, everyday talk and relational satisfaction are important variables for understanding family communication because they provide insight into the types of conversations in which siblings engage and how satisfied they are with the sibling relationship.

In order to better understand families, it is critical to study subsets within families, such as the sibling subset. Eighty-five percent of adults in the United States have a biological brother or sister and 95% have a sibling such as an adopted, half, or stepsibling (Crispell, 1996). Also, sibling relationships are generally the longest relationships individuals will experience throughout their lifetime, often outlasting the parent/child and the spousal relationship (Cicirelli, 1995; Floyd, 1995). During the course of an individual's life, siblings will interact as playmates, confidants, rivals, support systems, and friends. They will face a lifetime of shared events including childhood, adolescence, adulthood, parental caretaking, and the senior years. With this in mind, sibling relationships play a central role in a considerable number of individual lives.

As individuals age, they face several periods of transition. These transition periods are times of change for both the individual and the family unit, including sibling subunits. Transition periods can include such phenomena as moving from childhood to adolescence, leaving the home, marriage, the birth of children, divorce, illness, and death of a parent. In these times, relationships need to be negotiated and managed due to the impact of change on the family relationship. When a sibling marries, for example, the dynamics of the entire family unit change, along with the dynamics of the sibling relationship. Siblings are forced to negotiate how they will function with the addition of a family member and with the changes in the family dynamic as a whole. Further, the primary focus on the married sibling switches from his or her family of origin to his or her spouse and children. This switch also creates a necessity to re-define and negotiate the sibling relationship.

Turning points are specific events associated with change in the relationship. Baxter and Bullis (1986) conceptualize turning points as “any event or occurrence that is associated with change in the relationship, [with the] turning point [as] central to a process view of relationships” (p. 470). Turning points may be the key to understanding such transitions and the impact they have on the family, and more specifically, the sibling relationship. Therefore, the goal of this research is to study sibling relationships during a specific transition period by examining turning points and their relationship with closeness, geographic distance and how it relates to closeness, and the relationship between both closeness and relational satisfaction with everyday talk. In addition, the goal of the study is to examine the role of turning points and everyday talk in explaining and understanding closeness and relational satisfaction.

Families are variant and come in many shapes and forms. Some are “traditional,” in that they contain a father, mother, and biological children. Others are “non-traditional,” in that they are formed through remarriage, partnerships between gay and lesbian couples, adoption by single, homosexual, or heterosexual couples, or other variations. A commonality, however, is that families can be “defined through [their] communication—both verbal and nonverbal—rather than solely through biological or legal kinship” (Whitchurch & Dickson, 1999, p. 687). It is also acceptable to look at families from a biological or legal kinship (Whitchurch & Dickson, 1999). Therefore, in the present study, siblings are defined as at least two individuals in the same family unit that are biological, step, or adopted siblings. In other words, in order to be classified as siblings, the two individuals must be related

through blood or law (Mikkelson, 2007). In the present study, it is particularly important to specify what constitutes a sibling relationship due to the nature of the study and the specific guidelines of recruitment, which will be detailed in chapter 3. Although many people have “siblings of choice,” this research focuses only on siblings related through blood or law.

There are many issues that are important to understand in order to develop the most thorough conceptualization of sibling relationships. The present study focuses on four main areas: systems theory, sibling relationships, transition periods and turning points, and closeness, relational satisfaction, and everyday talk. In the following section, each of the four main areas will be addressed and the most current information will be presented—gaps in the literature will also be discussed.

Studying Families

The study of families in the communication discipline has been a long-standing tradition. Whitchurch and Dickson (1999) set forth seven assumptions about studying families from a communication approach. These assumptions are important because they lay the foundation for the present study. The assumptions are as follows: (1) relationships are constructed through interaction, (2) the family is an interacting system, (3) families are constantly managing and negotiating dialectical tensions throughout their family life cycle, (4) families must manage and renegotiate their relational definitions throughout their family life cycle, (5) communication definitions of family subunits are privileged over structural definitions of family subunits, (6) understanding communication during family transitions is critical to

understanding family life cycles, and (7) families create and maintain their own unique family mini-culture (Whitchurch and Dickson, 1999).

As stated earlier, these seven assumptions are important to consider as they set the foundation for studying families and inform the present study. The first assumption expresses that relationships are constructed through interaction. This assumption stresses the importance of examining the interaction between family members (i.e., siblings) in order to understand the meanings created within that relationship. The second assumption states that the family is an interacting system. Systems theory is critical in terms of informing this study about how a subset in the family (i.e., siblings) manages change in and through their interaction. The third assumption asserts that families are constantly managing and negotiating dialectical tensions throughout their family life cycle. While the present study does not specifically examine dialectical tensions, it is exploring how siblings manage and negotiate change in their relationship that could later be reviewed as dialectical tensions. The fourth assumption states that families must manage and renegotiate their relational definitions throughout their family life cycle. Throughout the life cycle, it is imperative that definitions of members (i.e., siblings) be managed and negotiated as members experience change. The fifth assumption conveys that communication definitions of family subunits are privileged over structural definitions of family subunits. Communicative definitions of the sibling relationship must be managed and renegotiated as the relationship changes due to various life stages. The sixth assumption expresses that understanding communication during life transitions is critical to understanding family life cycles. Life transitions are the key

to understanding familial relationships as members (i.e., siblings) manage and renegotiate their relationships. The final assumption explains that families create and maintain their own unique family mini-culture. Siblings, in particular, create and maintain their own mini-culture and this mini-culture provides insight into the sibling relationship.

The present study seeks to utilize the aforementioned assumptions as it works to understand the sibling relationship during the life transition into and through young adulthood. Specifically, the present study aims to understand the sibling relationship through the use of communication strategies and important turning point events. Now that the importance of studying families has been examined, the theoretical foundation for the present study will be explored.

Systems Theory

The present study adopts a system perspective in understanding family communication. A system is a “set of components that interrelate with one another to form a whole” (Galvin, Dickson, & Marrow, 2006, p. 311). Systems theory examines the whole family rather than the individual and how the individual functions together within the family as an entity. According to Whitchurch and Constantine (1993), “systems theorists seek to explain the behavior of complex, organized systems of sorts” (p. 325). Finding explanations of objective behavior is central to the theory and its assumptions. Systems theory is considered to be a grand theory (Galvin et al., 2006), as it is applicable to so many phenomena and is used across multiple disciplines, including the natural and social sciences.

Systems theory is considered to be a part of the cybernetic tradition of communication. Cybernetics is the tradition of examining “complex systems in which many interacting elements influence one another” (Littlejohn & Foss, 2005, p. 40). A family is an example of a system because “members are not isolated from one another, and their relationships must be taken into account to fully understand that family as a system” (Littlejohn & Foss, 2005, p. 40). A researcher taking a cybernetic perspective would ask questions of a family such as: How do members act towards one another? How do family members influence each other? How do family members communicate to maintain stability? (Littlejohn & Foss, 2005). The present study seeks to follow the cybernetics tradition in that the central question is regarding how siblings communicate to maintain the stability of the relationship during the transition into and through the young adult years.

As systems, families must be examined as a whole rather than for just their unique, individual parts. For example, when only one individual (such as a child) leaves the home for the first time, all members of the family system are affected by the change. Therefore, the entire family, and subsystems within the family, must be studied, rather than just the departing member. Connidis (1992) explains “the experience of one member affects others in the family” (p. 973). The present study seeks to simulate this by examining a subsystem in the system that represents the experiences of the sibling relationship. Therefore, only one member of the sibling dyad will be utilized to begin to understand the way siblings manage the change to their relationship in the transition into young adulthood.

As described in the introduction, sibling relationships are a subsystem of the family system. By focusing on the subsystem of siblings, the researcher seeks to better understand the ongoing family processes as the structure of the family system changes in response to sibling communication patterns. In particular, the present study follows the approach of systems theory by which “systems approach sees change as processed by the entire family system, rather than just a single family member” (Whitchurch & Constantine, 1993, p. 331). Overall, the present study seeks to better understand the sibling relationship during the transition period into young adulthood as viewed from a systems perspective with the lens that, as change occurs with one member or subsystem, all members are affected by it.

Yerby (1995), in her groundbreaking work on systems theory, explains how families are best seen as systems and how this view of families enables us to better understand families. She writes:

Systems theory has taught us to see our own and other family members’ behavior as interrelated, to locate predictable patterns of interaction that seem to exert more power over the family than do any individual family members themselves, to see problems in terms of relationship struggles rather than the “fault” of one person who is “scapegoated” and “blamed” for others’ pain, and to explore the intergenerational legacy of family experience. Most of all, systems theory has helped us to pay attention to our interdependence. (pp. 339-340)

The above quote is foundational for the present study. The family subsystem of siblings can be seen as each sibling’s behavior being interrelated with the other sibling(s). In addition, predictable patterns of talk can be examined, as well as how these patterns of talk affect the sibling relationship. Finally, the family subsystem of

siblings can be viewed as each member experiencing interdependence, rather than independence, with other siblings.

Galvin et al. (2006) further explains the components of systems theory that affect the present research study. Systems theory contains seven characteristics that are critical to the theory: (1) interdependence, (2) wholeness, (3) patterns/regularities, (4) interactive complexity, (5) openness, (6) complex relationships, and (7) equifinality. Interdependence is the concept that “a change in one part of the system affects the entire system” (Galvin et al., 2006, p. 312). In terms of family relationships, if a change occurs in one family member, all members (i.e., siblings) will be affected by that change. Wholeness can be understood as the notion that the system cannot be understood by looking at individual parts in isolation from the others, but rather, must be understood as an entire entity (Yerby, 1995). In other words, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Therefore, the present study focuses on a sibling examining the sibling relationship. The third characteristic, patterns and regularities, is the idea that systems, particularly relational systems such as families, “develop patterns that make life reasonably predictable and manageable (Galvin et al., 2006, p. 313). Interactive complexity refers to the idea that “interaction patterns trump cause/effect analysis” (Galvin et al., 2006, p. 313). In other words, relational communication is an ongoing process, so it is impossible to identify what action came first. Openness explains that systems can “interchange with the surrounding environments” (Galvin et al., 2006, p. 313). This means that family life does not occur in isolation, but rather, members engage with life outside the confines of the family unit, which in turn, affects the family. The concept of

complex relationships refers to the belief that there are multiple subsystems that make up a system, and that these subsystems must interact to maintain the overall system (in family communication, the idea of subsystems is central in that a family is made up of several different subsystems). Finally, equifinality explains that goals may be accomplished in many different ways and that there is no one correct way to accomplish them. For example, raising good children happens in many different ways with the same goal being reached (Galvin et al., 2006). The present study specifically utilizes two of these components, which will now be examined.

The first influence systems theory has on the present study is the notion that family members are interrelated and interdependent. For example, in the present study (which examines siblings leaving home for the first time), as one sibling leaves the home the effect of the change is not only seen on the departing sibling, but also on the other siblings. The siblings in the dyad must learn how to manage and negotiate their relationship as a result of the change that occurred with one of its members. The second influence of systems theory on the present research is the idea of subsystems. As Galvin et al. (2006) mentioned, the family is composed of numerous subsystems that make up the entire system. The goal of the present study is to focus on the sibling subsystem to better understand the unique relationship between siblings.

It is also important to recognize that systems theory takes a positivistic or logical-empirical approach, which is the same approach of the present study. Logical-empiricism “presumes an objective reality that can be discovered through appropriate methods” (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2006, p. 4). The logical-empiricist’s goal is to predict and offer generalized explanations of a particular phenomenon.

System theories attempt to understand how a system “manages to sustain and control itself over time” (Littlejohn & Foss, 2005, p. 41). Therefore, the present study seeks to find generalizations about how siblings manage their relationship through points of transition.

Systems theory has informed scholars on the understanding of family communication patterns and is effective in measuring complexity in family systems. For example, Olson (2000) found that a family system that is balanced in cohesion, flexibility, and communication tends to be more functional by use of systems theory. The study was grounded in systems theory, in that each component (cohesion, flexibility, and communication), impacts the system. For example, communication was examined by focusing on the family as a group and family cohesion was defined as “the emotional bonding that family members have towards one another” (Olson, 2000, p. 145). Olson (2000) concluded by explaining that family therapists could help reduce problems by helping change the pattern of interaction in which the family participated. Another study that utilized systems theory was conducted by Schrodt, Braithwaite, Soliz, Tye-Williams, Miller, Lamb, and Marko (2007), in which they examined stepfamilies and their use of everyday talk using a systems approach. Three members of a stepfamily were asked to complete a questionnaire. Members included a stepchild, stepparent, and parent from the same stepfamily. Results indicated that stepchildren used more forms of everyday talk with their residential parent compared to that of their stepparent or nonresidential parent. This study was important because it demonstrated that there are different communication patterns that occur within a stepfamily system.

A third study that utilized systems theory in blended families was conducted by Baxter, Braithwaite, and Bryant (2006). The study examined the communication structures of college-aged children and the triadic relationship with their residential parent and stepparent in well-established blended families. Four types of triadic communication structures were derived: linked triad, outsider triad, adult-coalition triad, and complete triad. The linked triad was characterized by the child wanting the residential parent to act as an intermediary between themselves and the stepparent; therefore, communication was indirect between child and stepparent. The outsider triad was characterized by the child feeling close to the residential parent, yet viewing the stepparent as an outsider resulting in limited communication with the stepparent. The adult-coalition triad was characterized by the child viewing the residential parent as betraying the child/parent relationship and demonstrating greater loyalty to the stepparent. As a result, communication was suspicious and untrusting with the residential parent and uncomfortable with the stepparent. The final triad was the complete triad in which there was positive communication among all dyads in the triad. Through the lens of systems theory, blended families' complex communication structures were examined, enabling a greater understanding of communication in blended families. As demonstrated by these studies, systems theory allows researchers to examine family communication patterns and the effects of the patterns on family relationships.

Systems theory provides a framework in studying families and specifically family subsystems. The present study seeks to understand how siblings sustain their relationship as it changes overtime. Systems theory provides the philosophical

framework necessary to understand siblings as they transition through life. This will be addressed in more detail later in this study. Now that the theoretical framework of the study has been explored, the family subsystem of siblings will now be examined.

Siblings Relationships

There are a number of issues that are important to understand in order to develop an idea of how sibling relationship experience change. The following section reviews the existing literature on sibling relationships throughout the lifespan by first focusing on childhood and adolescence. It then goes on to focus on adulthood, including young adulthood, middle adulthood, and late adulthood.

While research does exist on sibling relationships, it is an understudied family relationship (Gaines, Rugg, Zemore, Armm, Yum, Law, Underhill, & Feldman, 1999; Mauthner, 2002) compared to other family and personal relationships (Pearson, Nelson, Titsworth, & Harter, 2003). The study of sibling relationships, however, has been a focal point of some research, especially in terms of sibling relationships in childhood including birth order (Paulhus, Trapnell, & Chen, 1999; Toman, 1961), cognitive and social development (Abramovitch, Pepler, & Corter, 1982), sibling rivalry (Goetting, 1986) power (Bigner, 1974; Mauthner, 2002), and sibling relationships in middle adulthood to late adulthood (Connidis & Campbell, 1995; Stocker, Lanthier, & Furman, 1997). Overall, siblingship is “unique and influential” (Goetting, 1986, p. 703). Research on siblings has also found that siblings “share time, space, and personal history” (Fitzpatrick & Caughlin, 2002, p. 748) and they “offer each other companionship, security, and love” (Fitzpatrick & Caughlin, 2002, p. 745). In addition, others (Buhrmester, 1992; Lempers & Clark-Lempers, 1991;

Updegraff & Obedidallah, 1999) have found that siblings serve as sources of intimacy and emotional support.

Siblinghood in childhood and adolescence. The nature of sibling relationships in childhood and adolescence has been primarily researched in psychology and sociology. Several books have been written that focus on the sibling relationship in childhood (Bank & Kahn, 1997; Coles, 2006; Dunn, 1985; Edwards, Hadfield, Lucey, & Mauthner, 2006; Gallagher, Powell, & Rhodes, 2006). None, however, have taken a specific communication focus (Bank & Kahn, 1997; Coles, 2006; Dunn, 1985; Edwards, Hadfield, Lucey, & Mauthner, 2006; Gallagher, Powell, & Rhodes, 2006). Due to the lack of research in this area of communication, this section presents existing research on sibling relationships in childhood and adolescence from other disciplines.

Sibling rivalry has been a central area of research for psychology and sociology (Oberndorf, 1929). “Siblings are each other’s main competitors over parental resources,” (Michalski & Euler, 2007, p. 189), thus, they often fight for their parents’ attention and favoritism. Parents tend to treat children differently whether or not they realize it and this variation in treatment may lead to sibling rivalry. For example, later-born children may have more lax bedtimes or may be allowed to hold onto a favorite toy longer than firstborn child (Dunn, 1985). In addition, when children are very young and a disagreement erupts, parents tend to favor the younger child three out of four times by scolding the older child (Dunn, 1985).

Children also make comparisons between their own and their sibling’s relationship with their parents (Feinberg, Neuderhiser, Simmens, Reiss, &

Hetherington, 2000). Past research demonstrates that parents' differential treatment affects siblings. For example, a sibling who receives more discipline than his or her sibling reports lower self-esteem and more internalization of problems than the sibling who receives less discipline (Daniels, Dunn, Furstenberg, & Plomin, 1985). Brody, Stoneman, and McCoy (1992) found that parents use higher rates of control over younger children who appear to be more emotional, and thus, children report more negativity toward their sibling due to the control and lack of warmth from their parents. Conger and Conger (1994) found that when children are treated differently with regard to conflict, they engage in more delinquency behavior two years later. Similarly, older children whose mothers report disciplining them more also report more externalizing problems three years later (McGuire, Dunn, & Plomin, 1995). Shanahan, McHale, Crouter, and Osgood (2008) conducted a study on parents' differential treatment of siblings and its effect on sibling depression. Results indicate that older siblings and female siblings report less parental warmth compared to their siblings, which relates to higher level of depression symptoms. In addition, they found that "differential maternal warmth was most strongly associated with firstborns' sibling warmth; differential parental conflict was most strongly associated with second-borns' sibling conflict" (Shanahan, McHale, Crouter, & Osgood, 2008, p. 491). Research, therefore, has found that children are aware of parents' differential treatment and are affected by it in a multitude of ways. This differential treatment may affect siblings into adulthood and therefore, affect how close or satisfied individuals are with their siblings. While this is not directly related to the present study, differential treatment by parents and the sibling response to it may affect

sibling relationships in the present with regard to overall closeness and relational satisfaction.

Birth order is another area of research favored by psychologists. The data, however, has been inconsistent. Some scholars say that birth order plays no impact on personality (Beer & Horn, 2000). Others, however, report birth order as a reason for certain personality traits (Borkenau, Riemann, Angleitner, & Spinath, 2001). Researchers have attempted to define certain personality traits based on the order of the children (Bank & Kahn, 1997). Dixon, Reyes, Leppert, and Pappas (2008) examined personality and birth order in families with six or more children. Findings indicated that the youngest sibling scored higher on extroversion and psychoticism as compared to the oldest child. In addition, the youngest three siblings scored higher on extraversion than the oldest three siblings. Conclusions of this study suggest birth order does, in fact, play a role in personality differences among siblings. While this is not directly related to the present study, birth order effects on personality may affect the study in how siblings relate to one another and, therefore, affect overall closeness and relational satisfaction.

Birth order has also been used to study the differences in contact between older and younger children. Sulloway (1996) asserts that firstborns act as surrogate parents to younger siblings. Pollet and Nettle (2007) found that adult firstborn siblings are “approximately two and half times more likely than lastborns to have had contact with siblings several times a week or daily, instead of once or not at all over the past 12 months” (p. 1803). Therefore, birth order may play an important role into

how much contact siblings have with one another, which may equate to closeness and relational satisfaction, which is examined in the present study.

Birth order also affects how siblings treat each other. For example, Buhrmester and Furman (1990) found that siblings in third grade report a greater amount of nurturance from older siblings than those in ninth or twelfth grade. In addition, as siblings grow older, they exhibit less power and status over younger siblings than when siblings are younger in age (Buhrmester & Furman, 1990; Youniss, 1980). Siblings who have greater spacing between ages show greater amounts of nurturance to younger siblings than those who are closer in age. Siblings also “report greater affection, prosocial behavior, and admiration of siblings who are more than four years different in age than more closely spaced siblings” (Buhrmester & Furman, 1990, p. 1392). These findings suggest that birth order plays a role in how various siblings treat each other.

Despite the debate regarding birth order, it cannot be denied that siblings play important roles in each others’ lives. For example, siblings help in socializing each other and developing social skills (Eisenberg, 1992). In addition to socialization, siblings (especially older siblings) engage in teaching one another (Minnett, Vandell, & Santrock, 1983), and both younger and older siblings benefit from this teaching. Besides teaching, younger siblings also model behaviors of older siblings (Brim, 1958) in both positive and negative ways. Siblings provide guidance, as well as caretaking for each other (Bryant, 1982). Siblings do this especially when parental influence is limited. Siblings are a support system for each other (Furman & Buhrmester, 1985), and this is seen throughout the lifespan. Siblings can compensate

for poor relationships with other family and friends (Milevsky, 2005). Overall, siblings play important roles in each other's lives that continue into adulthood.

Childhood and adolescence are important developmental years for siblings. Research from fields outside communication has focused on sibling rivalry, sibling comparisons, birth order, and socialization, which may affect sibling relationships in adulthood. These findings provide a foundation for sibling research in adulthood. While communication scholars have examined various factors of sibling relationships in adulthood, these factors are different from the factors examined by other scholars regarding siblinghood in childhood and adolescence (and reviewed in the preceding section). Research in adulthood has focused on the value of siblings, relational maintenance, relational satisfaction, conflict, and closeness, which will be reviewed in the following section (Myers, 1999; Myers and Members of COM 200, 2001; Myers & Weber, 2004; Milevsky, 2005; Milevsky, Smoot, Leh, & Ruppe, 2005).

Siblinghood in adulthood. Communication scholars recently began contributing to the research on sibling relationships, particularly in adulthood. For the purpose of this review of literature, adulthood consists of all three major divisions: young adulthood, middle adulthood, and late adulthood. This section reviews the existing literature on sibling relationships from a communication perspective in the adult years to gain a greater understanding of the overall sibling relationship.

Relational maintenance has been a key area of study for sibling scholars. Myers and various colleagues (2001, 2004) have pioneered the study of relational maintenance and the sibling relationship with regards to communication. Myers and

Members of COM 200 (2001) found that siblings report using relational maintenance activities as follows (listed from most often to least often): tasks, positivity, assurance, networks, and openness. In addition, Myers et al. (2001) found that sibling liking is positively related to relational maintenance, that females use more relational maintenance behaviors than men, and female-female sibling dyads use relational maintenance behaviors more than other sibling dyads.

In addition to traditional examinations of relational maintenance, Myers and Weber (2004) extended the relational maintenance literature to look at specific relational maintenance behaviors siblings use in adulthood. Six factors were identified as important in terms of relational maintenance and siblings. They are as follows: (a) confirmation, (b) humor, (c) social support, (d) family visits, (e) escape, and (f) verbal aggression. The use of confirmation, humor, social support, and family visits were directly related to sibling liking, commitment, and trust. The study of relational maintenance in sibling relationships has shown researchers what maintenance behaviors siblings most frequently use, and what behaviors siblings uniquely use in order to maintain their relationships. Relational maintenance is important to the foundation of the present study in that siblings may identify similar relational maintenance behaviors as turning points in their relationship during the young adult years. For example, siblings may report the use of social support or visiting one another as an important turning point.

Like relational maintenance, other positive aspects of sibling relationships in adulthood have been researched. For example, sibling interpersonal solidarity, individualized trust, and self-disclosure contributed to sibling communication

satisfaction and are strongly related to sibling communication satisfaction (Myers, 1998). In addition, among the three, interpersonal solidarity was the “largest predictor of sibling communication satisfaction” (Myers, 1998, p. 313). Martin, Anderson, and Mottet (1997) found that for young adult siblings, self-disclosure was significantly positively related to understanding. Overall, interpersonal solidarity, individualized trust, and self-disclosure are all important contributors to the sibling relationship. While these components are not being directly examined in the present study, they do impact communication satisfaction and understanding, which may be linked to relational satisfaction and closeness.

Another positive aspect of sibling relationships is that the sibling relationship can compensate for lack of support from family members or friends. Milevsky (2005) found that adult siblings who receive high sibling support scored “significantly lower on loneliness and depression, and higher on self-esteem and life satisfaction” (p. 749). With regard to low support from mothers, siblings provided compensation for loneliness, depression, and self-esteem, and in terms of low support from fathers, sibling interaction compensated for loneliness, self-esteem, and life satisfaction. Finally, sibling relationships also compensated for low support from friends across all four concepts—loneliness, depression, self-esteem, and satisfaction. Overall, Milevsky’s findings demonstrate that siblings can help compensate for lack of support from parents and friends. These findings support the notion that siblingship is important and, therefore, valuable to examine—supporting the need for the present study.

Siblings play an important role in that they support one another. In addition, siblings also are important in that siblings value their relationships with each other. According to Cicirelli (1980), college women felt that “ties with siblings were equally important as ties with the mother when a family member was needed as a confidant” (p. 116). Women also felt more “positive toward their siblings than toward their fathers when they needed or perceived a family member in the role of either confidant or helper” (p. 116). The research, therefore, shows that relationships with siblings are important to young adults.

Another positive aspect of sibling relationships is that siblings provide care for each other. Specifically, gender was found to be a variable in sibling warmth—“participants with a female sibling as their most important sibling reported more warmth in their relationship than participants with a male sibling as their most important sibling” (Milevsky, 2005, p. 131). This was consistent with gender research on siblings in which female siblings demonstrate more care for the others than men. Age, therefore, plays an important role in the amount of warmth individuals feel with regard to their sibling relationship. Similarly, in terms of closeness, family size was a significant predictor of sibling closeness in that participants with more siblings scored lower on sibling closeness, communication, and support (Milevsky, 2005). This was most likely due to individual siblings not developing relationships that were as close with each individual sibling.

With regard to gender, Bedford (1989) found that adult women were more aware of their feelings for their sisters than adult men were with their brothers, which may be due to women naturally focusing on relationships and feelings more than

men. Overall, scholars have found that demographics such as age, gender, or family size impact sibling warmth and closeness. While these three demographic factors will not be examined in the present study, they are important variables to consider in future studies and therefore, the present study aims to provide a foundation for such future studies.

Another area of research on sibling relationships has examined factors that relate to satisfaction. For example, predictors of communication satisfaction among adult siblings were equality, receptivity, immediacy, similarity, and composure (Myers, Cavanaugh, Dohmen, Freeh, Huang, Kapler, Leonatti, Malicay, Schweig, Sorensen, Vang, & Wise, 1999). Additional research on sibling communication satisfaction found that adult sibling communication satisfaction was substantially related to sibling liking and loving (Myers, 1999). These findings help scholars to determine what accounts for sibling liking, loving, and overall communication satisfaction within the sibling relationship. With regard to the present study, communication satisfaction may play a role in relational satisfaction, closeness, and everyday topics of conversations—all of which are examined in the present study.

Another area of study on sibling relationships is commitment. In a study looking at commitment across the lifespan, Rittenour, Myers, and Brann (2007) found that commitment remains stable and that there are no significant differences between childhood/adolescence, early/middle adulthood, and old age. This is important as commitment may play an important role in the present study's examination of closeness and relational satisfaction—siblings may report greater closeness and satisfaction if they feel a greater commitment to one another.

A burgeoning area of research in the sibling relationship is communication motives. Fowler (2009) examined communication motives and whether they varied as a function of age or gender. First, the important reasons for communicating with a sibling (ranked most to least) were: (a) intimacy, (b) comfort, (c) mutuality, (d) obligation, and (e) control/escape. With regard to age and varying motivations, results indicated siblings aged 18-34 were motivated to communicate with a sibling due to control/escape and mutuality more than other age groups of siblings. Gender was also found to be a motivator for siblings. First, sisters who reported about sisters were more likely to report comfort as a motivator of communication than other sibling combinations. In addition, sisters reporting about either a sister or a brother were more likely to be motivated by intimacy than brothers reporting on brothers. This study is important because it specifically looks at the motivating factors siblings attribute to communicating with their siblings.

Verbal aggression has been another area of interest among scholars who study adult sibling relationships. This area of research is particularly relevant to the present study because verbal aggression may be seen as a turning point in the relationship and the present study is examining turning points—therefore, it may have a negative impact on sibling closeness. Myers and Bryant (2008) examined factors associated with seven types of verbally aggressive messages that siblings use. The seven types of messages were name-calling, insults, withdrawal, physical acts or threats, repudiating the relationship, unfair comparison, and negative affect. Myers and Bryant found that the top three most hurtful messages were repudiating the relationship, insults, and unfair comparisons. The top three messages in perceived

intensity were unfair comparisons, name calling, and physical acts or threats. The top three messages in perceived intent were physical acts or threats, negative affect, and name-calling. These findings provide insight for the present study in that verbal aggression can be seen as a turning point and therefore, may affect sibling closeness. While these seven types of messages are not specifically examined in the present study, similar turning points may be experienced.

Bevan and colleagues (2006, 2007) have begun to look at jealousy within adult sibling relationships. Bevan and Hale (2006) found that siblings and dating partners experience more intense jealous emotions than cross-sex friends. Bevan and Stetzenbach (2007) examined communication responses to jealousy (CRJ). Five CRJs were found: negative affect expression (e.g., appearing sad and depressed), integrative communication (e.g., explaining my feelings to my sibling), avoidance, distributive communication (e.g., quarreling and arguing), and violence. Overall, “participants reported moderate sibling jealousy” (Bevan & Stetzenbach, 2007, p. 74). Of the five CRJs, avoidance was reported more than the others. In addition, there was a positive relationship between communication satisfaction and using integrative communication to express jealousy; this is the most positive response because it involved explaining feelings to the sibling rather than avoiding, arguing, appearing sad, or using or threatening violence. Finally, “adult siblings’ reported use of distributive communication, avoidance/denial, and violence to express jealousy [was] negatively related to communication satisfaction” (Bevan & Stetzenbach, 2007, p. 73), which is understandable considering these are more negatively valenced

behaviors. These may be important as siblings may report them as a turning point event.

While the present study does not focus on these specific areas of research (i.e., relational maintenance, commitment, verbal aggression), they are important to examine when discussing what little is currently known about the sibling relationship. In addition, these findings may provide future understanding when examined with aspects of the present study in future studies. For example, the present study focuses on everyday talk, which may relate to communication satisfaction. Future studies can examine these two variables together. Also, demographic factors may impact the closeness individuals experience during various turning points; therefore, future studies may examine these demographics in connection with turning points and closeness. Finally, the way in which siblings engage in conflict may affect everyday talk and turning points in addition to how the conflict relates to sibling closeness.

Overall, limited research has been conducted on sibling relationships by communication scholars and therefore, further research needs to examine siblings. Research that has been conducted has focused on siblings in adulthood and has examined relational maintenance, demographic factors, communication satisfaction, commitment, conflict, and verbal aggression. While little work is focused on sibling relationships as a whole, scholars have examined closeness among siblings during adulthood. Sibling closeness will be addressed later in the study as a variable that continues to need to be studied in order to gain a better understanding of siblings. First, though, life transitions will to be explored because the premise of the study is on the life transition of siblings leaving the home and the changes that result from the

transition and how this, in turn, affects sibling closeness, relational satisfaction, and everyday talk.

Life Transitions

Life transitions are another foundational aspect to the present study as the focus is exclusively on sibling relationships during the transition into young adulthood and how siblings manage and negotiate their relationships during this time of change. Life transitions are various periods in an individual's life "when individuals' roles, relationships, and ecological contexts are altered" (Raymore, Barber, & Eccles, 2001, p. 198). Some key life transitions take place when moving from adolescence to adulthood, which includes leaving the home, marriage, having children, divorce, or death of various family members (Connidis, 1992). For the purpose of the present study, the life transition of interest and which is being observed is the passing from the adolescent stage into the young adult stage. This can be a time when "individuals leave behind so-called youthful freedom and begin to take responsibility for different aspects of their lives" (Raymore et al., 2001, p. 178). The remainder of this section explores why the transition from adolescence to young adulthood is important for the sibling relationship.

The focus of the present study is on the young adult years, and specifically on siblings who no longer live under the same roof or share living space. The young adult stage, which encompasses this transition period, is defined as "those years when a person no longer resides with his or her parents and siblings and has become actively involved with his or her family of procreation and/or with economic endeavors" (Goetting, 1986, p. 707). This is a period of change and exploration when

compared to long-term adult roles, which involve continuous and demanding responsibilities. During this transition period, family members often move out of the family home, pursue educational or occupational endeavors, and begin to establish intimate relationships (Scharf, Shulman, & Avigad-Spitz, 2005). Young adult siblings are “establishing independence from parents and often are living apart from one another for the first time in their lives” (Shortt & Gottman, 1997, p. 143).

Another way to look at this transition period is through the launching of adolescence into young adulthood. Launching a child is one of the most common transitions as “young adults leave the parental household to establish an independent residence” (Goldscheider & Goldscheider, 1989, p. 87). Research on launching of children has focused primarily on the parent-child relationship (Anderson, 1988; Goldscheider & Goldscheider, 1989; Hock, Eberly, Bartle-Haring, Ellwanger, & Widaman, 2001; Sullivan & Sullivan, 1980). The relationship between parent and child during the launching phase, however, provides insight into how sibling relationships may manage the transition. According to Hock et al. (2001), “separation of adolescents from their parents is imminent and represents a major life transition” (p. 284). Leaving home to attend college is a means of separation and launching of a child (Sullivan & Sullivan, 1980).

Sullivan and Sullivan (1980) examined the launching and imminent separation of young adult sons and their parents. The research found that the sons who left to live at college reported “increases in their parents’ affection toward them, their own affection toward their parents, and the total affection in their relationships with their parents” (Sullivan & Sullivan, 1980, p. 96). With regard to communication, sons

perceived improvements with their overall communication with their parents. In addition, sons perceived that their relationship with their parents had become more satisfying as their individual autonomy grew. With regard to the present study, siblings may report similar experiences with their own siblings as a result of leaving the home. Specifically, siblings may report improvements in their communication with their siblings, as well as greater affection and satisfaction. Launching is an important way to perceive the transition period into young adulthood because during this transition individuals are being launched from the home to live on their own.

Due to the transition from communal living to living away from the parental home, siblings must focus on managing their ever-changing relationship with each other. According to Hoch et al. (2001), “during this developmental transition, adolescents are highly engaged in the process of relationship renegotiation” (p. 284). This transition from living together to living apart is the first time in the sibling relationship that contact between siblings becomes almost completely voluntary in nature. Siblings no longer “have to” communicate with one another and maintain a relationship with each other. Parents may no longer dictate the sibling relationship and force siblings to communicate with each other. It is now, more than ever, up to the individual siblings to maintain the relationship. Siblings have a “choice about whether to be involved in each others’ lives or become distant” (Shortt & Gottman, 1997, p. 143). Siblings can choose whether to contact one another via phone, or other mediated means, or to see each other face-to-face. It is no surprise then that as siblings move out of the household, their contact tends to decrease because siblings no longer share living space (Leigh, 1982).

This transition period from moving out of the home environment to living independent of the family unit has been described as “one of the largest changes in the sibling relationship [due to the] change from everyday contact in the household to the greatly reduced contact after siblings are living on their own” (Mikkelsen, 2006, p. 28). The siblings’ relationships with their family members are “undergoing substantial transformation” (Sherman, Lansford, & Volling, 2006, p. 152). Due to this, it is important to identify and explain the complex communication processes that occur during the transformational periods in the lives of siblings.

The study of young adult sibling relationships has been inadequately and minimally examined. Cicirelli (1995) expressed that “the greatest gap in knowledge about the course of sibling relationships across the lifespan is in young adulthood” (p. 218). This being the case, it is imperative that research be conducted on this age group so that greater information can be known about young adult siblings. By building a deeper understanding of sibling relationships during the young adult life stage, information can be provided to family therapists about helping families, particularly sibling relationships prior to and during the young adult years. The present study, therefore, focuses on the young adult years as siblings’ transition from adolescence to adulthood, as well as how siblings experience the changes and transformations that occur during this time.

Due to the transition period where siblings will not be living in the same home, it is reasonable to assume that the communication process will need to be negotiated, managed and possibly redefined. As a result, it is important to examine the communication processes that siblings may engage in during the life transition.

Therefore, turning points are a means to studying these communication processes that siblings may engage in during the life transition.

Turning Points

The present study examined turning points to explore and understand the communication processes that siblings use during the transition to young adulthood. Turning points are important to this study as they focus on the individual's perceptions about key points and events in the relationship that define the relationship. The sibling pair, in addition, is making sense of their relational identity through the use of communicative practices that can occur within these turning point events (Baxter & Pittman, 2001). According to Baxter and Bullis (1986), "studying relationship dynamics through the turning point unit of analysis affords communication researchers a useful lens by which to examine communication and meaning" (p. 470) in relationships. In addition, examining turning points in close relationships, such as the sibling relationship, can help communication scholars identify the strategies and communication dynamics present during transitional periods in a relationship. Examining key turning points siblings experience, therefore, is crucial to understanding this relationship as siblings make sense of their relational identity through the use of these communicative practices (Baxter & Pittman, 2001).

In the past 25 years, four main studies have been conducted using turning points. To further understand turning points and to provide further support for why turning points are an important means for examining relationship processes, each study will be examined. In addition, several studies are examined that provide

turning points and closeness trajectories. These trajectories may be similar to those that siblings experience and therefore, are important to review.

One of the first studies that explored turning points in relationships was conducted by Baxter and Bullis (1986). Their study identified 14 turning points expressed and experienced by individuals in developing romantic relationships. The top four most frequent turning point types reported were get-to-know time, quality time, physical separation, and external competition. Baxter and Bullis highlighted the importance of examining turning points in close relationships.

Both romantic and sibling relationships experience change during the course of the relationship and turning points are a central way to view events of change in the relationship (Baxter & Bullis, 1986). For example, siblings may also experience the turning point of “physical separation” typically reported by romantic couples. While romantic couples reported being separated due to vacations or school breaks, siblings may be physically separated when they attend school or study abroad. Another turning point that romantic couples’ reported in Baxter and Bullis’ (1986) study was labeled “quality time”—where couples reported spending time enjoying each other. Similarly, siblings may report shared time together as a turning point and state that it is important for their relationship.

The second study of note examining turning points is Johnson, Wittenberg, Villagran, Mazur, & Villagran (2003)—they examined turning points among friends among young adults. This study is particularly important to the present study because the sibling and friendship relationships may have similarities, especially as siblings grow into young adulthood. Johnson et al. (2003) identified 12 turning points among

friends. The most common turning points reported were activities, living together, talk/hang out, and geographic distance.

In addition to exploring turning points, Johnson et al. (2003) examined how turning points were related to relational growth or deterioration. They found that activities, living together, and decrease in geographic distance resulted in friends growing closer, while increase in distance, conflict, decrease in contact, and a stop in shared living space resulted in friends growing distant. As stated before, because siblings likely experience similar turning points as friends, distance, a decrease in contact, or the fact they are no longer living together could impact siblings' relationship and cause a decrease in closeness. Similarly, activities shared with siblings could benefit their relationship and cause them to grow closer.

Johnson et al. (2003) also identified five different friendship closeness trajectories. The five closeness trajectories were a steady increase in closeness, a rise in closeness followed by a downturn and then a rise again, multiple downturns in closeness levels resulting in an increase in closeness, multiple downturns resulting in decreased closeness, and a growth of closeness followed by a downturn. Due to the similarity of friends and young adult siblings, it is likely to assume that siblings will experience similar trends of closeness trajectories.

In addition to turning point studies of romantic partners and friends, studies have examined various turning points among families. Baxter, Braithwaite, and Nicholson (1999) examined the development of blended families and the turning points blended families reported. Fifteen turning points were reported and the top five were changes in household/family composition, conflict or disagreement,

holidays or special celebrations, quality time, and family crisis. Similar to the present study's focus on transitions, and therefore, changes in the family, blended families experience transitions and changes. It would be expected then that siblings may experience similar turning points as blended families when siblings transition into young adulthood and family life changes. For example, both siblings and blended families may experience family crises, such as family conflict, illness, or death. Familial relationships, whether blended, biological, or legal, experience turning point events that have the potential to move the relationships to new places and depths.

Finally, Golish (2000) examined turning points among adult children and their parents. Ten turning points and seven closeness patterns were found. The top three turning points were physical distance, times of crisis, and communication. The present study is similar to Golish's (2000) study in that both are examining changes in the family during the young adult years, therefore, similar turning points are expected. For example, siblings would also experience the turning point of physical distance in that they are moving away from the familial home. While distance affected the parent-child relationship, it can also affect the sibling relationship. The seven closeness patterns reported by Golish (2000) were single major disruption, sustained low-to-moderate degree of closeness, sustained high degree of closeness, gradual increase in closeness, irregular cycle, disrupted progress, and gradual decrease in closeness. Siblings may experience similar patterns of closeness and turning points that affect their closeness. For example, the closeness pattern of single major disruption was the result of turning points such as lack of communication, death in the family, or a major fight. It is likely that siblings will experience similar

turning points and effects on closeness. Due to this, Golish's (2000) study provides a foundation for what siblings may experience during the transition into young adulthood.

Turning points are "the sites of developmental change in relationships" (Baxter et al., 1999, p. 294) and, therefore, they provide a means to studying sibling relationships as the relationships change due to the transition into the young adult years. Turning points provide insight into "how relationships are redefined through communication" (Graham, 1997, p. 351). While turning points are an important means in understanding the sibling relationship during adulthood, other factors of the relationship need to be considered including sibling closeness, relational satisfaction, and everyday talk.

Sibling Closeness

The present study focuses on sibling closeness—an important indication of how the sibling relationship is functioning during the transition into young adulthood. There has been much focus on sibling closeness in communication research. Researchers have been divided on whether closeness of siblings decreases, increases, or remains the same over the early and middle adult stages (Atchley, 1977; Connidis, 1992; Leigh, 1982). Some scholars have found that siblings' feelings of closeness have a curvilinear relationship, with siblings feeling the most closeness during childhood/adolescence and later adulthood (Atchley, 1977; Cumming and Schneider, 1961), and the least closeness during early and middle adulthood. This is a reasonable finding as early and middle adulthood individuals are starting and maintaining careers, beginning families, establishing households, and becoming more

independent overall. Connidis (1992) found that closeness between siblings tended to decrease following marriage, but increased with the addition of a child. On the other hand, Leigh (1982) found that “interaction with relatives generally remained constant” (p. 205), which could indicate constant closeness levels. He found that individuals generally interacted with relatives to the same amount in later stages as they did in early stages. Goetting (1986) also expressed that young adults “continued to participate in significant patterns of exchange with their siblings” (p. 708). Most recently, Milevsky (2005) supported the idea that siblings feel close and continue to communicate with their siblings during this transition stage. The reported level of closeness among young adult siblings varies in existing studies, so the present study seeks to explore the level of closeness among young adult siblings both quantitatively and qualitatively. While closeness levels during the life cycle have yet to be determined, additional research examining closeness in siblings will now be examined.

Short and Gottman’s (1997) study addressed closeness in young adult siblings. The first area of interest was family structure variables and closeness. None of the family structure variables—consisting of gender composition of dyad, age interval between siblings, and number of siblings in the family—related to the difference in the level of closeness experienced among siblings. Contradictions were discovered among studies that examined differences between sister-sister, brother-brother, and brother-sister dyads. In addition, geographical distance was not related to closeness. These findings are important as they illustrate that family structure variables may not be as important to sibling closeness as past researchers have

thought. Short and Gottman's (1997) findings also revealed that, with regard to conversations, emotionally close siblings showed more positive affect, affection, and validation than emotionally distant siblings. During topics of disagreement, emotionally close siblings were more affectionate, showed more interest, and validated the other more than emotionally distant siblings. These findings make sense because it is more likely for individuals in closer relationships to talk in a more positive and affirming manner (regardless of whether a conflict is involved) than for individuals in a more emotionally distant relationship.

Folwell, Chung, Nussbaum, Bethea, and Grant's (1997) research focused on the difference between emotionally close and emotionally distant siblings. Three events were associated as factors for siblings to feel more emotionally close to a sibling. These reasons were family events/hardships, commonalities, and age-related issues. Siblings that were more emotionally distant reported lacking closeness due to three reasons: the young years, tragedy/death/illness, and a history of emotional distance in the family. The results make sense in that commonalities and age-related issues would cause siblings to feel emotionally closer, whereas never being close or having troublesome youth experiences would cause emotional distance in later years. In addition, hardships and tragedy can cause any relationship to either grow emotionally closer or to fall apart, which was reported in both emotionally close and emotionally distant sibling relationships.

In a 2003 study on affectionate communication, Floyd and Morr found that closeness and satisfaction are both directly related to affectionate communication among siblings. Ponsetti and James (1997) found that siblings who report greater

closeness are less lonely than those who are not as close. Cicirelli (1989) found that there is a significant correlation between men and women and their closeness with sisters and depression—greater closeness is associated with less depression. These findings are encouraging because they demonstrate the importance and impact of the sibling relationships and they suggest that siblings can help lessen loneliness and depression among their siblings.

Gender and sibling closeness. Researchers have also been interested in studying closeness as it relates to factors other than the changes across the life cycle such as gender. Connidis and Campbell (1995) found that sibling ties with women are more involved than those of men. Overall, they found that sister-sister relationships are closer than relationships including both brothers and sisters. Also, sisters are generally in greater contact with their brother and sisters.

Floyd (1995) also examined gender and closeness among siblings. He focused on gender differences and closeness among siblings and friends regarding “what activities, topics of conversation, and affective states are most important to the closeness . . . of siblings” (p. 194). Results indicated that closeness for men is manifested through drinking together, shaking hands, and talking about sexual issues. Women, on the other hand, talk about personal problems and fears, and they talk on a deep, personal level in order to feel close. In addition, women hug more often than men and verbalize that they love and care for each other. These results are consistent with the broader gender literature, which suggests that men tend to engage in activities to feel close, and women tend to use talk to forge their closeness. In addition, Floyd (1995) explained that siblings specifically reported doing favors for

each other, providing help in an emergency, and just knowing they were close without having to talk about it as reflecting greater closeness. Surprisingly, participants “did not report feeling closer to friends than to their siblings” (Floyd, 1995, p. 200). Siblings’ use of doing favors for one another and helping in emergencies is typical of behaviors family members would perform. In addition, siblings do not necessarily engage in contact on a daily basis, so they may still feel close just because they know they are close.

In a similar study, Floyd and Parks (1995) revealed that women use more verbal interactions contributing to closeness with their siblings than compared to men. Men did not, however, use shared activities more than women to contribute to closeness. This is surprising considering the aforementioned Floyd (1995) study, in which men reported more activities and women reported more talking as reasons for being close. Floyd and Parks (1995) also found that women reported being more satisfied with interactions than men, and that the interactions contribute more to their overall relational closeness than men. In a later study, Floyd’s (1996) findings revealed that women and men considered self-disclosure and mutual activities to be equally important to closeness. Sister-sister dyads, however, did consider self-disclosure to be more important to closeness than brother-brother and sister-brother dyads. Similar to this, brother-brother dyads consider shared activities to be important to relational closeness than sister-sister and brother-sister dyads. It is interesting to note that it was found to be important for sister-sister dyads to use self-disclosure than it was for sister-brother or brother-brother dyads. Similarly, it was

found more important for brother-brother dyads to use activities than for sister-sister or sister-brother dyads.

Connidis (1989) found that sisters are more likely than brothers or brother-sister dyads “to be close friends or mutual confidants” (p. 91). Cicirelli (1989) found that men are significantly closer to sisters than to brothers, but women’s closeness to sisters is not greater than men’s closeness to sisters. Connidis and Campbell (1995) found that women are more involved with their siblings by remaining in contact via telephone or in-person relationships than men. In addition, siblings are closer when a sister is involved and have greater contact and emotional investment in the sibling relationship than men. In a study looking at individuals age 55 or older, results indicated that women are closer than men and that single siblings provide more support than married siblings (Campbell, Connidis, & Davies, 1999). These findings are not surprising, specifically that sisters were found to be closer than brothers, as sisters tend to be more involved in sibling relationships and have greater contact with their siblings as suggested by the research presented. In addition, the finding that single siblings provide more support than married siblings is not surprising given that single siblings do not have as many commitments (such as taking care of their own family) as married siblings.

Closeness among siblings has been a focus of communication researchers. Conflicting results, however, continue to dominate the literature. Regardless, closeness is an important factor to study as it provides a better understanding of the sibling relationship. Another important factor affecting sibling relationships is

relational satisfaction, therefore, the following section addresses relational satisfaction in sibling relationships.

Relational Satisfaction

Relational satisfaction—the “degree to which an individual is content and satisfied with his or her relationship” (Anderson & Emmers-Sommer, 2006, p. 5)—is an indicator of the overall relational health of the sibling relationship. Relational satisfaction is critical in understanding the sibling relationship because it provides important information in regard to how siblings feel about one another and how they view their relationship with their sibling.

Past research on relational satisfaction has been primarily focused on romantic and marital couples (Caughlin, 2002; Caughlin & Huston, 2002; Caughlin, Huston, & Houts, 2000; Miller, Caughlin, & Huston, 2003) and parent-child relationships (Caughlin & Afifi, 2004; Caughlin & Golish, 2002; Sillars, Koerner, & Fitzpatrick, 2005) and overall family satisfaction (Caughlin, 2003). Very few studies have examined relational satisfaction in the sibling relationship. Those studies that have examined relational satisfaction in the sibling relationship will now be discussed.

Myers and Bryant (2008) examined behavior indicators of commitment that include relational satisfaction as a component with regard to the sibling relationship. Eleven behavioral indicators of commitment were found: tangible support, emotional support, informational support, esteem support, network support, everyday talk, shared activities, verbal expressions, nonverbal expressions, protection, and intimate play. Ten of the eleven indicators (excluding intimate play) were related positively with relational satisfaction and communication satisfaction. Specifically, three

indicators of commitment were significant predictors of relational satisfaction and communication satisfaction: emotional support, shared activities, and network support (Myers & Bryant, 2008). This is an important finding in understanding the unique make-up of sibling commitment, as well as satisfaction as it provides detailed factors that affect satisfaction among siblings.

Verbal aggression is another factor that affects relational satisfaction among siblings. Teven, Martin, and Neupauer (1998) found that among young adults, “siblings’ verbal aggression is negatively correlated with participant’s level of relational satisfaction” (p. 182). Martin, Anderson, and Rocca (2005), in a similar study using participants older than 30 years of age, found that individuals’ use of verbal aggression was negatively related to communication satisfaction and trust within the sibling relationship. In addition, individuals’ use of verbal aggression was negatively related to their perception of the sibling’s credibility. Verbal aggression, therefore, had a negative impact on siblings’ relational satisfaction.

Recently Fowler (2009) examined the “relations between motives for sibling communication and relational satisfaction for siblings of different ages” (p. 60). The results indicated that different age groups of siblings were motivated differently. Siblings aged 18-34 were motivated to communicate by intimacy, obligation, and mutuality. Siblings aged 35-40 and 50-64 were motivated by obligation as negative predictor of relational satisfaction and mutuality as a positive predictor. Siblings aged 65 and above were motivated by comfort. The main point here is that the results indicated that siblings of different age groups were motivated by different factors in order to experience satisfaction in their sibling relationship.

Few studies focusing on sibling relationships have focused on relational satisfaction. Closeness and relational satisfaction are important factors to explore when studying sibling relationships because they explore the feelings towards each other. This being the case, another key factor to explore is everyday talk as it is a tangible way to understand what siblings communicate, and therefore, how it affects their overall closeness and satisfaction.

Everyday Talk

The examination of social interaction is vital in understanding relationships. As Schrod, Soliz, & Braithwaite (2008) indicate, “examining everyday talk in familial relationships enables scholars to focus on communication as the primary means by which family members shape personal identities (cf. Tracy, 2002) and build, enact, and transform family relationships (Baxter, 2004)” (p. 191). According to Dindia (2003), communication is vital in maintaining a personal relationship. Duck and Pond argued that “talk functions to assure the continuation of the relationship into the future by projecting a rhetorically forceful image of continuance not only through its language but through its very occurrence” (as cited in Duck, Rutt, Hurst, & Strejc, 1991, p. 231). In other words, the frequency of correspondence and topic of conversation can be influential in maintaining personal relationships, including those among siblings.

It is important to discover the everyday talk patterns that occur within the sibling relationship to better understand the mundane conversations siblings engage in and how the conversations affect closeness and relational satisfaction. Specifically, Goldsmith and Baxter (1996) identified multiple behavioral indicators representing

20 different types of everyday talk, such as small talk, gossip, joking around, catching up, recapping the day, and reminiscing. Exclusive to sibling relationships, Goldsmith & Baxter (1996) found that informal talk frequently centered around gossip, joking around, catching up, and reminiscing.

Other research on everyday talk has focused on stepfamilies (Schrodt et al., 2007). Schrodt et al. (2007) examined the use of everyday talk among three members of a stepfamily: parent, stepparent, and stepchild. Frequencies of everyday talk revealed that all three members used catching up, joking around, and recapping the day's events more frequently than other forms of talk. Stepchildren reported the use of serious conversations, talking about problems and reminiscing more than other forms of talk, while parents and stepparents reported love talk and reminiscing more than the others. The least frequent form of everyday talk by all three members was interrogation. Schrodt et al. also examined differences in everyday talk among the various family members (i.e., parent, stepparent, and stepchild). Results for stepchildren revealed that, generally, stepchildren used more everyday talk with their parent than with a stepparent or nonresidential parent. In addition, children used more love talk with nonresidential parents than with stepparents and more small talk with stepparents than with nonresidential parents. With regard to parents and stepparents, parents and stepparents used greater frequencies of everyday talk with the stepparent, followed by children, and then nonresidential parents. Parents reported the use of catching up, reminiscing, persuading, giving instructions, lectures, interrogating, and making plans with both the stepparent and the child the same amount during the week. Overall, the use of everyday talk by stepfamilies provides

an insight into how families are using everyday talk that may then reflect on the sibling relationship.

In a related study, Myers (2001) found that siblings tended to be more open with friends, instead of one another, regarding certain topics such as money, sex, and romantic partners. The only topic areas discussed more often with siblings than friends were parents, brothers, and sisters (Myers, 2001). These findings highlight the importance of communication in sibling relationships and how siblings are making strategic choices about the content of their conversations.

Therefore, the examinations of everyday talk among siblings is important as it provides insight into the types of topics siblings use to communicate with one another as siblings transition into and through the young adult years. Everyday talk provides understanding about how siblings manage the changes surrounding their relationship due to the young adult years as they choose topics to maintain or not maintain their relationship.

Overview

The present study addresses the sibling relationship during the transition into young adulthood. The study aims to examine the major turning points siblings experience during the young adult life stage and how each turning point affects the level of closeness siblings report. Little research has explored turning points and how they relate to feelings of closeness in the sibling relationship. By examining turning points and closeness, this study will explain the various factors that affect closeness among siblings. In addition, the present study focuses on the various patterns of closeness siblings report with regard to their relationship with their sibling during

young adulthood. The patterns of closeness demonstrate the variety of experiences siblings have and how closeness varies throughout the life stage. The present study also focuses on the factors of closeness and relational satisfaction in order to provide a foundational understanding of siblings during this life period. Finally, the present study examines the types of everyday talk siblings use in their relationship with their sibling. The types of talk provide an understanding of the sibling relationship and what siblings use to manage and negotiate their relationship during the transition period.

Hypotheses and Research Questions

The need for studying sibling relationships continues to grow as scholars seek to better understand the family system and its subsystems. In addition, it is important to understand sibling relationships as they have the potential to endure for an individual's entire life. Due to the longevity of the sibling relationship, siblings typically experience several turning points. It is important to study how siblings manage and negotiate various turning points communicatively because the way siblings manage transitions will affect the future of the relationship. The transition to young adulthood is a time where a significant number of changes occur and it is one of the most understudied life stages. Present-day relationships provide the foundation for relationships in later life; therefore, it is important to study these relationships in order to better predict sibling relationships as siblings age.

Transitions create change in relational definitions, relational rules, and communication patterns. Little research has examined the transition into young adulthood and the change that it creates among sibling relationships; therefore, the

purpose of the present research study is to understand the sibling relationship during this point of transition. Siblings often do not live in the same residence during this transition period, so it is reasonable to assume that the communication process will need to be negotiated and managed. Thus, it is important to look at the communication processes siblings engage in during this life transition stage by examining everyday talk. The way siblings manage and negotiate their relationship is important because it sets up how the relationship will function in future interactions and how it will affect siblings' overall closeness and relational satisfaction.

Therefore, the following hypotheses and research questions are posed:

H1: There is a significant difference between geographically close and distant sibling relationships in terms of their level of closeness.

H2: The degree of closeness among siblings relates to their overall relational satisfaction.

RQ1: What types of everyday talk do siblings engage in during the transition into young adulthood?

H3: Everyday talk among siblings relates to their level of closeness and overall relational satisfaction.

Turning points identify key events that are associated with change in relationships. For example, Baxter, Braithwaite, and Nicholson (1999) found that turning points were key for step-families when identifying events that they perceived as moments of signifying their identity as a new family. While turning point research has explored parent-child relationships (Golish, 2000), romantic relationships (Baxter & Pittman, 2001), and divorced couples (Graham, 1997), little research has looked at turning points in sibling relationships, and more specifically, during the transition to young adulthood. It is important to examine turning points as they are the specific

times of change and can impact changes in closeness that can occur during transitions. By examining turning points, sibling relationships during the transition to young adulthood will be explored and understood in a new way. Therefore, the following research questions are posed:

RQ2: What kinds of turning points do siblings experience during the transition into young adulthood?

RQ3: Is there a relationship between the type of turning points and the level of closeness?

RQ4: What patterns of changes in closeness categorize sibling relationships during the young adult stage?

Summary

The purpose of this chapter has been to lay the foundation for the study that follows. This chapter set forth the foundation of systems theory as a theoretical framework for the study. This chapter established why the study of sibling relationships during adulthood is important. The existing literature within the four main issues central to the study was also examined. Current research on turning points, sibling closeness, relational satisfaction, and everyday talk was explored.

The remainder of the dissertation is organized as follows. Chapter 2 explains the methods utilized in this study to collect, interpret, and analyze the data. Chapter 3 presents the results of the findings from the data in this study. The results include analysis of basic demographic data, closeness, relational satisfaction, and everyday talk. In addition, the results section includes analyses of turning points, turning points' effect on closeness, and overall closeness patterns of young adult siblings. Chapter 4 discusses the results, strengths and limitations of the present study, and directions for future research.

Chapter Two: Method

This chapter outlines the methods and procedures utilized in the present study. Information provided in this chapter includes the procedures used to recruit study participants, as well as a discussion of the instruments used to collect data on closeness, relational satisfaction, everyday talk, and turning points.

Participants

At a moderate-sized Western university, 199 undergraduate students volunteered to participate in the present study. Of the sample, 119 (59.8%) were female, 79 (39.7%) were male, and one participant chose not to disclose gender. A majority of participants identified themselves as Caucasian-American (86.9%, $n = 173$), with smaller proportions of participants describing themselves as Latino/a-American (3%, $n = 6$), Asian/Pacific American (3%, $n = 6$), African-American (1%, $n = 2$), American Indian (0.5%, $n = 1$), or coming from another racial/ethnic background (5.5%, $n = 11$). The participants were primarily traditional-aged college students, with an average age of 20.42 years ($SD = 2.02$, range: 18 to 34 years).

With regard to the participants' siblings, 102 (51.2%) were female, 93 (46.7%) were male, and four did not include sibling's gender. The mean age of siblings was 22.81 years ($SD = 4.47$, range: 18 to 43 years). Furthermore, the majority of the sibling relationships were classified as biological (89.4%, $n = 178$),

with smaller portions classified as half-sibling (7%, $n = 14$), sibling being adopted (1%, $n = 2$), participant being adopted (1%, $n = 2$), step-sibling (1%, $n = 2$), and both siblings being adopted (0.5%, $n = 1$).

In terms of the sibling family, the average number of children in the participant's family was 3.07 ($SD = 1.35$, range: 2 to 11). The average birth order for the participants was 2.26 ($SD = 1.16$) out of the total number of children.

Participants tended to report about older siblings with the average birth order of the participants' siblings at 1.63 ($SD = .90$) out of the total number of children. The average participant's year in college was around the sophomore year ($M = 2.45$, $SD = 1.12$) and the average year in school of the participant's sibling was a junior to senior in college ($M = 3.8$, $SD = 1.46$). With regard to the participants reporting on brothers or sisters, 60 females reported on a female, 57 females reported on a male, 41 males reported on a female, and 36 males reported on a male.

Participants reported on the amount of times siblings communicated with each other using various mediums in a two-week period. Siblings reported using text messages most ($M = 5.95$, $SD = 9.44$), followed by the use of phone ($M = 3.62$, $SD = 6.10$), instant messaging ($M = 2.0$, $SD = 6.43$), face-to-face communication ($M = 1.33$, $SD = 3.46$), e-mail ($M = .80$, $SD = 1.47$), and mail ($M = .18$, $SD = .87$).

Procedures

Participants were recruited from various communication classes. The researcher first contacted the course instructor to gain permission to attend class. The researcher attended permitted classes and asked for study participants. The researcher read from a pre-written script that explained the requirements to participate, the

participant's rights, and the overall purpose and goal for the study and interested participants were provided the survey and filled it out while the researcher was present (see Appendix A for survey and Appendix B for script). In order to qualify for study participation, individuals must have been 18 years of age or older and have had a sibling who was also 18 years of age or older. In addition, the individual must have been living in a separate residence from his/her sibling. If the participant had more than one sibling 18 or over, he/she selected the sibling whose birthday month was closest to his/her own to discuss in the survey. Surveys took approximately 15-20 minutes to complete. Participants were thanked after completing the survey.

Measures

Closeness. Respondent perception of closeness with their sibling was assessed using the Buchanan, Maccoby, and Dornbusch's (1991) Relational Closeness Scale. Respondents were asked to answer 10 items (e.g., "How openly do you talk with your sibling?" or "How close do you feel to your sibling?") focusing on communication during the past month using a 5-interval Likert-type scale (1 = not at all, 3 = somewhat, 5 = very much)—high scores from a participant on the measure represent high levels of relational closeness to their sibling. Overall, the scale was reliable ($\alpha = .98$); past alpha reliability was .94 (Buchanan, Maccoby, and Dornbusch, 1991). Individual composite scores were conducted by taking the average of all 10 items per individual. These scores were then used to find the overall closeness of siblings and to correlate with relational satisfaction and everyday talk.

Relational satisfaction. Relational satisfaction with siblings was assessed using a modified version of the Marital Opinion Questionnaire (Huston, McHale, &

Crouter, 1986). The scale consisted of 10 items measuring satisfaction with a 5-point semantic differential scale (e.g., “miserable–enjoyable”) and an additional global satisfaction item that ranged from 1 (completely dissatisfied) to 5 (completely satisfied). Participants were asked to report their satisfaction with their sibling over the past month. Overall, the scale was reliable ($\alpha = .85$). Previous studies have shown it to be a reliable scale to measure relational and family satisfaction (α for first eight items = .91) (Morr Serewicz, Dickson, Morrison, & Poole, 2007). Individual composite scores were conducted by reverse coding four items (discouraging/hopeful, boring/interesting, disappointing/rewarding, and useless/worthwhile), then, the average score of the 10 items was taken to achieve the overall relational satisfaction of individual siblings. Composite scores were then used to find overall relational satisfaction of siblings and were used in correlations with closeness and everyday talk.

Everyday talk. Frequencies of everyday talk among siblings were assessed using a modified version of Goldsmith and Baxter’s (1996) Revised Taxonomy of Interpersonal Speech Events. Separate behavioral categories were created for each type of everyday talk that could theoretically characterize sibling talk. The participants reported frequencies of everyday talk over the past month using a 5-interval Likert-type scale (1 = never, 2 = seldom, 3 = sometimes, 4 = often, 5 = regularly). Overall, the scale was reliable ($\alpha = .92$). The measurement scale is reliable ($\alpha = .82$ to $.92$) (Schrodt, Soliz, & Braithwaite, 2008) and has been used successfully by past researchers to examine relationships between everyday talk and

family relationship types (Schrodt, Braithwaite, Soliz, Tye-Williams, Miller, Normand, & Harrigan, 2007).

Turning points. Turning point data were acquired using the Retrospective Interview Technique (RIT), which has been used in past studies to explore turning point events (Baxter & Bullis, 1986; Graham, 1997). The instructions asked each individual to identify all the turning points in their sibling relationship from the time when both siblings began living in separate residences. As participants identified turning points, they plotted those points on a graph with the abscissa axis representing the turning points and the ordinate axis representing closeness. Closeness was measured using 10-point scale (0 = extremely distant, 2 = distant, 4 = somewhat distant, 6 = somewhat close, 8 = close, and 10 = extremely close). This followed a similar scale to Graham's (1997) in which the abscissa axis went from left to right with the right representing "today" and the ordinate axis went from zero on the bottom to 10 on the top.

Summary

The present chapter provided information regarding the methods used to gather data for the present study. Recruiting procedures were discussed for obtaining participants from a moderate-sized Midwestern university. Tools utilized to determine participants' closeness, relational satisfaction, and everyday talk were outlined. Buchanan, Maccoby, and Dornbusch's (1991) Relational Closeness Scale was used to assess individual's overall closeness with their sibling. To assess relational satisfaction among siblings, Huston, McHale, and Crouter's (1986) relational satisfaction scale was used. Goldsmith and Baxter's (1996) Revised

Taxonomy of Interpersonal Speech Events was utilized to examine the everyday topics in which siblings engaged. Finally, the Retrospective Interview Technique, which has been successfully used in past studies such as Baxter and Bullis (1986) and Graham (1997), was used to examine the various turning points siblings experienced during the young adult years and how these turning points affected closeness levels. Chapter 3 addresses the results.

Chapter Three: Results

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the results of the data analysis from the present study. This chapter provides detailed results on the closeness levels, relational satisfaction, and everyday talk siblings reported. In addition, this chapter provides extensive results on the turning points siblings experienced during the young adult years, the closeness levels associated with the turning points, and the closeness patterns of siblings during the young adult years.

Hypothesis one addressed the significant difference between geographically close and distant sibling relationships in terms of their level of closeness. In order to address hypothesis one, *t*-tests were run to explain the difference in levels of closeness between geographically close and distant siblings. Descriptive statistics revealed the overall closeness was moderate ($M = 3.82$, $SD = .74$), with one representing low closeness and five representing very close. A paired sample *t*-test was performed to test the difference in levels of closeness between geographically close and distant siblings. There was no significant difference between the levels of closeness among geographically close ($M = 3.96$, $SD = .73$) and distant siblings ($M = 3.79$, $SD = .74$, $t(195) = -1.29$, $p = .98$). Therefore, the hypothesis was not supported.

Hypothesis two addressed the degree of closeness among siblings and how it relates to their overall relational satisfaction—therefore, a correlation between closeness and relational satisfaction was conducted. Descriptive statistics reveal that

the overall satisfaction was moderate ($M = 3.84, SD = .84$), with one representing completely dissatisfied and five representing completely satisfied, and closeness was moderate ($M = 3.82, SD = .74$). A Pearson's product-moment correlation test was run to explore this relationship and the results indicated a strong correlation of .63 ($p < .01, n = 198$).

Research question one inquired about the types of everyday talk siblings engage in during the transition to college. In order to answer research question one, frequencies were conducted on the types of everyday talk reported. Descriptive statistics revealed that siblings use the following types of everyday talk (listed from most often to least often, with a range of five representing the use of the type of everyday talk regularly and one representing that siblings never used it): catching up ($M = 3.88, SD = 1.10$), joking around ($M = 3.78, SD = 1.18$), small talk ($M = 3.43, SD = 1.06$), talking about problems ($M = 3.25, SD = 1.15$), serious conversation ($M = 3.18, SD = 1.14$), decision making ($M = 3.15, SD = 1.20$), making plans ($M = 3.01, SD = 1.15$), recapping the day ($M = 2.95, SD = 1.26$), getting or giving instruction ($M = 2.93, SD = 1.23$), reminiscing ($M = 2.85, SD = 1.20$), complaining ($M = 2.82, SD = 1.14$), relationship talk ($M = 2.74, SD = 1.31$), gossip ($M = 2.72, SD = 1.22$), asking a favor ($M = 2.65, SD = 1.08$), express love ($M = 2.63, SD = 1.22$), conflict ($M = 2.61, SD = 1.10$), persuading ($M = 2.47, SD = 1.04$), one-way conversation ($M = 2.06, SD = 0.95$), making up ($M = 1.85, SD = 0.90$), and interrogation ($M = 1.65, SD = 0.83$).

Hypothesis three examined how everyday talk among siblings relates to the level of overall closeness and overall relational satisfaction. A principal components factor analysis with orthogonal varimax rotation was first run with regard to everyday

talk. Two criteria were used to determine the number of factors: the scree test and the factor loading. The scree plot indicated three factors to use for the varimax rotation procedure (eigenvalue ≥ 1.0). The varimax rotation procedure yielded three components: expression of intimacy, maintenance talk, and relationally risky behavior. The second criterion for loading of each factor was that the items had to have a factor loading of at least .60, with no secondary loading above .40. However, six factors loaded slightly below the .60 criterion, but were kept as factors due to the low loading on the other components (DiCioccio, 2008). The complete list of everyday talk topics, categorized in each of the three components, can be seen in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1.
Everyday Talk Components

Item	1	2	3
Catching up	.591	.547	-.032
Reminiscing	.546	.372	.219
Express Love	.681	.200	.082
Relationship Talk	.785	.111	.082
Serious Conversation	.703	.306	.203
Talking about Problems	.710	.319	.262
Small Talk	.150	.695	.156
Gossip	.376	.536	.223
Joking Around	.380	.619	.210
Recapping ones Day	.483	.566	.087
Decision Making	.359	.641	.286
Giving/Getting Instructions	.096	.657	.323
Making Plans	.323	.632	.246
Making Up	.276	.040	.664
Conflict	.390	-.010	.686
Complaining	.322	.202	.617
Persuading Conversation	.120	.328	.699
One-way-conversation	-.237	.373	.515
Interrogation	-.113	.210	.660
Asking a Favor	.162	.248	.588

Note: Bold and italicized indicates the factor on which the item loaded.

The three components had strong Chronbach's Alpha level (expression of intimacy = .856, maintenance talk = .859, relationally risky talk = .807). Within each category, Chronbach's Alphas were run if an item was deleted. No alpha score would improve if an item was deleted, so all items were included. "Expression of intimacy" accounted for 39.50% of the item variance ($M = 2.92$, $SD = .94$). "Maintenance talk" accounted for 10.10% of the item variance ($M = 3.17$, $SD = .89$), and "relationally risky talk" accounted for 6.00% of the item variance ($M = 2.30$, $SD = .69$), for a total item variance of 55.58%. Composite scores were then created for each of the three everyday talk composites.

To assess how everyday talk among siblings related to their level of closeness and overall relational satisfaction, a Pearson product-moment correlation test was run for the three everyday talk components and both overall closeness and relational satisfaction. Results for overall closeness and the three everyday talk components indicated that closeness correlated at the .01 level for all three types of talk: expression of intimacy ($r = .71$, $p < .01$, $n = 199$), maintenance talk ($r = .70$, $p < .01$, $n = 199$), and relationally risky behavior ($r = .33$, $p < .01$, $n = 199$). Results for overall relational satisfaction and the three everyday talk components indicated that only expression of intimacy correlated at the .05 level with relational satisfaction ($r = .16$, $p < .05$, $n = 198$).

Identification of Turning Points

Research question two focused on the kinds of turning points siblings experience during the transition into young adulthood. A total of 180 of the 199 participants reported turning points, and overall, 630 turning points were reported.

On average, participants reported 3.17 turning points (range: 0 to 12). Nine categories of turning points were inductively derived from the RIT procedure. In order to answer research question two, a thematic analysis was performed to identify the types of turning points siblings experience. The first step of conducting a thematic analysis is to familiarize oneself with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006), therefore, the researcher began analyzing the turning point data by reading through every participant RIT chart. Braun and Clarke (2006) stress the importance of immersing oneself in the data and reading with the intent to search for “meanings, patterns, and so on” (p. 87). The second step, according to Braun and Clarke (2006), is to generate initial codes—thus, the researcher then began creating codes by “generating an initial list of ideas about what is in the data and what is interesting about them” (p. 88). The third step is to search for themes by “sorting the different codes into potential themes” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 90). The researcher, therefore, began creating potential themes by examining the initial list of ideas and placing them in potential themes. The fourth step of conducting a thematic analysis is to review the themes. During this step, themes are refined and some are collapsed into each other. The researcher performed this step by examining each theme and evaluating whether some themes could be collapsed. Several themes in the present study were able to be collapsed. For example, the themes “at home,” “time together,” “connecting,” and “holiday/vacation” were combined into an overarching final theme of “time together.” All were combined because participants expressed in each original theme that they spent time together by spending time at home, on vacation or during holidays, or via connecting with conversations (either face-to-face or through other

medias). Overall, siblings expressed that opportunities of being together were key turning point events in their relationship. The fifth step in conducting a thematic analysis is defining and naming themes. This is the step where researchers “define and further refine the themes [they] will present for [the] analysis, and analyze the data within them” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 92). Thus, the researcher examined each theme and made sure that each theme was defined and could stand on its own. Figures 3.1 through 3.9 demonstrate the finalizing of each theme. After themes were finalized, the researcher went through each participant’s RIT chart and counted how many times each theme was stated, creating an overall number of times turning point themes were used. This procedure was similar to other turning point studies (Golish, 2000).

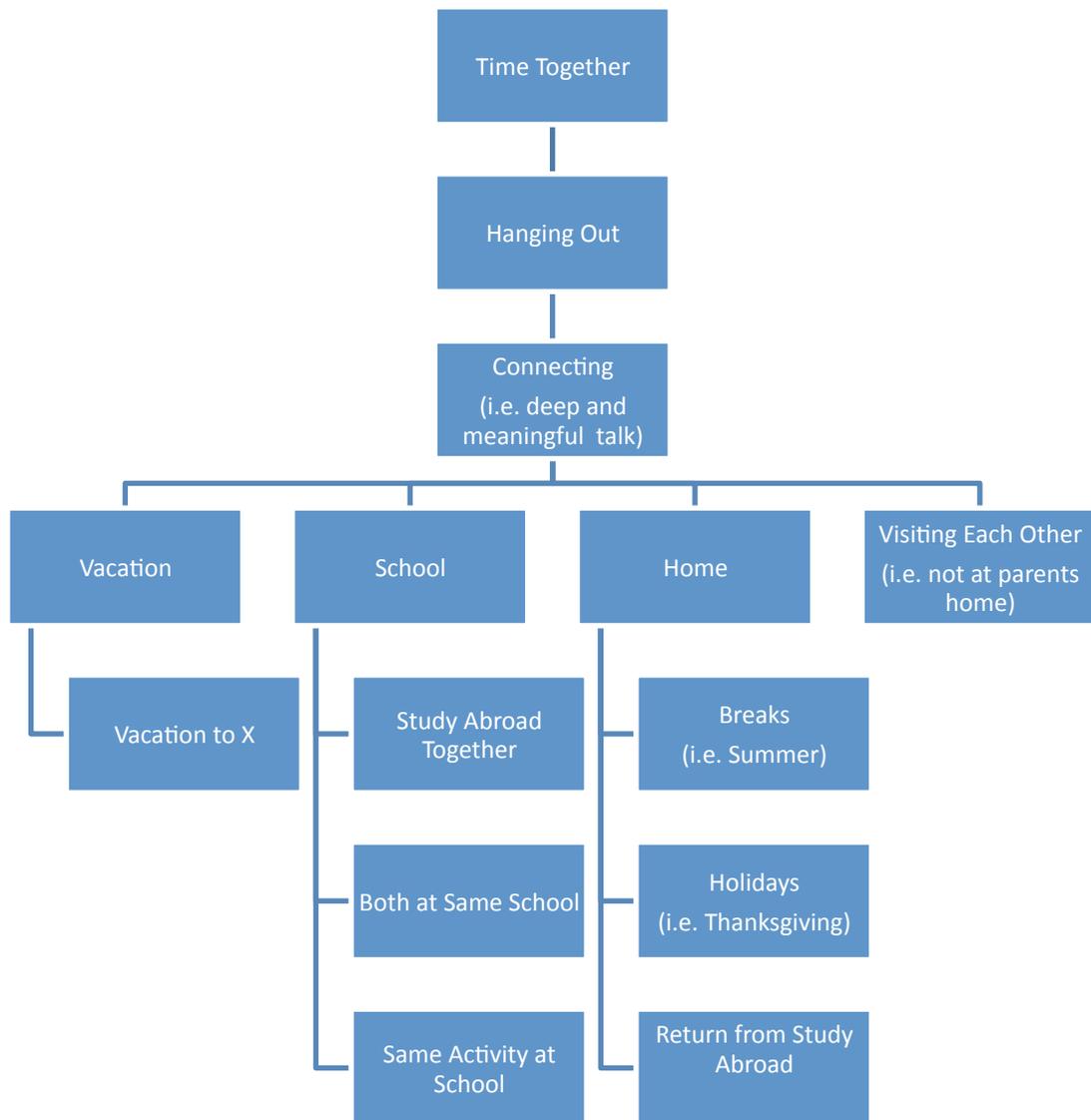


Figure 3.1. Final thematic map for time together.

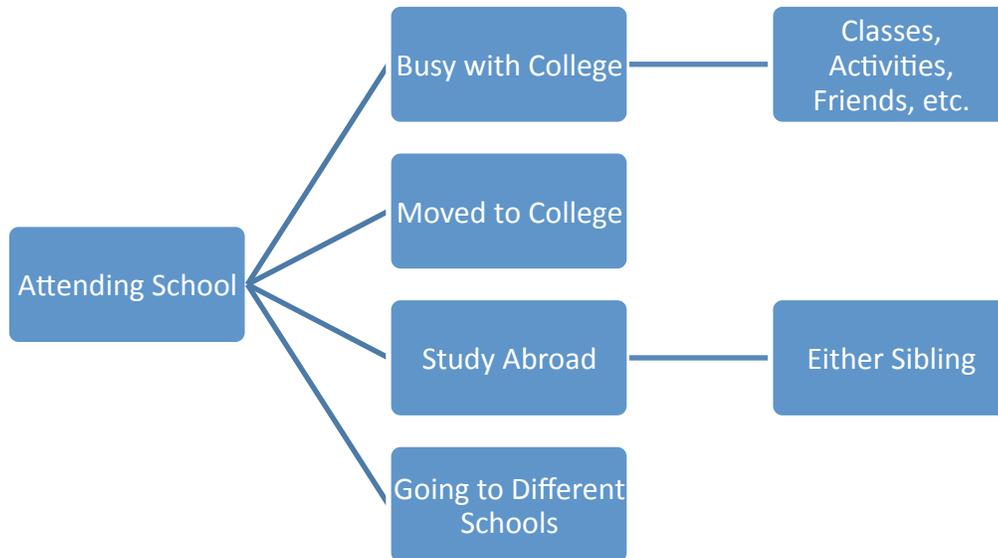


Figure 3.2. Final thematic map for attending school.

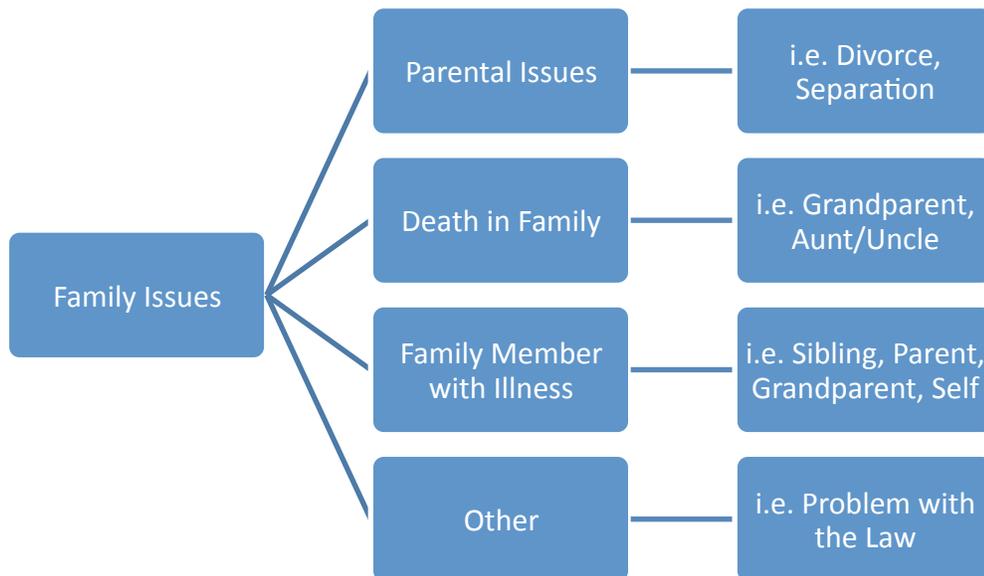


Figure 3.3. Final thematic map for family issues.

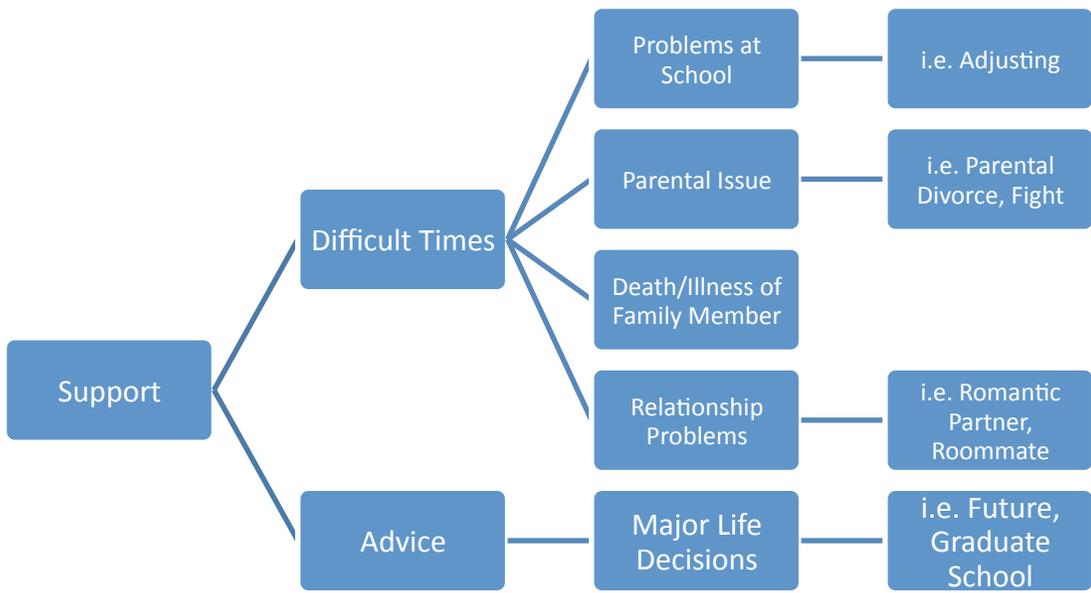


Figure 3.4. Final thematic map for support.

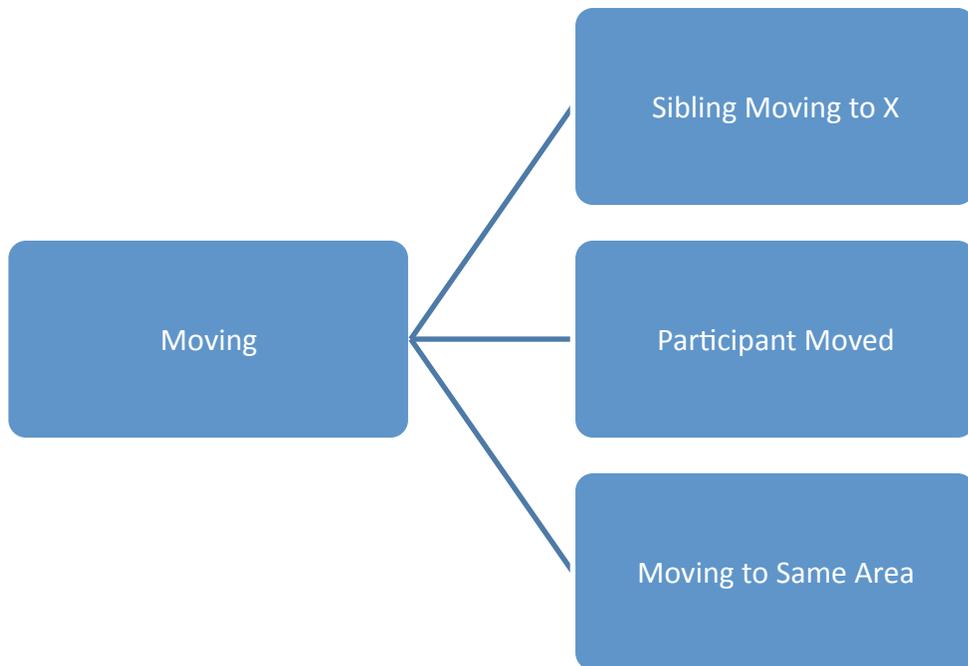


Figure 3.5. Final thematic map for moving.

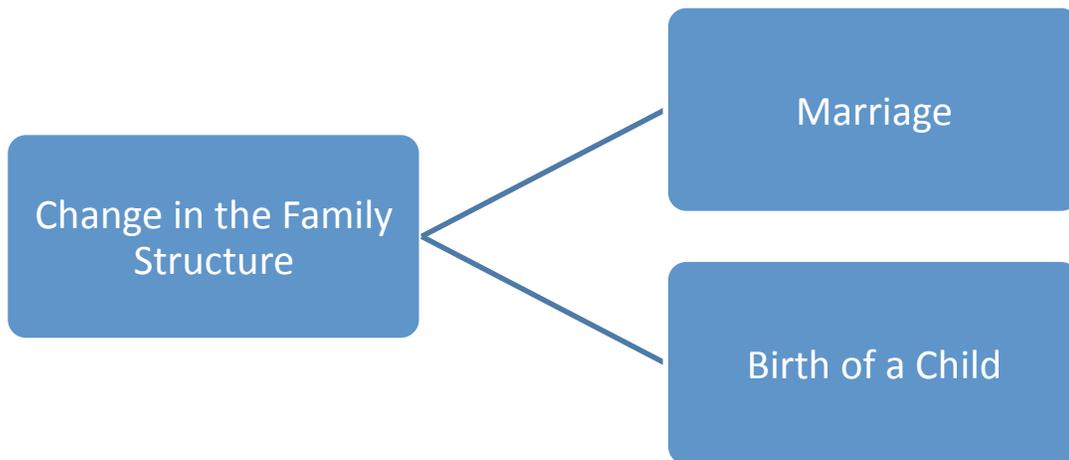


Figure 3.6. Final thematic map for change in the family structure.

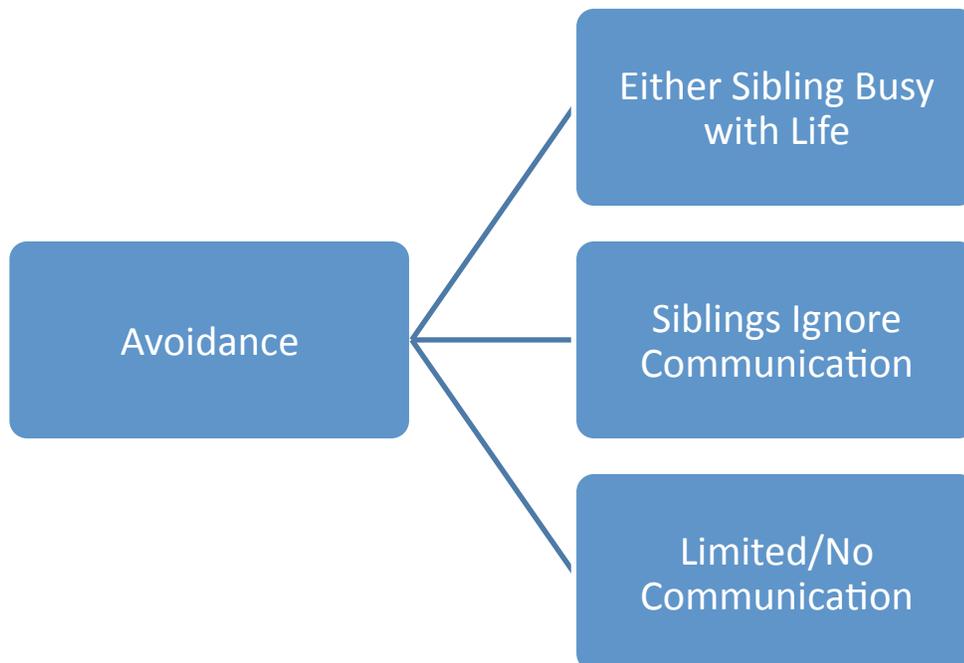


Figure 3.7. Final thematic map for avoidance.



Figure 3.8. Final thematic map for conflict.

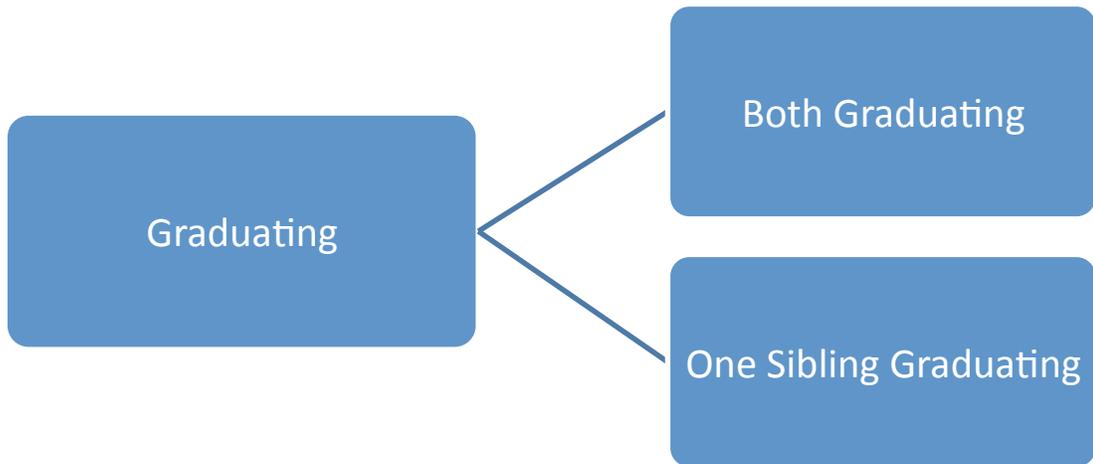


Figure 3.9. Final thematic map for graduating.

Research question three addressed how the turning point related to the level of closeness. The data is reported with each of the nine turning points. The closeness level and its impact on the turning point were assessed by examining the current level of closeness per turning point and the closeness level before the turning point. If the previous turning point had a lower closeness level than the turning point being assessed, it was interpreted that the turning point related to an increase in closeness. If the previous turning point was higher than the turning point being assessed, it was interpreted that the turning point related to a decrease in closeness. If there was no difference between the previous turning point and the current turning point, it was assessed as a maintaining of the level of closeness. Several turning points that were assessed were the first listed on the RIT chart, therefore, there was no prior turning point and closeness comparison. When this occurred, the turning point was not included in the assessment of closeness. The result is that the number of participants reporting an increase, decrease, or maintenance of closeness does not always match the total number of turning points per theme. For example, there were a total of 274 reports of the turning point “time together;” however, only 244 were reported with regard to closeness change (190 increased in closeness, 42 decreased in closeness, and 12 maintained the same level of closeness). Again, this is because the remaining 30 were reported as the first turning point mentioned and, therefore, no changes in closeness could be assessed in relation to a prior turning point.

Table 3.2 provides an overview of the results including the number of participants stating the turning point and the overall percentage of use of the turning

point. (See Appendix C for a more detailed example of turning point themes with participant examples and corresponding closeness levels.)

Table 3.2.
Turning Points for Sibling Relationships

Turning Points (N = 630)	Percentages (%)	Total
1. Time Together - Being home during breaks from school - Vacations and Holidays - Spending time together - Connecting	43.5	274
2. Attending School - Being at school - Studying abroad	28.1	177
3. Family Issues - Death in the family - Medical issues - Parental separation or divorce - Other familial problems	10.3	65
4. Support - Discussing problems/decisions - Providing advice/comfort	7.3	46
5. Moving	4.3	27
6. Change in the Family Structure - Birth of a child - Marriage/remarriage	2.9	18
7. Avoidance - Little or no contact	2.9	18
8. Conflict	2.4	15
9. Graduation - Sibling graduation	1.7	11

The most frequently reported turning point was “time together” with 274 (43.5%) participants reporting the turning point. Within this turning point, participants reported spending time together either at home during holidays and breaks, or while at school. In addition, several participants reported spending time connecting with each other via mediated means. Most participants became closer with their sibling due to experiencing the turning point, with a total of 190 (69%) individuals reporting an increase. Only 12 (4.3%) individuals reported that they and their sibling remained unchanged, and 42 (15%) reported a decrease in closeness. Of those siblings that grew closer due to time together, several reported doing things together such as skiing/snowboarding, going to dinner or a party together, or just hanging out as friends. Vacations and holidays provided siblings an opportunity to “hang out” together where they could have a heart-to-heart discussion or just enjoy each other’s company. Participants reported that, now that they were older and more mature, they had better conversations which aided in closeness when they were at home as opposed to when the participants were younger and lived together at home. Spending time together via mediated means (such as calling each other to talk) allowed siblings to grow closer. Participants reported that this provided a way to stay in touch and, therefore, they felt closer. Communicating is an important way to maintain and intensify a relationship. It provides an opportunity for siblings to grow closer as they remain an important relationship in each other’s lives. Finally, those who were shown to be less close reported more fighting and/or opportunities to agitate one another due to the time together.

The second most frequently reported turning point was “attending school,” with 177 (28.1%) participants reporting the turning point. Participants stated that being at school, starting school, or studying abroad was an important turning point in their relationship with their sibling. Participants reported that being at college, rather than at home, was a key turning point in their relationship with their sibling. Some participants reported that being at school benefited their relationship with their sibling, and closeness increased. Of the individuals who reported an increase in closeness, some stated that this was because they fought less and had less opportunity to annoy one other. For those participants who included studying abroad, closeness increased due to the excitement one sibling had for the other to be traveling abroad, or because of a developing a shared experience if the other sibling had previously traveled abroad. Of the 177 turning points containing “attending school,” 72 (40.7%) reported closeness increasing. Other participants felt that being at school was the reason of why their closeness with their siblings decreased. Those participants reported that being apart and not communicating on a regular basis was a reason for the decrease in closeness. In addition, studying abroad made it difficult for siblings to communicate due to time changes, high costs, and minimal time to keep in touch. A total of 52 (29.3%) participant turning points were reported that decreased closeness. A total of 8 (4.5%) remained the same. Overall, “attending school” caused some siblings to grow closer while others became distant.

The third turning point, “family issues,” included such events as a death in the family, the parents divorcing, a health issue, or a member of the family causing problems. A total of 65 (10.3%) instances were reported. Thirty-eight (58.5%)

instances referred to an increase in closeness, 13 (20%) reported a decrease, and two (3%) remained the same. Parental separation or/and divorce or death in the family were reasons for siblings to grow closer as they reached out to each other for support. Specifically, a death in the family was an event that brought people together to celebrate the life of the individual who had passed. Family members may put aside issues and problems due to the situation, while others may reminisce about memories they shared. In addition, illnesses resulted in siblings growing closer. Illnesses could be affecting either sibling or another family member—regardless, all became closer. Siblings were able to provide support or comfort to one another through the illness. For those siblings that grew distant, participants reported events such as a DUI or other problems. Some siblings reported being “fed up” with another sibling issue that caused problems within the family. Therefore, these issues resulted in a decrease in closeness.

“Support,” was the fourth turning point with 46 (7.3%) events reported. Support consisted of siblings discussing decisions they were making, talking about problems with one another, or providing advice/help. Thirty-six (78%) of the points reported an increase in closeness, while only five (11%) reported a decrease. For those siblings whose closeness increased, several participants reported calling each other for advice with school problems or other major decisions. Several participants were homesick or needed comforting from their sibling. In addition, participants reported discussing break-ups or romantic partner issues with each other, and receiving support during the conversation.

“Moving,” was the fifth most frequent turning point with 27 (4.3%) events reported. Moving was a cause for both an increase and decrease in closeness. Eleven (41%) individuals reported an increase in closeness, while nine (33.3%) reported a decrease. Only one (4%) report remained the same. There were no consistencies, whether siblings were moving closer or further away, regarding “moving” and its relationship to closeness. For example, some siblings remained close whether moving closer or moving further away.

The sixth turning point, “change in the family structure,” was reported 18 (2.9%) times. Again, closeness was divided with six (33.3%) dyads becoming closer, seven (39%) growing distant, and two (11.1) remaining the same. The birth of a child, whether it was a sibling’s or parents’, brought siblings closer together. Regardless, other changes in the family structure can result in either an increase or a decrease in closeness among siblings as demonstrated in the data.

The seventh turning point was “avoidance.” This turning point was reported 18 (2.9%) times, and not surprisingly, 14 (78%) dyads became less close. Participants that reported this turning point stated that they had little or no time to communicate with one another and, therefore, they became less close. Others reported that their sibling made no effort to contact them and remain connected. Lack of communication plays a vital role in sibling relationships, and when no communication is occurring it is not surprising that closeness decreases.

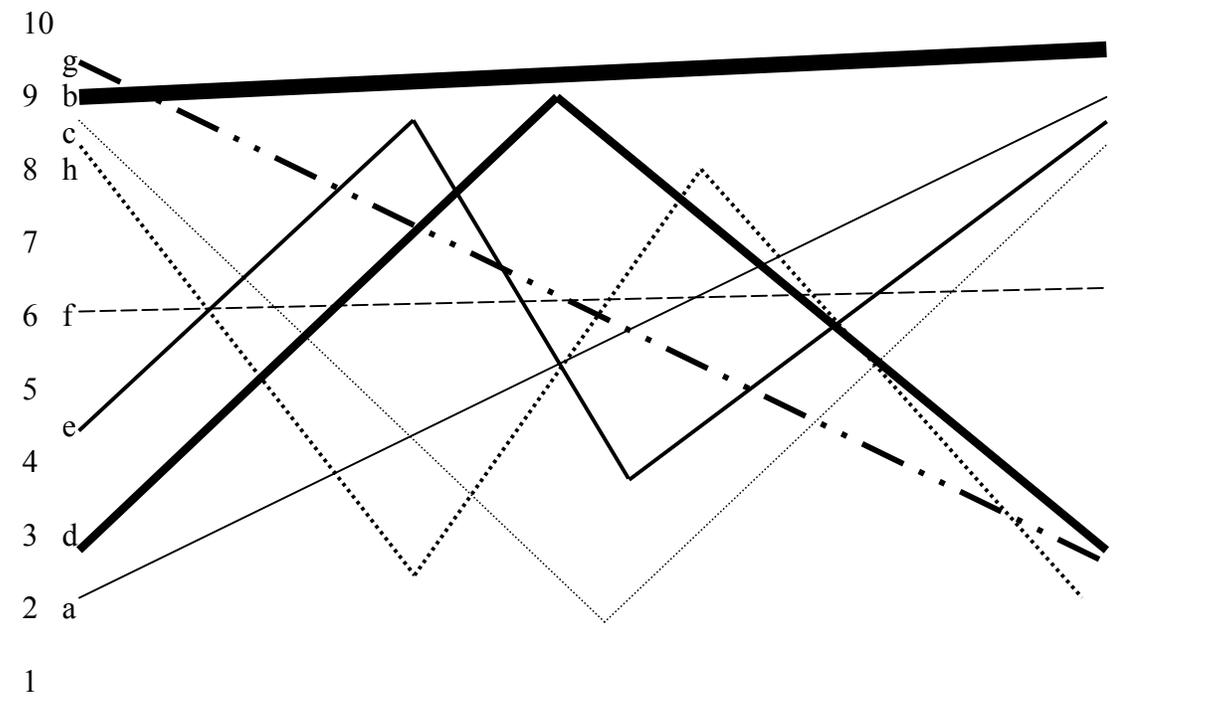
“Conflict,” was the eighth most frequently reported turning point with a total of 15 mentions (2.4%). The majority of participants, a total of 10 (67%), reported becoming less close, while only one participant (7%) grew closer. It is not unusual

for siblings to become less close due to a conflict. Participants reported conflict issues over significant others, dating friends, or using each other. Arguments can be difficult for siblings as they may cause a decrease in closeness. A few individuals, however, later reported that they reconciled with their sibling, which resulted in an increase in closeness.

The final turning point, “graduation,” was reported 11 (1.7%) times. All participants (100% of the 11) reported growing closer to their sibling due to this turning point. Graduation is a time to celebrate accomplishments. Many times it is a joyous occasion for a family resulting in members growing closer to one another.

Patterns of Closeness Between Young Adult Siblings

Research question four addressed patterns of changes in closeness which categorized sibling relationships during the young adult stage. To answer research question four, eight patterns of changes in closeness were identified from the RIT graphs. Research question four was analyzed by first organizing each individual response by the type of pattern it followed. The 10-point scale was divided into low, medium, and high levels of closeness. Then, each individual response was placed in separate categories, which explained the various turning points and how they related to the level of closeness and how closeness progressed throughout. After each response was placed, categories were collapsed. From there, patterns were drawn and similar patterns were collapsed into the same category. This followed a similar analysis of past research (Golish, 2000). Figure 3.10 illustrates these patterns.



- a = Gradual increase in closeness
- b = Sustained high degree of closeness
- c = Single disruption of low closeness
- d = Single disruption of high closeness
- e = Multiple disruptions of closeness beginning low
- f = Sustained moderate degree of closeness
- g = Gradual decrease in closeness
- h = Multiple disruptions of closeness beginning high

Figure 3.10. Patterns of turning points in closeness in young adult siblings.

The first closeness pattern (illustrated as “a” in Figure 3.10), “gradual increase in closeness” ($n = 75$), was characterized by a steady increase in closeness from the beginning point to the present. Participants’ closeness began either low or moderate and increased from the point they moved out of the same home to the present time where they felt moderately to highly close. No single event caused the increase in closeness except for normal life circumstances. Participants cited attending school

and growing up as reasons for their increase in closeness, while others reported that they increased in closeness for no reason except that it happened.

“Sustained high degree of closeness” was the second closeness pattern (illustrated as “b” in Figure 3.10) ($n = 32$). This pattern was characterized by a steady, high degree of closeness over the designated time. Participants reported starting off high and remaining high throughout. Common turning points such as spending time together or school were reported as reasons for a sustained high level of closeness. Other siblings stated that they just felt close and that it remained that way throughout the young adult period.

The third closeness pattern was “single disruption of low closeness” (illustrated as “c” in Figure 3.10) ($n = 23$). This pattern was characterized by starting high on closeness followed by a single event that lowered the closeness level, followed by an increase in closeness. Participants reported causes of decreases in closeness such as studying abroad, lack of communication due to busy schedules, or a major fight. Increases in closeness after the single decrease in closeness were due to visiting each other or spending more time with one another and focusing on building and sustaining the relationship even in the midst of busy schedules.

“Single disruption of high closeness” (illustrated as “d” in Figure 3.10), was the fourth closeness pattern of siblings during the young adult stage ($n = 23$). This pattern was characterized by the sibling closeness level starting low with a single event in which the closeness level increased, followed by an event that resulted in a decrease in closeness. Sibling closeness increased due to a significant family issue such as an illness or death in the family. Other participants reported an increase in

closeness due to sharing time together. Eventually, closeness decreased to its original level due to lack of time together or due to school.

The fifth closeness pattern was “multiple disruptions of closeness beginning low” (illustrated as “e” in Figure 3.10) ($n = 10$). This pattern was characterized by the starting point beginning with low levels of closeness followed by an increase in closeness, then a decrease and finally ending closer at either the moderate or high level of closeness. Siblings discussed events in which their closeness increased, such as a vacation or school, followed by an event that caused their closeness to decrease, such as a conflict, family issue, or school.

The sixth closeness pattern, “sustained moderate degree of closeness” (illustrated as “f” in Figure 3.10) ($n = 9$), was characterized by closeness levels remaining moderate throughout the time period stated. Participants reported the turning points of college and spending time together as key points in their relationships. Participants reported normal events such as college that kept them steadily at the moderate closeness level. Nothing happened that either increased or decreased their closeness levels significantly.

“Gradual decrease in closeness,” (illustrated as “g” in Figure 3.10), was the seventh closeness pattern for siblings during the young adult period ($n = 9$). This pattern was characterized by closeness levels beginning at either moderate to high levels of closeness. Closeness steadily decreased to moderate to low levels of closeness. However, decrease in closeness only occurred slightly by two to three points on the closeness scale. Turning points such as school, avoidance, or familial issues were reported as reasons for the decrease in closeness. Overall, daily life apart

may have been the reason why siblings felt a slight decrease in closeness rather than significant increase and decrease in closeness.

The eighth and final closeness pattern was “multiple disruptions of closeness beginning high” (illustrated as “h” in Figure 3.10) ($n = 8$). This pattern was characterized by the closeness level beginning high, then moving lower, followed by an increase in closeness, and then ending down, but at the moderate level of closeness. For several participants something significant occurred that caused a sharp decrease in closeness followed by an increase. This occurred several times throughout the specified time period. Decrease in closeness was associated to something significant such as going to school or a family problem. Increases in closeness were associated with spending time at home or on a vacation together that created a situation in which siblings could reconnect and spend time together growing closer.

Summary

This chapter presented the results of the analyses of the data in the present study. Results from the closeness, relational satisfaction, and everyday talk scales were discussed. Mean scores of the closeness, relational satisfaction, and everyday talk scales were included. A result of the t -test conducted on closeness among geographically close and distant siblings was discussed. In addition, the results for the Pearson product-moment correlation conducted on closeness and relational satisfaction, as well as the Pearson product-moment correlation conducted on the three categories of everyday talk and both closeness and relational satisfaction were included. The factor analysis for everyday talk was discussed in detail.

The chapter also presented the results of the turning points siblings reported experiencing during the young adult years. The total number of turning points was presented. In addition, each turning point category was discussed in detail, as was the total number and percentage of participants who reported the turning point. The turning point's relationship to closeness was also explicitly explained for each turning point category. Finally, the various patterns of closeness among young adult siblings were discussed in detail, as were the total number and specific turning points per closeness pattern.

Chapter Four: Discussion, Limitations, and Directions for Future Research

This chapter discusses the major findings that were identified in the present study. The discussion includes conclusions obtained from analyses of the major concepts of this study, including how geographic distance relates to closeness, the role of everyday talk in the management of sibling relationships, and identification of critical turning points among siblings.

Discussion

Overall, the present study has revealed five major findings:

1. Geographic proximity does not relate to feelings of closeness among siblings.
2. Three types of everyday talk are important in maintaining and managing sibling relationships—expressions of intimacy, maintenance talk, and relationally risky talk.
3. Expressions of intimacy, maintenance talk, and relationally risky talk related to feelings of closeness, while only the expressions of intimacy category related to relational satisfaction.
4. Nine unique turning points were identified as important events in the relationship among young adult siblings and these turning point events related to feelings of closeness among siblings.
5. Seven unique, fluctuating patterns of closeness were identified among siblings during periods of change.

The remainder of this chapter discusses these findings in greater detail.

Finding 1: Geographic proximity does not relate to feelings of closeness among siblings. The first major finding from the present study is that geographically close and distant siblings are not distinct or different in their level of relational closeness with moderate levels of closeness. Past research has reported mixed findings on levels of closeness siblings report during the young adult stage (Cicirelli, 1995; Connidis 1992; Milevsky, 2005; Stocker et al., 1997); therefore, these findings are important in that they demonstrate that young adult siblings' feelings towards each other are not impacted by geography. Past research affirms this finding. For example, Short and Gottman (1997) found that geographic distance is not related to closeness, while Goetting (1986) reported that siblings continue to interact with family members when they live apart. Milevsky (2005) reported that siblings continue to feel close with their siblings during the transition to young adulthood and proceed to communicate with one another. These moderate levels of closeness seem not to be impacted by geographic distance. Siblings may be finding other ways to remain close, such as visiting each other at school or during breaks, remaining in contact with one another via telephone or other mediums, or they may feel close due to their support of one another through various difficulties and life events. During the young adult years, it is typical for siblings to continue to return to the parental home for periods of time. This pattern can also help to explain why distance is not as much of a factor as it may be in the middle and later adult years. Overall, this finding indicates that geographic distance does not significantly impact how siblings feel about each other. Other factors, such as the quality of the social interaction, may

have more of an impact on the quality of the sibling relationship than physical distance alone.

Finding 2: Three types of everyday talk are important in maintaining and managing sibling relationships—expressions of intimacy, maintenance talk, and relationally risky talk. The second major finding focuses on the characteristics of everyday talk that occurs between siblings. To better understand the three categories of everyday talk, it is important to first discuss the different characteristics of talk most commonly and least commonly used by siblings during the young adult years. It was common for sibling talk to involve activities such as catching up, joking around, engaging in small talk, talking about problems, engaging in a serious conversation, discussing decisions to be made, and making plans. Siblings rarely participated in conversations that were persuasive conversations, one-way conversations, involved making up, and interrogations. Now that the topics that siblings most and least commonly engage in have been laid out, the three major categories of everyday talk will be discussed.

The first category of everyday talk was “expressions of intimacy.” Talk in the “expressions of intimacy” among siblings was categorized in terms of expressions of love or engaging in a serious conversation that can be associated with deeper, more meaningful relationships. It is reasonable to assume that conversations such as these are more personal in nature and, thus, they signify a more meaningful and significant relationship.

The second category of everyday talk to emerge from the data was “maintenance talk.” “Maintenance talk” was a common type of talk among siblings.

This type of talk included topics such as small talk, gossip, and recapping the day. Due to the nature of these topics, the activities are used when individuals are maintaining their relationship rather than developing or intensifying it. It is reasonable to assume that maintenance topics are not as serious, yet they play an important role in the maintaining and sustaining of a relationship. Duck (1988) found that most conversations entail maintaining rather than developing or dissolving a relationship, which is supported in the present study.

The third and final everyday talk category was “relationally risky talk” and contained topics such as conflict, interrogation, and asking a favor. All topics are relationally “risky” in that the individual is demonstrating vulnerability when they engage in the topic. “Relationally risky talk” is the least used type of talk among siblings. It is the type of talk that takes a great deal of energy, and has the potential to change the relationship—therefore, it typically occurs on an infrequent basis. Due to the nature of each category and the current findings, the researcher would thus expect that siblings would engage more in “expressions of intimacy” and “maintenance talk” than “relationally risky talk.”

Finding 3: Expressions of intimacy, maintenance talk, and relationally risky talk related to feelings of closeness, while only the expressions of intimacy category related to relational satisfaction. The third major finding of the present study addressed the relationships between everyday talk with both feelings of closeness and relational satisfaction. While relational closeness was related to all three categories of everyday talk (expressions of intimacy, maintenance talk, and relational risky talk), relational satisfaction was only related to the “expressions of

intimacy.” Perhaps, the most interesting aspect of the finding is the relationship between “relationally risky talk” and relational closeness. This relationship is surprising as the conversations include topics such as interrogation, conflict, and complaining, which tend to be negative conversations that many often try to avoid. “Relationally risky talk” relates to closeness because it provides siblings an opportunity to engage in conversations that will hopefully improve or change the relationship. If siblings are able to engage in these conversations effectively, it may bring them closer together. Overall, they may be uncomfortable conversations, yet they are important as they can hopefully bring change to the relationship and thus closeness.

Similar to “relationally risky talk,” everyday talk in the “maintenance talk” is important in maintaining and sustaining relationships resulting in increased feelings of closeness with the sibling. However, “maintenance talk” does not necessarily result in a satisfying relationship, as it tends to be mundane and used for maintenance purposes. In addition, past research has found no significant association between relational maintenance and relational satisfaction (Dindia & Baxter, 1987), which is consistent with this study.

On the other hand, the “expressions of intimacy” contains important types of talk that result in both feelings of closeness and satisfaction in the sibling relationship. Types of talk such as catching up or engaging in a serious conversation allow siblings to feel close to one another as they deepen their relationship—by the same token, because these types of conversations deepen the relationship, siblings feel more satisfied with their relationship.

The first three findings presented thus far have provided a greater understanding of the young adult sibling relationship. First, geographic distance did not relate to overall closeness and closeness levels were moderate for both geographically close and distant siblings. Second, everyday talk conversations were reported for usage and everyday talk conversations were calculated revealing three categories. And third, all three categories of everyday talk correlated significantly with closeness; however, only the “expressions of intimacy” category was positively correlated with relational satisfaction.

Finding 4: Nine unique turning points were identified as important events in the young adult sibling relationship, and these turning point events related to feelings of closeness in the sibling relationship. Overall, nine turning point events were identified among the young adult siblings. Each turning point was identified in the data and resulted in the siblings growing either closer or more distant in response to the turning point event.

The most frequently reported turning point category was “time together.” This has previously been a key turning point in studies on romantic partners (Baxter & Bullis, 1986), blended families (Baxter, Braithwaite, & Nicholson, 1999), friends (Johnson et al., 2003), and adult child/parent relationship (Golish, 2000). Participants in this study were no longer living together, so the infrequent and limited amount of time together provided an opportunity for siblings to reconnect and feel closer to one another. Due to the limited amount of time together, it is reasonable to assume that many did not have the opportunity to annoy or cause friction with one another. Specifically, time together spent on vacations or during holidays allowed siblings to

escape from their busy schedules and to spend uninterrupted time together. Vacations and holidays allowed individuals to relax and reconnect without the daily interruptions that can hinder relationships. Myers and Weber (2004) reported that family visits were a means by which siblings maintained their relationship; therefore, it is not surprising that siblings reported time together through family visits on vacations and holidays as an important turning point and one that allowed siblings to grow closer together.

In addition to spending time via vacations and holidays, siblings reported spending time doing an activity together, which allowed siblings to grow closer. Floyd and Parks (1995) reported that both men and women grow closer when engaged in shared activities. In the present study, both males and females reported that time together engaging in such as activities as skiing or spending time with a mutual friend brought them closer together, which is consistent with the past research of Floyd and Parks (1995). Johnson et al.'s (2004) research on friendships and turning points found that friends reported activities such as participating in an activity together or spending time together as an important turning point in their relationship. In addition, the activities done together by friends resulted in an increase in closeness. Friendships and adult sibling relationships are similar due to the egalitarian nature of the relationship and the fact that adult sibling relationships are based now on choices like friendships, so it is not surprising that both types of relationships reported the turning point of time together and many experienced an increase in closeness due to the event.

In the present study, time together provided opportunities for siblings to experience a shared activity together, to talk, or to just be together. It is not surprising that siblings would report growing closer together as a result of spending time with one another. In addition to activities, siblings in the present study reported spending time together by connecting via mediated means such as calling. According to Floyd and Parks (1995), connecting through verbal interactions contributed to overall closeness, specifically to women. The majority of participants reporting connecting involved a female sibling. This supports past research, which suggests that women use verbal interactions as a way to connect and feel close to their siblings (Floyd & Parks, 1995).

Although most of the individuals in the present study reported growing closer to their siblings, some did report that they grew more distant as a result of spending time together. For example, when individuals have become accustomed to their schedules apart it is difficult to be around one another for longer periods of time (i.e., summer break). Once again, limited amount of time together may allow siblings to grow closer as they do not have the opportunity to bother the other, while longer visits together may result in siblings growing distant.

The second most frequently reported turning point was “attending school.” This turning point is similar to past research on romantic relationships (Baxter & Bullis, 1986), friends (Johnson et al., 2003), and adult child/parent relationship (Golish, 2000). All of the participants in the present study were currently enrolled in school, therefore it is not unexpected that participants reported being at school as a key event resulting in a change in their relationship with their sibling. Interestingly,

siblings in the present study reported both increases and decreases in closeness in association with the “attending school” turning point event. For many, this was the first time they were no longer living with their sibling and thus, there was physical distance between them—they were experiencing new challenges in maintaining their relationship with their sibling.

It is reasonable to assume that siblings, who have struggled with sibling rivalry or conflict with their sibling in the past, find that once they are away from each other, it is easier to maintain closeness in the relationship. The day-to-day events that typically strain a sibling relationship no longer exist and a door opens to a re-definition of the sibling relationship with potentially higher levels of closeness. However, it is also possible that others found it was difficult to maintain the level of closeness they previously experienced when living together due to the new lack of time and immediacy. Johnson et al.’s (2004) study on friendship and turning points reported a similar finding. They found that friends reported increases of geographic distance as a turning point and that closeness decreased due to the increase of geographic distance. It is not surprising then, that siblings also reported decreases in closeness due to the increase of geographic distance. Contrary to this, Sullivan and Sullivan (1980) found that among parent/child relationships, college-age sons reported improvements with their overall communication with their parents while they went away to school—also supporting the idea that increases in geographic distance can result in an increase in closeness among family members.

Similar to the idea of physical distance, studying abroad was a common element within the “attending school” turning point category. Studying abroad

created obstacles for communication among siblings and several reported that they grew more distant due to the lack of immediate communication. However, others grew closer due to being excited for the other and the life changing experience they were having. Overall, being away from one another because of school was a central and normal part of the transition into adulthood and an important turning point for sibling relationships. The physical distance between siblings either benefited or disrupted the sibling relationship depending on how siblings handled it.

“Family issues” was the third turning point event to emerge in the present study. This turning point is similar to other turning point studies about blended families (Baxter, Braithwaite, & Nicholson, 1999) and adult child/parent relationship (Golish, 2000). Most participants reported an increase in closeness around situations such as a death in the family or an illness affecting a family member. Siblings may have grown closer due to mutual feelings of loss due to the death of a family member or through supporting each other through the difficult time of facing a family illness. Illnesses, such as cancer, are crucial life situations where it is assumed that family members will band together to support one another. Other siblings in the present study reported being able to connect with their sibling while reminiscing about and sharing the joy of a lost family member’s life. Therefore, it is evident that siblings function as an important support system throughout the life cycle and difficult family circumstances provide an opportunity to lend this support.

There were other types of events in the “family issues” turning point as well. For example, some siblings reported decreases in closeness due to problems that a sibling caused to the family, such as receiving a DUI or rebelling. Siblings may have

been angry with the sibling causing problems for the family and therefore, the problem resulted in a decrease in closeness. The varying responses of levels of closeness attributed to a “family issue” and are similar to past research (Folwell et al., 1997). Folwell et al. (1997) found similar results when examining events associated with emotionally close and distant siblings. Emotionally close siblings reported growing closer due to family hardships, while emotionally distant siblings reported growing distant over family tragedies/death/illness. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that sibling closeness responses to the family issue may have stemmed from how emotionally close they were overall and therefore, responded accordingly becoming closer if they were emotionally close and more distant if they were emotionally distant. Overall, “family issues” are important events in the sibling relationship that affect the closeness and overall relationship.

“Support” was the fourth turning point event with which the majority of participants reported experiencing greater closeness with their sibling. Support included such events as discussing problems with one another and providing advice or comfort about an issue or situation. According to Furman and Buhrmester (1985), siblings serve as support systems to one another throughout their lifespan, which is evident in the present study. Myers and Weber (2004) reported that one of the relational maintenance behaviors siblings use is that of social support, which is directly related to sibling liking, commitment, and trust. This is evident in the present study in that siblings reported feelings of support in their relationship with their sibling. In another study, Milvesky (2005) found that siblings who receive high levels of sibling support show significantly lower scores on measures of loneliness

and depression and higher scores on life satisfaction and self-esteem. The current study demonstrates that siblings value and are affected by support. Finally, Floyd (1995) reported that doing favors or helping each other during emergencies (a form of social support) reflected in greater closeness. This supports the participants' reports of growing closer due to the support experienced. Overall, support for one another was important for the siblings in the present study. Providing support was important for siblings and resulted in an increase in closeness.

The fifth turning point, "moving," resulted in both increases and decreases in closeness for the siblings in the present study. The event of "moving" does not relate solely to either bringing siblings emotionally closer or emotionally more distant. Some siblings who moved closer to each other may have increased sibling closeness due to the ease of spending more time together, whereas, perhaps moving farther away caused a decrease in closeness because living far apart may have created a greater difficulty in seeing each other. This is evident in Johnson et al.'s (2003) research on friendships in which they found that increases of geographic distance resulted in decreases in closeness and decreases in geographic distance resulted in increases in closeness, therefore supporting several participants' reports of similar experiences with moving either geographically closer or distant. On the other hand, other siblings may grow closer when a sibling moves away due to the excitement they have for the new opportunity of their sibling, and they may experience decreases in closeness when moving closer due to relational problems. Overall, the act of moving was an important event for siblings due to the changes it brought to the relationship.

The sixth turning point, “change in the family structure,” resulted in several participants reporting increases in closeness while several others reported decreases in closeness. Past research supports both of these findings. For example, Connidis (1992) found that siblings’ closeness increased after the birth of a child to the sibling. Also, Connidis found that siblings’ closeness decreased after marriage. It is reasonable to assume that the mixed results could be due to the relationship with the new member, particularly with an addition through marriage. Individuals who have a more positive relationship with the new in-law would likely report an increase in closeness with the sibling; however, those who have a poorer relationship may report a decrease. In addition, there could be an issue of jealousy between the siblings due to the time spent with the spouse rather than with the sibling. With regard to the birth of a child, closeness variations may be similar to experiences with the addition of a member through marriage.

“Avoidance” was the seventh turning point. Avoidance consisted of little or no contact between siblings due to either siblings’ lack of time or that either sibling made no effort to communicate with the other. It is not surprising that the majority of participants reported a decrease in closeness in relation to events in this category. The lack of time spent together, and/or direct avoidance associated with events in this category, do not allow for siblings to maintain their relationship, thereby resulting in a decrease in closeness. Limited or no communication provides no opportunity to build or maintain a relationship. Relationships are continually changing—they may develop further or disintegrate and even relational maintenance allows for change. Therefore, the lack of communication among the participants in the present study was

not allowing for maintenance or growth to occur within the relationship. The result was a decrease in closeness rather than a maintaining of a current level of closeness or growing closer. This is supported by past research on siblings and friends. For example, Myers and Bryant (2008) examined types of verbally aggressive messages used by siblings. They found that withdrawal was a type of aggressive message that siblings used to hurt one another; therefore, it is not surprising that siblings' reports of events such as avoidance resulted in a decrease in closeness. Similarly, Johnson et al. (2003) reported that as friends experienced decreases in contact, the imminent result was a decrease in closeness, which is similar to siblings experience with avoidance of communication.

The eighth turning point event was "conflict." Past research on blended families also identified conflict as a turning point for the family (Baxter, Braithwaite, & Nicholson, 1999). This turning point was also associated with a decrease in closeness among the siblings. It was not unusual that siblings' feelings of closeness decreased due to a conflict. The very nature of a conflict presumes a decrease in closeness as individuals engage in dealing with an issue of disagreement. Past research has found similar results with regard to relational satisfaction as it relates to closeness. For example, Teven et al. (1998) found that siblings' verbal aggression related negatively with their overall relational satisfaction and Martin et al. (2005) found that verbal aggression related negatively with their overall communication satisfaction. Therefore, it is not surprising that conflict, which may include verbal aggression, results in a decrease in closeness. Similarly, Johnson et al. (2003) found that among closeness among friends decreased as a result of conflict.

The final turning point was “graduation.” A similar category, “special celebration,” was derived from a study on blended family turning points (Baxter, Braithwaite, & Nicholson, 1999). All the participants who reported graduation as a turning point also reported an increase in closeness around this event. Participants were genuinely excited that their sibling had accomplished such a large goal and they reported feeling close due to it. Graduation does not tend to cause stress or strife; rather, graduations are times of togetherness as members attend the ceremony, meals, and other commencement activities.

The nine turning point events that emerged in the present study represented events that brought siblings closer and/or moving them more distant to each other. The next portion of this section will examine the overall characteristics of closeness with regard to the turning points.

The turning point events of “time together,” “family issues,” “graduation,” and “support” all resulted in siblings growing closer together. Three overall explanations are given for siblings growing closer together due to these three turning points. The first explanation for siblings growing closer together is due to communication. In essence, they reported that both the quality of the communication, as well as the quantity of communication were important contributors to the siblings growing closer. Siblings reported that they communicated more and had better conversations with each other, which resulted in them feeling closer to their sibling. The second reason why siblings grew closer together was due to overall support for one another. Participants reported that they supported each other through family issues, being homesick, and helping each other with other problems. Overall, siblings

reported that supporting each other through the turning points brought the siblings closer together. The final explanation for why siblings grew closer together during these turning points was they had the opportunity to celebrate. Celebrating an accomplishment, a family member, or life in general was found to be an important reason for why siblings grew closer together.

Three turning points resulted in mixed conclusions with some siblings growing closer together and others reporting increased distance. These turning points were “attending school,” “moving,” and “change in the family structure.” The reasons for growing closer varied by turning point. For example, participants reported that being at school provided less opportunity to fight, however, participants reported that studying abroad provided opportunities to be excited for a sibling and their experience. Explanations for growing distant were the same for all turning points. Participants reported that they grew more distant due to the lack of communication with their sibling. Individuals felt that school, moving, or changes in family structure (particularly an addition to the family through marriage or birth) were causes of less communication and therefore, reasons for siblings to feel distant. Communication occurred less due to the lack of time siblings had due to the turning point or due to the greater distance between siblings. Finally, two turning points, “avoidance” and “conflict,” resulted in siblings becoming more distant. Participants reported that the little or lack of communication and the negative communication resulted in siblings growing distant from each other.

Turning points demonstrate the important events that affect the sibling relationship and how they experience closeness. Turning points varied in terms of

bringing siblings closer to each other or more distant. The results emphasize the importance of examining specific events and how these events impact the sibling relationships. Increased understandings can be made from the particular turning points that provide a broader understanding of the sibling relationship during the young adult years.

Overall, the turning points demonstrate the importance of communication in maintaining and sustaining sibling relationships during the young adult years. Communication played a central role in the closeness of siblings whether or not it was a casual conversation to catch up or a conversation that included support. The importance of communication is also apparent in that the lack of communication equates to siblings growing more distant. Therefore, communication is central to sibling relationships, particularly during the young adult years as individuals engage in the various transitions and changes that the life stage presents. If individuals desire to remain close to their sibling, it is imperative that they begin or continue to communicate with one another. When siblings stop communicating, there is no opportunity for them to stay connected and be a part of each other's lives and therefore, they inevitably feel less close. The young adult years are particularly important for siblings to remain in contact as they set the foundation for the remainder of the relationship. The young adult years set a precedent for how siblings will engage with one another in middle and late adulthood when the responsibilities of life result in greater demands.

Finding 5: Seven unique fluctuating patterns of closeness were identified among siblings during periods of change. The patterns of closeness among siblings

in the present study provide insight into the overall sibling relationship during the young adult life stage. Seven patterns of closeness during the young adult life stage were found among the siblings in the present study, which were similar to past research on friendship (Johnson et al., 2003), adult child/parent relationship (Golish, 2000), and divorced couples (Graham, 1997). The most common closeness pattern, “gradual increase in closeness,” characterized how throughout the young adult stage individuals increased in closeness from the starting point of moving out of the home to the present. Maturing, school, or time together were the explanations provided by the participants for why they felt an increase in closeness towards their sibling.

The “sustained high degree of closeness” and “sustained moderate degree of closeness” patterns were similar in that participants reported that they felt a specific level of closeness and that it did not fluctuate much throughout the young adult stage. Typical life events (such as college) did not affect the level of closeness, but rather were normal parts of life. Golish (2000) reported a similar closeness pattern among adult child/parent relationships. She expressed that the adult child/parent relationship may maintain stability overtime and therefore, it was reasonable that the participants reported sustained degrees of closeness. The participants in the current study are experiencing similar life situations, so it is reasonable to assume that some siblings would experience stability in their relationship and therefore, report a sustained degree of closeness.

The third closeness pattern, “single disruption of low closeness,” was characterized by a single event resulting in a decrease in closeness. Golish (2000) reported a similar closeness pattern among adult children and their relationship with

their parents. It was common among the participants who reported this pattern that one primary negative event caused the decrease in closeness, but all were able to recover from the negative event and return to a higher level of closeness. Events like fights or studying abroad eventually ended and siblings were able to regain their original level of closeness.

Conversely, a “single disruption of high closeness” was a pattern in which siblings experienced a single event that resulted in increased closeness. Johnson et al. (2003) reported a similar pattern among young adult friends. Specific events such as a death in the family or a family member experiencing an illness caused siblings to feel closer due to that event. However, once time had passed since the event in which siblings found support in each other to deal with it, sibling closeness decreased to its prior level.

The closeness patterns of “multiple disruptions of closeness beginning low” and “multiple disruptions of closeness beginning high” were similar in that siblings experienced several disruptions that caused closeness to increase and decrease several times throughout the specified time period. Past research on turning points and closeness patterns have found similar trajectories (Golish, 2000; Johnson et al., 2003). Events such as family problems, going to school, vacations, and fights characterized the various turning points siblings experienced that led to the varying degrees of closeness. Regardless, all of the respondents reported feeling moderate closeness presently, even with the multiple disruptions and changes in closeness.

The seventh closeness pattern, “gradual decrease in closeness,” was characterized by participants reporting moderate to high levels of closeness. Golish

(2000) reported a similar closeness pattern among the adult child/parent relationship. This level of closeness had decreased steadily due to siblings living apart and not seeing each other on a daily basis. Decreases were only minor, indicating that siblings felt that closeness changed only slightly, rather than dramatically.

The seven patterns of closeness during the young adult stage provide insight into the sibling relationship. There were various patterns of closeness the siblings in the present study reported experiencing: some reported steady increases of closeness, some reported decreases, others reported consistency, and others reported sporadic experiences of closeness. Overall, these results demonstrate why it is so difficult to categorize the sibling relationship as one pattern of experience. All sibling relationships are different. Even siblings from the same family will not have the same pattern of closeness throughout the life cycle and particularly during the young adult years. It is inaccurate for researchers to claim that the young adult years are times where all siblings experience decreases in closeness or that all siblings begin the young adult years distant and then develop into close siblings (Atchley, 1977). Rather than searching for one closeness trajectory, researchers should focus on the various patterns of closeness siblings experience and what commonalities these siblings express. This study illustrates that while all relationships are unique, they also maintain a sense of commonality, both of which create the sibling relationship.

Overall

The present study provides a greater understanding of the sibling relationship, specifically with regard to communication and closeness. The importance of interaction is central to the managing and renegotiating of the sibling relationship

during the young adult years. The turning point events examined in the present study highlight the importance of examining how life events can impact the development and change in close family relationships, specifically the sibling relationship. For example, three key turning point events, “time together,” “attending school,” and “avoidance,” signify the importance of quality communication among siblings. The turning point “time together” related to an increase in closeness among siblings most likely due to high quality interaction that may have occurred during their time together.

“Attending school” was another important turning point for young adult siblings. “Attending school” resulted in siblings reporting both increases and decreases with regard to closeness. Many reported communication or the quality of their social interaction as central to whether siblings experienced increases or decreases in closeness. While school proved to be a challenge to the sibling relationship, many siblings did not allow it to hinder their relationship, but rather they used the opportunity to grow closer through positive, high quality interaction. For those siblings who reported decreases in closeness, many reported the lack of communication or lack of high quality interaction. This leads into the third key turning point “avoidance.” Several participants reported the lack of communication they experienced during the young adult years, which resulted in decreases in closeness. Therefore, the present study provides evidence that communication is central to the sibling relationship, especially high quality communication to have a close sibling relationship.

Propositions

The young adult years are times of transition and change for families and specifically for the sibling relationship, yet it does not have to be a time for sibling relationships to deteriorate. The present study has examined the various turning point events that siblings experience during the young adult years and how these events relate to closeness. In addition, the present study has examined the types of talk siblings engage in and how these relate to closeness and relational satisfaction. Having gained a better understanding of the sibling relationship during the young adult years through the examination of these concepts, two propositions can be presented on the management and negotiations of the sibling relationship during the young adult years can be explored.

First, turning point events occur that affect the sibling relationship, however, the response to the turning point determines how the event affects the sibling closeness. The quality of the interaction plays a central role in the managing of turning points. It is important to understand that regardless of the turning point event such as “attending school,” “conflict,” or “family issues” that siblings can still be close. It is critical that these events be managed through the experience of high quality interaction either face-to-face or through mediated communication. With today’s technology and mediated communication channels, siblings should not use the excuse of physical distance as a reason for a decline in the sibling relationship as it does not relate to closeness.

Second, there are a variety of types of talk that siblings can engage in to improve closeness and relational satisfaction in the relationship. The present study

examined three categories of everyday talk that relate to closeness and relational satisfaction. The first category, expressions of intimacy, is important for siblings to incorporate in interaction. For example, one type of talk was about problems. Talking about problems enables siblings to support each other which increases closeness as found in the turning point analysis. A second type of talk in the expressions of intimacy category was expressing love. It is important for siblings to share that they care for each other as it can result in an increase in closeness. The second everyday talk category was maintenance talk, which related with closeness. Two types of talk that siblings can engage in to maintain their relationship are small talk and joking around. Lighthearted conversations such as these provide opportunities to engage in maintenance behavior that is important in the day-to-day health of the relationship. The final everyday talk category was relationally risky talk (specifically conflict and making-up) and also related with closeness. These types of talk are important for siblings to engage in because they provide opportunity to manage change. Conflict is inevitable in every relationship, therefore, how siblings engage in the conflict, the quality of the conflict, as is the resolution of the conflict is what is important in maintaining the relationship. Even though these types of talk can create feelings of vulnerability, they are important to engage and resolve productively as they can bring siblings closer together emotionally.

Overall, it is inevitable that siblings experience change in their relationship as they move into young adulthood, therefore, siblings need to be aware of the idiosyncrasies associated with this life stage so that they can manage them productively. Effective communication is central to managing the transition

effectively and enabling the relationship to mature and grow closer. Siblings need to engage in communication and use a variety of types of talk to ensure that the relationship can manage the challenges that transitions bring to a relationship.

Toward a Theory of Siblings' Transition to Young Adulthood

Given these findings and the complicated nature of transitions in close relationships, a preliminary model is presented that attempts to create a theoretically sound and parsimonious explanation of siblings' transition to young adulthood (see Figure 4.1).

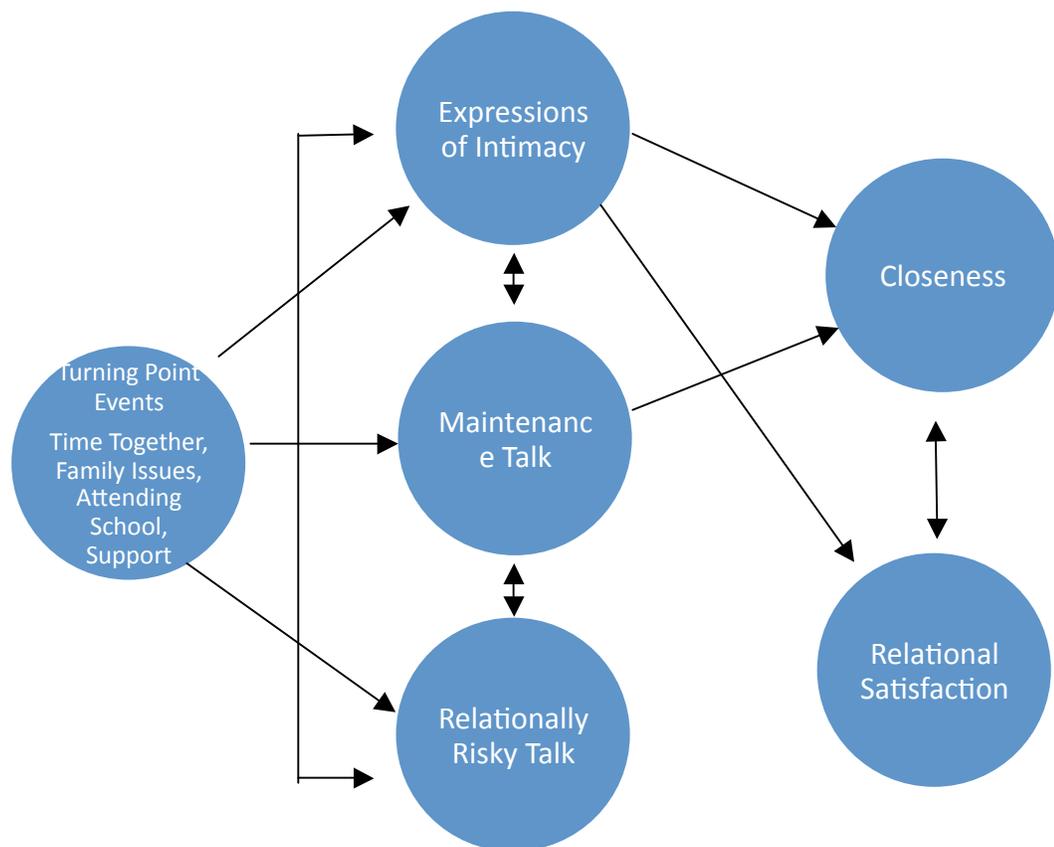


Figure 4.1. Model of sibling transition in young adulthood.

Accordingly, this dissertation presents three assumptions for a theory of siblings' transition to young adulthood.

Assumption 1: Critical relational events occur that move sibling relationships to a new status. Critical events (such as “time together,” “attending school,” “family issues,” and “getting and receiving support”) occur that move sibling relationships to a new relational definition characterized by either more or less closeness. When events are responded to positively, sibling relationships typically grow closer together; however, when the critical events are managed poorly, the result is greater emotional distance between siblings. For example, high quality interactions during periods of time together allow siblings to grow closer due to the quality of the interaction. However, if the interactions are not high quality, sibling relationships can suffer. “Attending school” can bring siblings closer together emotionally. For example, school provides opportunities for growth and if siblings share these opportunities with one another, siblings can grow closer. “Family issues” creates crises that either bring people together or further apart. The outcome depends on how the siblings manage the critical event. Finally, “getting and receiving support” can bring siblings together. For example, the feeling that others are available to you in a time of need can result in higher levels of closeness. Conversely, the lack of support when needed can result in sibling relationships growing more distant. Overall, the way siblings manage critical events during the transition of young adulthood results in a new place for the relationship, either emotionally closer or more distant.

Assumption 2: The characteristics of the talk during critical events impact the trajectory of the young adult sibling relationship. The present study reveals that during these critical events (i.e., time together, attending school, family

crisis, and getting and receiving support) it is important to engage in either expressions of intimacy, maintenance types of talk, and relationally risky talk as they impact the trajectory of the sibling relationship in young adulthood. This is due to the characteristics embedded in those types of talk that make a difference in the sibling relationship. The present study was exploratory in nature; therefore, future research needs to explore the characteristics of each type of talk and how they make a difference in the sibling relationship. For example, future research can explore how relationally risky talk plays itself out in the sibling relationship. Specifically, researchers can examine what relationally risky talk looks like when handled productively—or, researchers can examine expressions of intimacy and specifically what types of talk result in more intimate sibling relationships. Researchers can also examine maintenance talk and how siblings engage in each type of talk that results in siblings maintaining their relationship.

Research on the various types of talk can vary depending on which type of talk is being examined. However, future research can follow this example. Conflict is a type of relationally risky talk among siblings, yet it is important for siblings to engage in conflict, specifically when conducted productively. Therefore, it is important to examine how siblings engage in conflict productively. Future research could model the marital conflict field's research methods in that researchers can videotape siblings engaging in difficult conversations and code the communication strategies used (Gottman, Levenson, & Woodin, 2001; Gottman, Markman, & Notarius, 1977; Levenson & Gottman, 1983). This model could be used for

examining the communication dynamics among siblings when they are engaging in difficult conversations.

Assumption 3: The way in which communication is managed during turning point events predicts feelings of closeness and relational satisfaction among siblings. Through the use of types of talk (expressions of intimacy, maintenance talk, and relationally risky talk), turning point events can be related to both closeness and relational satisfaction, providing a greater understanding of the sibling relationship. However, this first requires a way of quantifying turning points so that they can be related to closeness and relational satisfaction with the types of talk as mediators between turning point events and closeness and relational satisfaction. Quantifying turning points can follow other examples of scale development (Goldsmith & Baxter, 1996). In doing so, trajectories can be acquired. Trajectories provide an understanding of the way in which siblings manage the turning point event through the use of various types of talk, which determine if closeness increases or decreases. Before trajectories of increased or decreased closeness can be determined, researchers must examine what siblings do with the types of talk during critical events and how siblings engage in types of talk. For example, what is the gossip and how do siblings do gossip?

Summary

The present study examined the sibling relationship during the young adult years by examining closeness among geographically close and distant siblings, the relationship between closeness and relational satisfaction, everyday talk and the relationship between everyday talk categories and both closeness and relational

satisfaction, key turning point events siblings experience, and communication patterns. Five major findings were observed and explained in the present study. First, closeness levels did not differ between geographically close and distant siblings. Second, three everyday talk categories were found. Third, all three everyday talk categories related to closeness, but only expressions of intimacy related with relational satisfaction. Fourth, nine turning point categories emerged from the data and each related uniquely with closeness. The final finding was that siblings experienced seven different closeness patterns. These findings are important to the sibling literature as they provide a clearer understanding of the sibling relationship with regard to closeness, relational satisfaction, everyday talk, and turning points.

Limitations and Future Research

The purpose of the present study was to examine the sibling relationship during the young adult years by examining how everyday talk relates to closeness and relational satisfaction, how turning point events relate to closeness and closeness patterns. The findings from this study contribute to an increased understanding of the sibling relationship during the young adult stage, particularly with regard to everyday talk and turning points. Although, this study provided new information on the sibling relationship, there were several limitations to the study, and there are more areas of research that need to be addressed in the future.

The first limitation of the present study is that only one sibling was questioned with regard to his/her sibling relationship. This study, which examined only one sibling's perspective on their relationship with their sibling, is the first step in increasing our understanding of communication dynamics among siblings. Future

research should focus on sibling dyads, rather than an individual sibling reporting about their understanding of the relationship. It is important to consider the sibling relationship as co-constructed together rather than individually by only one member.

The second limitation of the present study is that the population lacked diversity. Almost 87% of the population identified themselves as Caucasian, which excluded other racial groups that may provide important information about sibling relationships. In addition, almost 60% of the participants were female. Past research on siblings has shown that males and females engage in their sibling relationships differently (Floyd & Parks, 1995), therefore, it is important to have a more equal number of males and females to make broader generalizations about the sibling relationship. Finally, almost 90% of siblings were biologically related. Biological siblings are not the only sibling relationship and each unique make-up of siblings provides a clearer understanding of the overall sibling relationship. Therefore, the examination of communication among half siblings, stepsiblings, or one or both siblings having been adopted may also be important for increased understanding of the sibling relationship. Overall, future studies need to sample from a more diverse population that takes into account race, sex, and family composition.

The third limitation of the present study is that the sample consisted of primarily middle and upper class individuals. For example, the turning point “time together,” which included studying abroad, would not necessarily be reported as frequently from another, less affluent university setting. Studying abroad is an expensive endeavor and the present university, from which the sample was drawn, has over 150 study abroad programs and encourages all students to participate.

Future research needs to recruit individuals of all economic backgrounds in order to understand the sibling relationship from each unique experience.

The fourth limitation of the present study is that not all participants' siblings were still in the young adult life stage. The goal of the study was to examine siblings during the young adult years. Strategies were in place to ensure that all participants reported on a sibling who was at least 18 and therefore, in the young adult years. However, there were no maximum age limits. Therefore, some participants reported on siblings as old as 43. The young adult years are unique and different from other life stages and it is important to study only siblings who are currently in the life stage. Future research on siblings in the young adult years needs to look at only individuals and their siblings who are currently experiencing the young adult years.

The fifth limitation of the present study is the measurement strategies utilized to assess turning points in the sibling relationship. Participants plotted the turning points they experienced along with the level of closeness they felt, but they did not go into detail about the importance of the turning point and why it affected the closeness change or maintenance accordingly. As a result of this lack of detail, it is recommended that future research on turning points in close relationships use an interview format to collect this data instead of self-report surveys. This strategy will increase the depth of information collected on the turning point experiences in close relationships.

Despite the limitations mentioned above, the present study opens the door for some interesting future research opportunities. Future research should address four areas. First, as stated before, research needs to focus on two siblings who are both

currently in the young adult years. Examining dyads with both members in the same life stage will provide an even clearer understanding of siblings in their young adult years in terms of their uniqueness and the particulars that life stage. In addition, future research needs to address each portion of the life cycle with regard to the sibling relationship. Only then can we fully understand the sibling relationship.

The second area for potential future research is in regard to closeness. The study of sibling closeness should veer away from solely utilizing closeness scales and needs to address in greater detail why siblings feel the amount of closeness they do, why closeness levels vary, what events specifically affect closeness, and why. Closeness is an important aspect of understanding the sibling relationship. Past research has focused primarily on the overall closeness levels siblings report (Connidis & Campbell, 1995; Milevsky, 2005). The present study demonstrates the importance of examining turning points and how they affect closeness, which provides a better understanding of the sibling relationship. Future research needs to focus further on specific events and how they affect closeness in the sibling relationship.

The third area that future research needs to address is in regard to everyday talk and closeness. The present study found that there were three everyday talk categories and that they all related to closeness. Although this is a start, future research should more specifically address each everyday talk topic, the amount that siblings use the topic, and how that topic affects closeness. By examining everyday talk and closeness in this manner, specific topics used by siblings that are important to their relationship can be revealed.

The fourth and final suggestion for future research is to address turning points in greater detail. This is the first sibling study, to the researcher's knowledge, that examined turning points. Turning points provide a greater insight into the sibling relationship. Future research needs to examine turning points in greater depth, as well as why sibling closeness changes due to the specific turning point. Overall, future research needs to focus on greater explanations of turning points and closeness. Overall, the present study has provided insight into sibling relationships with regard to closeness and geographical distance, the relationship between everyday talk and both closeness and relational satisfaction, and key turning point events that impact the sibling relationship. This study brings researchers one step closer to understanding the unique relationships of siblings.

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Appendix A: Survey

Sibling Relationship Survey

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this project. This survey examines the degree of closeness, satisfaction, types of talk, and turning points among sibling relationships.

SPECIAL NOTE: If you have more than one sibling, please select only one of your siblings and complete this survey with that sibling in mind. Please select a sibling that is over the age of 18 and who's birthday month is closest to yours. In addition, please follow the directions highlighted in bold. There are no right or wrong answers, and your responses will be kept strictly anonymous and confidential.

The following questions will help us define your sibling relationship. Please indicate your response by circling the appropriate answer or entering the desired information.

1.	Your sex.	Female Male
2.	Your age.	_____ Years Old
3.	Your siblings sex.	Female Male
4.	Your siblings age.	_____ Years Old
5.	Birth order of you	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
6.	Birth order of sibling	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
7.	Relational type.	Biological Step Half Sibling is Adopted You Are Adopted Both Adopted
8.	Total number of children in your family.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
9.	Would you consider your sibling relationship to be a long distance relationship (for this study a long distance relationship is one in which you cannot see your sibling, face-to-face, most days)?	Yes No
10.	Your year in school	High school/College First Year Student Sophomore Junior Senior Graduated
11.	Your siblings year in	High school/College

	school	First Year Student Graduated	Sophomore	Junior	Senior
12.	Your ethnic background	African American Islander American Indian	Latino/a Caucasian	Asian/Pacific Another:	
13	Your siblings ethnic background	African American Islander American Indian	Latino/a Caucasian	Asian/Pacific Another:	

Siblings often have varying degrees of closeness with one another, therefore please answer the following questions about your level of closeness over the past month with your sibling by circling the appropriate number on a 1-to-5 scale.

		Not at All		Somewhat		Very Much
14.	How openly do you talk with your sibling?	1	2	3	4	5
15.	How careful do you feel you have to be about what you say to your sibling?	1	2	3	4	5
16.	How comfortable do you feel admitting doubts and fears to your sibling?	1	2	3	4	5
17.	How interested is your sibling in talking to you when you want to talk?	1	2	3	4	5
18.	How often does your sibling express affection or liking for you?	1	2	3	4	5
19.	How well does your sibling know what you are really like?	1	2	3	4	5
20.	How close do you feel to your sibling?	1	2	3	4	5
21.	How confident are you that your sibling would help you if you had a problem?	1	2	3	4	5
22.	If you needed money, how comfortable would you be asking your sibling for it?	1	2	3	4	5
23.	How interested is your sibling in the things you do?	1	2	3	4	5

24. On a scale of 1-10 (1 being not close at all, 10 being extremely close) how close do you feel to your sibling? _____

The following statements concern the ways siblings communicate in their relationship. Please report how often you communicate with your sibling via the following means.

25.	How many times per two weeks do you communicate by email with him/her? _____ Times Per Two Weeks
26.	How many times per two weeks do you communicate by instant messaging with him/her? _____ Times Per Two Weeks
27.	How many times per two weeks do you communicate by text messaging with him/her? _____ Times Per two Weeks
28.	How many times per two weeks do you communicate by phone with him/her? _____ Times Per Two Weeks
29.	How many times per two weeks do you communicate face to face with him/her? _____ Times Per Two Weeks

30.	How many times per two weeks do you communicate by regular mail through letters, cards, or packa him/her? _____ <i>Times Per Two Weeks</i>
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Please circle the appropriate number on a 1-to-5 scale indicating how frequently you engage in each of the following kinds of talk with your sibling over the past month.

		Never	Seldom	Sometim	Often
31.	Small Talk	1	2	3	4
32.	Gossip	1	2	3	4
33.	Joking Around	1	2	3	4
34.	Catching Up	1	2	3	4
35.	Recapping The Day's Events	1	2	3	4
36.	Reminiscing	1	2	3	4
37.	Making Up	1	2	3	4
38.	Express Love	1	2	3	4
39.	Relationship Talk	1	2	3	4
40.	Conflict	1	2	3	4
41.	Serious Conversation	1	2	3	4
42.	Talking About Problems	1	2	3	4
43.	Complaining	1	2	3	4
44.	Persuading Conversation	1	2	3	4
45.	Decision-Making	1	2	3	4
46.	Giving and Getting Instructions	1	2	3	4
47.	One-Way Conversations	1	2	3	4
48.	Interrogation	1	2	3	4
49.	Making Plans	1	2	3	4
50.	Asking a Favor	1	2	3	4

The following statements concern your satisfaction with your relationship with your sibling. Please think about your relationship with your sibling over the past month and use the following words and phrases to describe it. For example, if you think that your relationship with your sibling during the past month has been very miserable, circle the space next to the word "miserable." If you think it has been very enjoyable, circle the space next to "enjoyable." If you think it has been somewhere in between, circle the space that is appropriate.

51.	Miserable	1	2	3	4	5	Enjoyable
52.	Hopeful	1	2	3	4	5	Discouraging
53.	Empty	1	2	3	4	5	Full
54.	Interesting	1	2	3	4	5	Boring
55.	Rewarding	1	2	3	4	5	Disappointing

56.	Doesn't give me much chance	1	2	3	4	5	Brings out the best in me
57.	Lonely	1	2	3	4	5	Friendly
58.	Worthwhile	1	2	3	4	5	Useless

All things considered, how satisfied or dissatisfied have you been with your relationship with your sibling over the last month? Circle the space that best describes how satisfied you have been.

59.	Completely Dissatisfied	1	2	3	4	5	Completely Satisfied
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60. Please fill out the following chart. Directions: The following chart is designed to identify major turning points or changes in your relationship with your sibling. The vertical line represents how close you felt to your sibling during a specific change and the horizontal line represents the various turning points or changes in your relationship. To start you need to identify the point in which the first sibling moved out of the home you were both residing in. Then you will place this with how close you felt to your sibling. The last point is today. Identify how close you are today. Next you will identify key turning points between the starting point and today and how close you felt during each of those points. Plot as many turning points/key changes that you have experienced during the time frame. Remember there are no right or wrong answers.

Extremely Close		
	9	
	8	
Time of	7	
Turning	6	
Point	5	
Occurrence	4	
	3	
	2	
	1	
	0	

Extremely Distant

Point where both moved out

Today

Appendix B: Script to Invite Individuals to Participate in Study

My name is Jennifer Corti and I am a third year PhD student at the University of Denver. I am currently working on my dissertation which is entitled Sibling Relationships during the Young Adult Years: An Analysis of Closeness, Relational Satisfaction, Everyday Talk, and Turning Points. The results will most likely be published or presented at a conference. I am here to ask for individuals to participate in this study. The purpose of the study is to look at differences in closeness, relational satisfaction, everyday talk and turning points among geographically close and distant siblings. The survey contains questions about your relationship with your sibling. In order to participate, you must be at least 18 years old and have a sibling of any kind (biological, step-sibling, half-sibling, or adopted sibling). In addition, your sibling must be at least 18 and currently not living with you. The survey will only take 10-15 minutes which you will complete right now. There are minimal risks involved, but at any moment you may stop if you feel uncomfortable. The survey is completely voluntary and you will not receive any penalty if you do not choose to participate. I will now ask for volunteers.

Appendix C: Examples of Turning Point Responses with Closeness Level

Participant Identification Number	Participant Sex and Age	Siblings Sex and Age	Turning Point	Description of Turning Point and Closeness Level
124	M-20	F-23	Time Together	Home together that summer; 8.5
181	M-19	F-22	Time Together	Came a visit me for a week; 9
177	M-21	F-18	Time Together	Just got on each others nerves that summer; 4
108	F-19	M-22	Time Together	Bonding with skiing interest; 9
24	F-20	M-19	Time Together	Hang out in Boulder (party together); 9
174	F-77	M-23	Time Together	Hung out one night. It really brought us together; 10
77	F-20	M-22	Time Together	Talk online once every two weeks. When we are both home we get along better than when we were younger; 6
113	F-20	F-20	Time Together	Trip to Belize. We fought a lot; 4 Spring break I visited her and we did not get along; 4
64	F-22	M-19	Time Together	Family vacation in Hawaii, we made fun of our parents; 8
133	M-23	M-22	Time Together	He became closer with my friends and I became closer to hid friend. Hung out more often; 8
181	M-19	F-22	Attending School	School; 5
108	F-19	M-22	Attending School	Started college- Brother provided guidance; 10

112	F-22	M-20	Attending School	I moved to South America
10	F-20	M-22	Attending School	I moved out, we got closer after I left for college; 9
20	F-19	M-23	Attending School	College, we talk more than we ever did when we lived at home-we've both matured; 9
22	F-22	M-25	Attending School	He left to another continent! So it was hard to communicate. We felt close and distant at the same time; 5
193	F-22	M-21	Attending School	Both started school; 1
191	F-20	M-18	Attending School	Study abroad; 3
180	M-22	F-24	Family Issues	Oldest brother passed away; 7
49	F-19	M-23	Family Issues	My grandmothers death, we really bonded over our feelings of devotion and longing for her; 8
186	F-20	M-25	Family Issues	Dad got cancer. Found out I was cutting and talked with me for hours to help understand me; 9
27	F-19	M-20	Family Issues	My mother going to rehab; 9
45	F-20	M-22	Family Issues	Parents separated; 5 Parents divorced. 5.5
224	F-19	M-22	Family Issues	He had a mental breakdown; 1 Had to pay \$700 dollars to get his car out of impound and he hasn't mentioned it once; 1
108	F-19	M-22	Support	Started college-Brother provided guidance; 10
192	F-21	M-29	Support	Helped me with guy problems; 8

				Helped me get through a break-up; 9
48	F-19	M-22	Support	When I called my brother with problems adjusting to school; 6
186	F-20	M-25	Support	Dad got cancer. Found out I was cutting and talked with me for hours to help understand me; 9
100	F-21	F-23	Support	Saved my computer during finals
124	M-20	F-23	Moving	She moved to California; 7
148	F-20	M-25	Moving	He graduated and moved back to home town; 10
114	F-23	M-25	Moving	Brother moved to NY; 9
19	F-20	F-25	Moving	She moved to OH; 6
151	F-21	F-23	Moving	Sibling moved to ND; 10
70	M-20	F-22	Moving	Moved to DC; 5
9	F-20	M-24	Change in the Family Structure	He had a baby. The baby kept us close for a little; 5
85	F-19	F-24	Change in the Family Structure	Her having a baby; 7
55	F-19	M-22	Change in the Family Structure	Mom engaged and remarried; 6.5
66	F-20	M-24	Change in the Family Structure	Marriage
129	M-20	M-26	Change in the Family Structure	Brother got married; 6 Brother let wife take over his life; 4
88	M-20	F-22	Avoidance	She ignores my communication sometimes; 7.5

108	F-19	M-22	Avoidance	No/little contact in summer; 6
224	F-19	M-22	Avoidance	I've tried calling him, but he rarely calls back; 2
137	F-20	M-18	Avoidance	Busy with school. Little communication; 6.5
16	F-20	F-35	Avoidance	I never see her. She is busy with her son and boyfriend. I am in college; 1
187	M-21	F-27	Conflict	Fight; 2
37	F-21	M-19	Conflict	He tried to date my best friend; 1
119	F-19	F-21	Conflict	Her and my boyfriend did not get along; 7
182	F-20	F-22	Conflict	Major fight; 1.5
15	F-21	F-30	Conflict	Got in a fight. She accused me I only use her. Said we only got along in London because she paid for the whole trip; 3
148	F-20	M-25	Graduation	He graduated and moved back to home town; 10
201	F-20	F-23	Graduation	Graduated college; 9
81	M-20	F-22	Graduation	She is getting ready to graduate and head back to Korea; 6
162	M-19	F-23	Graduation	Sister graduates college; 7