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The Adolescent Sibling Relationship as a Predictor of Romantic Relationship Quality in Emerging Adulthood

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**The Adolescent Sibling Relationship as a Predictor of Romantic Relationship Quality in
Emerging Adulthood**

by

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A Thesis

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Abstract

This study examines the relationship quality of siblings during adolescence and the relationship quality of romantic relationships during emerging adulthood. The research hypothesis states that in positive dyadic sibling relationships, individuals with an opposite-sex older sibling will report greater relationship satisfaction with a romantic partner in emerging adulthood than individuals with a same-sex older sibling. Participant demographics as well as responses to the Network of Relationship Inventory were examined. Participants were university students who had at least one sibling, and were in a current romantic relationship lasting at least 6 months. The implications of research are to expand understanding of how the sibling relationship impacts family dynamics, as well as the social development of the individual.

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Chapter 1: Introduction and Literature Review

The following literature review discusses how interactions with siblings prepare individuals for later experiences in their social worlds. Conflict resolution skills between siblings, and the implications of gender differences are explored. Finally the benefits of positive sibling relationships are looked at in detail. The current study will examine how social skills learned from a sibling during adolescence will transfer to romantic relationships in early adulthood.

Social Skills and Preparation

An individual is first exposed to socialization in their family of origin. Much of the attachment and socialization research indicates the importance of the parental role. Although an individual's relationship with his or her parents is undeniably impactful, recent research indicates that sibling relationships have a significant influence on the development of youth, even after other relationships are considered (McHale, Updegraff, & Whiteman, 2012). Both positive and negative interactions with siblings affect how an adolescent will develop. When comparing sibling relationships and parent-child relationships, studies indicate that adolescents may have an easier time in sibling relationships expressing themselves, taking part in interactions that develop social skills, and taking the perspective of others. This is because the age gap between siblings is often similar to that of peer relationships. These sibling interactions are learning opportunities in that they can foster the development of conflict resolution and appropriate emotional expression (Padilla-Walker, Harper, & Jensen, 2010). Spending extended periods of time with a sibling serves as a reminder that people other than ourselves have individual thoughts and ambitions (Raffaelli, 1992). Considering this

idea, it is easy to see how individuals with siblings might be better equipped to handle social interactions or conflicts with their peers.

Since children learn social skills from their family-of-origin, older siblings usually become models for their younger siblings. Everyday interactions can prepare individuals for peer interactions, and also influence the relationship between siblings. In the case of conflicts, the individual who always loses the argument may develop a sense of resentment towards their sibling, and may come to learn they cannot win. Alternatively, if one sibling always wins arguments by behaving a certain way, like shouting, the behavior is reinforced as the child continuously gets what they want (Whiteman, McHale, & Soli, 2011). If a win-lose pattern of sibling arguments continue, the effect of sibling negativity will be even greater. Although conflicts do arise, a sibling relationship is also often a source of social support throughout life, giving adolescents a place to practice their social skills on others who may be different from them in a variety of ways including gender, age, and overall personality (Doughty, Lam, Stanik, & McHale, 2015).

Due to similarities between sibling relationships and romantic relationships, it can be expected that aspects of the sibling relationship may be a source of preparation for later romantic relationships (Doughty, McHale, & Feinberg, 2013). Intimate sibling relationships may lead to better social skills as well as confidence, which is empowering to adolescents. The sibling relationship also teaches individuals what to expect from other peers, and how they should behave in accordance. In this sense, the sibling relationship may also impact how an individual behaves in their romantic relationships. Sibling and romantic relationships both involve gender dynamics, as well as similar levels of emotional intensity (Doughty et al.,

2015). Learning to engage in power negotiations as well as to effectively resolve conflicts with a sibling may be skills that carry over from the sibling relationship into romantic relationships. The acquired social skills, or lack of social skills, that each person brings to the romantic relationship may be an important factor in how the couple negotiates power and resolves conflict (Doughty et al., 2013).

Sibling Conflict

Increased self-disclosure in intimate relationships opens the door for disagreement, as these important relationships are emotionally charged and become unstable (Olson, DeFrain, & Skogrand, 2014). Given these findings, it is easy to understand why sibling conflict is so common. Conflict, as well as increased levels of anxiety and lower self-esteem, has been correlated with difficult emotional adjustment in adolescence. Interestingly, studies have indicated that the impact of sibling conflict differed depending on birth order and gender constellation of the siblings. The researchers noted that the gender constellation of the sibling dyad is important to consider when exploring adjustment of children and adolescents. In fact, when studying how siblings interact with one another, the gender constellation may be even more important to explore than individual traits (Campione-Barr, Greer, & Kruse, 2013).

In sibling relationships that are rated as being both warm and containing a small level of conflict, both siblings indicated that they perceived themselves as having some power and control in the relationship. Those who report greater sibling intimacy also reported more power in their romantic relationships. Conversely, conflict between siblings has been a negative predictor for intimacy with a romantic partner, in that the greater the sibling conflict, the lower levels of later romantic intimacy. Sibling relationships with especially high levels of

conflict are detrimental to the development of the social skills that are particularly beneficial in later romantic relationships (Doughty et al., 2013). These findings underline the importance of researching siblings as part of social learning. (Doughty et al., 2015).

With regard to the conflict domains, siblings most often argue about equality and fairness, as well as personal domain invasion. Personal domain invasions have been correlated with negative sibling relationships for both older and younger siblings (Campione-Barr & Smetana, 2010). Although personal domain invasions often take place among siblings, a 2014 study indicated that sibling pairs most often discussed issues of equality and fairness. These results were affected by the gender constellation, as the researchers found that sister-sister sibling dyads were more likely to fight over the personal invasion domain than brother-brother or opposite-sex dyads. Also, discussing intrinsic harm issues such as teasing, being bossy, or being physically aggressive often lead to intense conversations. It was challenging for participants of the study to stay calm when their siblings started to use a more heated tone of voice, which indicated that the intensity of the argument could further promote negative feelings between siblings (Campione-Barr, Greer, Schwab, & Kruse, 2014).

Power has been defined as the “product” of personal interactions and communication that might indicate an attempt to control another person (Bevan, 2010). Specifically for opposite-sex sibling dyads, sibling control was found to be a predictor for romantic intimacy and power (Doughty et al., 2013). As children, power in the sibling dyad often goes to the older sibling simply because they have a greater ability to articulate their feelings and point of view. However, a younger sibling who is able to effectively express one’s feelings may elicit less threatening responses from their older siblings. This means that understanding between

siblings may be most beneficial to the younger child who has less social skills than his or her older sibling, as an increase in sibling relationship quality has been correlated with less destructive conflict behaviour (Hindman, Riggs, & Hook, 2013).

When siblings argue, tension can escalate, and both can become both verbally and physically aggressive. A 2015 study on childhood aggression indicated that some of the most common acts of aggression included shouting, swearing, and pushing. Although sibling aggression is not uncommon, greater instances of sibling aggression in childhood were correlated with both aggression and emotional difficulties in adulthood. This is consistent with previous findings as well as social learning theory, which maintain that people replicate the behaviour they have learned from other people. If a child grows up around frequent aggressive interactions, they will be more likely to use aggressive behaviors as an adult. Interestingly, the results of this study pertained to both males and females (Mathis & Mueller, 2015).

Conflict between siblings is inevitable, but not every aspect of it is negative. Experiencing conflict with a sibling can help individuals define their own identity by exploring their differences from their brother or sister (Shantz & Hobart, 1989). That being said, effectively managing conflict and learning to use social understanding will have a positive effect on sibling relationship quality (Kramer, 2010).

Siblings who have a positive relationship may find conflict resolution easier because they have less of a negative history between them. An increase in sibling conflicts likely elicits an increase in negative feelings. The negative feelings create a hostile environment where more conflicts are likely to happen. Considering this, it is easy to see how sibling

conflict can become a vicious cycle if the issues are not resolved. As suggested by a 2003 study, conflict within the family often reaches a high point when the children reach adolescence, and dealing with these conflicts appropriately has been linked to more successful adjustment (Tucker, McHale, & Crouter, 2003).

Gender Differences in Socialization

Researchers have long acknowledged that males and females have different preferences in how they create their social network. Males are likely to prefer large groups of peers, and females usually have smaller, more intimate peer groups (Olson et al., 2014). A 2014 study predicted that because of this difference in peer interactions, males should be more likely to reconcile with peers after a conflict. Their study supported this idea, and found that women feel angrier than men for longer, and at a higher intensity following a conflict with a same-sex peer. Therefore, they posited that women are more likely to end a peer relationship after a conflict occurs (Benenson et al., 2014). These findings may suggest that women and men approach peer relationships with different expectations.

It is also likely that individuals may manage disputes differently depending on whether the conflict is with a same-sex peer or with a romantic partner. The female-female friendship is usually cooperative and emotionally intimate, which is different from male-male friendships. This may give women an advantage in romantic relationships, as they are accustomed to being emotionally vulnerable with another person, whereas men may not have had that experience (Keener, Strough, & DiDonato, 2012).

Gender differences have also been found with regards to empathy. Studies show that girls tend to be more empathetic than boys, and are more likely to be passive in conflict

resolution, by withdrawing or giving in. The study of empathy also indicates that it is positively correlated with prosocial behaviour, and negatively correlated with aggressive behaviour (De Wied, Branje, Meeus, 2007). It can be suggested that given these two findings, females may be more prosocial in their conflict resolution.

Self-disclosure increases intimacy between people, and is an important factor in friendships and romantic relationships. Increasing intimacy can lead to an increase in mutual trust. Males and females differ in how they self-disclose. Women tend to value interpersonal connections, whereas men are more likely to value independence (Olson et al., 2014). Both men and women could benefit from learning how the opposite sex prefers to communicate. Women could be more relaxed in conflict situations if they accept that it is not always a threat to the relationship. Men could learn that being intimate and connected with a partner does not require giving up personal freedom. Ideally, people will have a balanced style of communication that accepts both connection and independence (Tannen, 2001).

When looking for an opposite-sex intimate partner, both males and females are often disheartened by the different approach the opposite sex takes in building intimacy. For instance, women will want to use self-disclosure, whereas men are more comfortable participating in activities together, when developing the relationship. Couples may find success if they are both flexible, and try to communicate in a way that their new partner feels comfortable. Men could benefit by opening up emotionally, and women could enjoy participating in activities. Both parties will likely appreciate the efforts of their partner (Olson et al., 2014).

Sibling Gender Constellation

Gender constellation has been correlated with the effects of sibling intimacy in adolescent siblings. Having an opposite-sex sibling may give individuals a jump-start at developing the skills and experience of interacting with a member of the opposite sex, and may be beneficial for many adolescents in entering romantic relationships. Individuals with opposite-sex siblings are found to experience an increase in romantic competencies throughout adolescence, while no such effect was found for individuals with same-sex siblings (Doughty et al., 2015). Gaining a better understanding of how males and females communicate differently may prepare individuals for initial interactions with members of the opposite sex (Olson et al., 2014).

In adolescence, siblings may be increasingly important sources of information regarding peers and social groups, as parents may be seen as not understanding their peer dynamics (McHale, Kim, & Whiteman, 2006). Having an opposite-sex sibling may open doors to a larger group of opposite-sex peers and their “culture”. These siblings may also be a first-hand source on how to interact with opposite-sex peers (Doughty et al., 2015). Adolescents who have a sibling of the opposite-sex reported higher intimacy in their romantic relationships. A positive correlation was found between sibling gender constellation and later power in the romantic relationship, but this was only true for opposite-sex sibling dyads. (Doughty et al., 2013).

Birth Order

There have been opposing views on the importance of birth order between siblings. There are some family therapists who support the idea that the way a family is organized will

impact the individual members, and they acknowledge that the study of birth order is valuable. What makes this area of research somewhat controversial is that the effects of birth order have been found to fluctuate depending on what constructs are being studied. With regards to social development, there is evidence that birth order does have an impact on children and adolescents (Steelman, Powell, Werum, & Carter, 2002).

A 2011 study indicated that birth order seems to affect an individual's perception of the bond they have with their sibling. The younger siblings were more likely to compare themselves to their older sibling, whereas the older siblings seemed unaffected by the relationship with their younger sibling (Van Volkom, Manchiz, & Reich, 2011).

Although older siblings usually see themselves as being the sibling with the most power, younger siblings have been found to rate this relationship as being more satisfying. A 2014 study supported this statement, and indicated a correlation between relationship duration and birth order. Unsurprisingly, the more satisfying the romantic relationship, the longer they tended to last (Robertson, Shepherd, & Goedeke, 2014).

Research has found that children with older siblings tend to perform better on tasks measuring social understanding. They tend to have a head start with skills such as emotional understanding and perspective taking, which could be learned from the older sibling. Levels of self-awareness were also higher for children with older siblings. In fact, the impact that siblings have on the development of their younger sibling's self-awareness might explain the correlation between self-awareness and the number of siblings in a family. These findings further support the affect that older siblings have on the social development of their younger sibling (Taumoepeau & Reese, 2014).

With regards to negotiation between siblings, a 2006 study found that the age difference between children does not affect the outcome of the conflict, however, being the older sibling is a place of privilege, as they tend to win the arguments. This study concluded that although the older sibling will usually lead the conversation, siblings can effectively resolve conflicts if each sibling remains flexible and open to the others' suggestions (Ross, Ross, Stein, & Trabasso, 2006).

Benefits of Positive Sibling Relationships

Encouragement is one aspect of the sibling interact that has been found to counteract the effects of sibling conflict. Siblings tend to be closer and have greater relationship satisfaction when they support each other, acknowledge each other's points of view, listen to, and accept their siblings. In addition, when siblings actually "push" each other to succeed, siblings may develop an even closer relationship (Phillips & Schrodt, 2015). In addition, warmth in the sibling relationship has been negatively correlated with externalizing problems in adolescents, such as aggression, as well as predicting lower levels of social difficulties (Bascoe, Davies, & Cummings, 2012).

The influence that older siblings have on their younger siblings has been correlated with the younger siblings' perception of their older sibling. For example, a 2000 study indicated that the level of support received from an older sibling is related to better social adjustment, but only when the younger sibling views their sibling in a positive light (Widmer & Weiss, 2000). This finding can be seen as another reason that positive sibling relationships are beneficial. The more positive the sibling relationship is, the more influential the older sibling can be in promoting healthy adjustment in their younger sibling.

There has been much research done on parent-child attachment, but sibling attachment has also been found to have positive effects on children and adolescents. A 2013 study found that positive attachments with a sibling might encourage individuals to keep their emotional expression under control, which would in turn likely reduce the instances of anxious, depressive, and aggressive behaviours (Buist, Deković, & Prinzie, 2013).

Similar to the development of social competence, children who have positive attachments to their sibling may acquire more positive schemas about the people around them (DeKlyen & Greenberg, 2008). This means that they would begin new interactions with a sense of confidence and trust in other people, reducing the likelihood of internalizing and externalizing behaviours (Buist et al., 2013).

Implications of Research

An increase of sibling research may encourage mental health practitioners to specifically focus on conflict prevention programs between siblings, rather than simply overall family coherence. In addition, as explained by systems theory, there are reciprocal connections between the sibling relationship and other subsystems in the family (Whiteman et al., 2011). Therefore, practitioners may come to find value in looking at multiple subsystems within the whole family (Doughty et al., 2015). If the goal of parents and mental health practitioners is to encourage positive relationships among siblings, there must be deliberate actions to teach children social skills (Kramer, 2010).

Looking at the impact that opposite-sibling interactions have on the development of romantic social skills is important, as it shows that fights between siblings may have enduring effects on an individual's development. This research is especially important since the sibling

experience has been found to have an effect even after controlling for parent-child relationships. This indicates that the influences of a sibling are significant on their own (Doughty et al., 2015).

With regards to therapy and the issue of conflict in the romantic relationship, helping the clients identify their own conflict style may normalize their problems, and help the couple feel hopeful that they are not fixed in their current routine of interaction (Shalash, Wood, & Parker, 2013).

Current Study

Until recently, researchers have not looked at siblings in detail. This is surprising, considering the impact that sibling relationships most likely have within the family context (Cox, 2010). In addition, although researchers have considered the effect of having an opposite-sex sibling or same-sex sibling, there still needs to be further research (Doughty et al., 2013). There have been some studies on the effects of adolescent relationships, but little on adult relationships (Robertson et al., 2014). After completing the literature review on the most up-to-date research on sibling relationships, social learning, and gender differences in socialization, it seems that conducting further research on the effects of the sibling relationship on romantic relationships would be beneficial.

The goal of the current study is to expand the literature with regards to how the gender constellations in sibling dyads influence social skill development, and how these skills translate into romantic relationships in emerging adulthood. The research questions that emerged from the literature review include: (1) Do the social skills learned in sibling relationships translate into competency in later romantic relationships? (2) Does the

relationship between opposite-sex siblings provide greater preparation for later relationships with opposite-sex romantic partners? and, (3) Does this effect change depending on whether the individual is the older or younger sibling? These questions led to the following research hypothesis:

H: Individuals who report a positive relationship with their opposite-sex older sibling during late adolescence will report higher romantic relationship quality in early adulthood than individuals who report a positive relationship with their same-sex older sibling.

The independent variables to be examined in this study were the gender constellation of the sibling dyad, birth order, and sibling relationship quality. The dependent variable is the quality of the current romantic relationship.

Chapter 2: Method

Participants

One hundred fifty-one voluntary participants were recruited from St. Cloud State University (28 male, 110 female, 13 unanswered). Participants ranged from ages 18 to over 25, with most participants ranging from ages 18-21 years (61%), followed by 20-21 years (24%), over 25 years (16%), 22-23 years (7%), and 24-25 years (4%).

Participants were predominantly White (68%), followed by Asian/Pacific Islander (11%), Hispanic/Latino (5%), African American/Black (3%), and Multiracial (1%). Informed consent was obtained from all participants.

Requirements to participate was having at least one sibling, and being in a current romantic relationship for at least 6 months. Incentive to participate included being entered into a drawing for a \$20 prize. Some participants were offered 5 points extra credit by their professors.

Procedure

The participants were be given consent forms to sign prior to participating in the study (see Appendix A). They were be given permission to stop participating in the study at any point in time. General demographic information, as well as sibling gender constellation and birth order was obtained through self-report questionnaires (see Appendix B). After completion of the survey, they were given a written debriefing about the nature and purpose of the study (see Appendix C). The consent form and written debriefing were adapted from the textbook *Research Design in Counseling* (Heppner, Wampold, & Kivlighan, 2008).

Participants were asked to fill out the Relationship Quality Version of the Network of Relationships Inventory (NRI-RQV). This measure is a survey of 30-items across 10 scales, and it uses a 5-point Likert scale to assess each item (1 = “hardly at all” to 5 = “extremely much”). The NRI-RQV assesses both positive and negative relationship features, such as companionship and conflict, respectively. This study used all 30 items of the NRI-RQV scale (Buhrmester & Furman, 2008). There are 5 positive subscales (Companionship, Intimate Disclosure, Satisfaction, Emotional Support, and Approval) and 5 negative subscales (Pressure, Conflict, Criticism, Dominance, Exclusion). As suggested in the NRI manual, the subscales factors of Closeness and Discord were assessed. Closeness can be considered an overall positive subscale, as it consists of the average of all positive items in the NRI-RQV. Discord can be considered an overall negative subscale, as it consists of the average of all the negative items in the NRI-RQV.

Participants were asked to fill the NRI-RQV twice: once with regards to their sibling relationship during adolescence, and once with regards to their current romantic partner. In the following section, the term *Sibling Subscale* refers to participant responses when considering their sibling relationship, and the term *Romantic Subscale* refers to participant responses when considering their romantic relationship.

Chapter 3: Results

The items of the Network of Relationships Inventory had an overall alpha coefficient of 0.87, indicating that this measurement is valid and reliable. 52% of participants reported on their relationship with an opposite-sex sibling, while 48% of participants reported on their relationship with a same-sex sibling.

The first analysis performed was a t-test for significance of the correlation coefficient. This was computed to assess the relationship between the Sibling Subscales and Romantic Subscales of the NRI-RQV. A factorial analysis of variance was then conducted to explore the influence of Sibling Category and Sibling Subscale. Sibling Category refers to whether the participants completed the NRI-RQV on an older same-sex sibling, older opposite-sex sibling, younger same-sex sibling, or younger opposite-sex sibling.

The Sibling Subscale results were divided into two groups at the median level. For example, the lower half of reported scores on Sibling Companionship were given the label of Low Sibling Companionship, and the upper half of reported scores on Sibling Companionship were given the label of High Sibling Companionship. The factorial analysis of variance was conducted on variables that were significantly correlated in the t-test for significance of the correlation coefficient.

Subscale Correlations

There was a positive correlation between the Sibling Closeness and Romantic Closeness variables ($r = 0.219$, $n = 132$, $p = 0.004$). There was a positive correlation between Sibling Discord and Romantic Discord ($r = 0.247$, $n = 133$, $p = 0.004$). No correlations were

found between Sibling Closeness and Romantic Discord. No correlations were found between Sibling Discord and Romantic Closeness.

Positive correlations were found between Sibling Intimate Disclosure and Romantic Companionship ($r = 0.580$, $n = 134$, $p = 0.580$), Romantic Satisfaction ($r = 0.514$, $n = 134$, $p = 0.514$), Romantic Approval ($r = 0.485$, $n = 135$, $p = 0.485$), Romantic Intimate Disclosure ($r = 0.658$, $n = 134$, $p = 0.760$), and Romantic Emotional Support ($r = 0.760$, $n = 135$, $p = 0.658$).

Factorial Analysis of Variance

Due to the absence of main effects between levels of Sibling Category, this researcher was unable to reject the Null Hypothesis. However, there were several main effects between levels of sibling variables, as outlined below.

Sibling companionship. The main effect for Sibling Companionship yielded an F-ratio of $F(1, 124) = 5.74$, $p < .05$, indicating a significant difference between low levels of Sibling Companionship ($M = 3.37$, $SD = 0.38$) and high levels of Sibling Companionship ($M = 3.20$, $SD = 0.45$) for Romantic Exclusion. This effect size was small (0.20). These results indicate that participants who reported lower levels of Sibling Companionship were more likely to report higher levels of Romantic Exclusion.

Sibling criticism. The main effect for Sibling Criticism yielded an F-ratio of $F(1, 125) = 6.35$, $p < 0.05$, indicating a significant difference between low levels of Sibling Criticism ($M = 3.36$, $SD = 0.40$) and high levels of Sibling Criticism ($M = 3.12$, $SD = 0.45$) for the Romantic Exclusion subscale. The effect size was moderate (0.27). These results

indicated that participants who reported lower levels of Sibling Criticism were more likely to report higher levels of Romantic Exclusion.

The main effect for Sibling Criticism yielded an F-ratio of $F(1,126) = 16.10$, $p < 0.001$, indicating a significant main effect between low levels of Sibling Criticism ($M = 1.78$, $SD = 0.65$) and high levels of Sibling Criticism ($M = 2.32$, $SD = 0.94$) for the Romantic Pressure subscale. The effect size was moderate (0.32). These results indicate that participants who reported higher levels of Sibling Criticism were more likely to report higher levels of Romantic Pressure.

The main effect for Sibling Criticism yielded an F-ratio of $F(1,125) = 5.95$, $p < 0.05$, indicating a significant main effect between low levels of Sibling Criticism ($M = 1.62$, $SD = 0.82$), and high levels of Sibling Criticism ($M = 1.96$, $SD = 0.93$) for the Romantic Criticism subscale. This effect size was small (0.19). These results indicate that participants who reported higher levels of Sibling Criticism were more likely to report higher levels of Romantic Criticism.

Sibling intimate disclosure. The main effect for Sibling Intimate Disclosure yielded an F-ratio of $F(1,134) = 19.89$, $p < .001$, indicating a significant main effect between low levels of Sibling Intimate Disclosure ($M = 3.78$, $SD = 0.73$) and high levels of Sibling Intimate Disclosure ($M = 4.35$, $SD = 0.54$) for the Romantic Companionship subscale. This effect size was moderate (0.42). These results indicate that participants who reported higher levels of Sibling Intimate Disclosure were more likely to report higher levels of Romantic Companionship.

The main effect for Sibling Intimate Disclosure yielded an F ratio of $F(1,127) = 36.58$, $p < 0.001$, indicating a significant main effect between low levels of Sibling Intimate Disclosure ($M = 3.74$, $SD = 0.81$) and high levels of Sibling Intimate Disclosure ($M = 4.64$, $SD = 0.46$) for the Romantic Intimate Disclosure subscale. This effect size was large (0.56). These results indicate that participants who reported higher levels of Sibling Intimate Disclosure were more likely to report higher levels of Romantic Intimate Disclosure.

The main effect for Sibling Intimate Disclosure yielded an F ratio of $F(1, 126) = 6.89$, $p < 0.05$, indicating a significant main effect between low levels of Sibling Intimate Disclosure ($M = 4.08$, $SD = 0.92$) and high levels of Sibling Intimate Disclosure ($M = 4.64$, $SD = 0.52$) for the Romantic Satisfaction subscale. This effect size was moderate (0.35). These results indicate that participants who reported higher levels of Sibling Intimate Disclosure were more likely to report higher levels of Romantic Satisfaction.

The main effect for Sibling Intimate Disclosure yielded an F ratio of $F(1, 126) = 19.38$, $p < 0.001$, indicating a significant main effect between low levels of Sibling Intimate Disclosure ($M = 3.69$, $SD = 0.89$) and high levels of Sibling Intimate Disclosure ($M = 4.53$, $SD = 0.53$) for the Romantic Emotional Support subscale. This effect size was large (0.52). These results indicate that participants who reported higher levels of Sibling Intimate Disclosure were more likely to report higher levels of Romantic Emotional Support.

The main effect between levels of Sibling Intimate Disclosure yielded an F ratio of $F(1,127) = 12.49$, $p < 0.005$, indicating a significant main effect between low levels of Sibling Intimate Disclosure ($M = 3.65$, $SD = 0.78$) and high levels of Sibling Intimate Disclosure ($M = 4.22$, $SD = 0.66$) for the Romantic Approval subscale. This effect size was

moderate (0.37). These results indicate that participants who reported higher levels of Sibling Intimate Disclosure were more likely to report higher levels of Romantic Approval.

Sibling exclusion. The main effect for Sibling Exclusion yielded an F-ratio of $F(1,124) = 8.21, p < 0.05$, indicating a significant main effect between low levels of Sibling Exclusion ($M = 2.62, SD = 0.75$) and high levels of Sibling Exclusion ($M = 2.33, SD = 0.65$) for the Romantic Dominance subscale. This effect size was moderate (0.20). These results indicate that participants who reported lower levels of Sibling Exclusion were more likely to report higher levels of Romantic Dominance.

The main effect for Sibling Exclusion yielded an F-ratio of $F(1,124) = 12.52, p < 0.005$, indicating significant main effect between low levels of Sibling Exclusion ($M = 2.22, SD = 0.86$) and high levels of Sibling Exclusion ($M = 1.73, SD = 0.72$) for the Romantic Pressure subscale. This effect size was moderate (0.30). These results indicate that participants who reported lower levels of Sibling Exclusion were more likely to report higher levels of Romantic Pressure.

Sibling pressure. The main effect for Sibling Pressure yielded an F-ratio of $F(1, 126) = 8.30, p < 0.05$, indicating significant main effect between low levels of Sibling Pressure ($M = 1.81, SD = 0.71$) and high levels of Sibling Pressure ($M = 2.26, SD = 0.90$) for the Romantic Pressure subscale. This effect size was moderate (0.23). These results indicate that participants who reported higher levels of Sibling Pressure were more likely to report higher levels of Romantic Pressure.

Sibling conflict. The main effect for Sibling Conflict yielded an F-ratio of $F(1, 124) = 6.41, p < 0.05$, indicating a significant difference between low levels of Sibling Conflict

($M = 1.8$, $SD = 0.62$) and high levels of Sibling Conflict ($M = 2.19$, $SD = 0.94$) for the Romantic Pressure subscale. This effect size was moderate (0.24). These results indicate that participants who reported higher levels of Sibling Conflict were more likely to report higher levels of Sibling Romantic Pressure.

The main effect for Sibling Conflict yielded an F-ratio of $F(1, 124) = 3.98$, $p < 0.05$, indicating a significant main effect between low levels of Sibling Conflict ($M = 1.63$, $SD = 0.73$) and high levels of Sibling Conflict ($M = 1.89$, $SD = 0.98$) for the Romantic Criticism subscale. This effect size was small (0.15). These results indicate that participants who reported higher levels of Sibling Conflict were more likely to report higher levels of Romantic Criticism.

Sibling dominance. The main effect for Sibling Dominance yielded an F-ratio of $F(1,107) = 7.76$, $p < 0.006$, indicating a significant main effect between low levels of Sibling Dominance ($M = 1.23$, $SD = 0.43$) and high levels of Sibling Dominance ($M = 1.65$, $SD = 0.48$) for the Romantic Pressure subscale. This effect size was moderate (0.42). These results indicate that participants who reported lower levels of Sibling Dominance were more likely to report lower levels of Romantic Pressure.

Chapter 4: Discussion

The results of this study show that there are many aspects of the sibling relationship that can be linked to later romantic relationships. While, the most striking findings of this study include the impact of Sibling Intimate Disclosure on five different Romantic Subscales of Romantic Companionship, Romantic Intimate Disclosure, Romantic Emotional Support, Romantic Satisfaction, and Romantic Approval, the results of each Sibling Subscale can be tied into previous literature.

Previous Literature and the Current Study

Kramer (2010) reported that having a strong foundation for social understanding and conflict management likely leads to positive sibling relationship quality. This information, taken with the results of this study on Sibling Companionship and Romantic Exclusion, points to the possibility that having a high quality sibling relationship could be beneficial for later romantic relationship quality.

Doughty and colleagues (2015) found that intimate sibling relationships can contribute to social skills development, which can be empowering for adolescents. It is possible that adolescents who feel confident in social situations may be less likely to feel criticized by another individual, which is suggested by the current results.

Bascoe and colleagues (2012) indicated that closeness and warmth in the sibling relationship has been negatively correlated with lower levels of social difficulties in adolescents. In addition, emotional vulnerability has been found to be advantageous in romantic relationships (Keener et al., 2012). When considering previous literature as well as

the results of this study, it can be suggested that having the experience with emotional intimacy with a sibling can be linked with more positive romantic relationships.

Doughty and colleagues (2013) reported that individuals who experience sibling control seem to be more likely to also experience romantic power. These results, combined with those of the current study could suggest that individuals with a sibling who is inclusive is linked to lesser pressure from a romantic partner.

DeKlyen and Greenberg (2008) maintained that children who have positive attachments to their siblings may be likely to gain positive schemas about others. This can possibly explain that individuals who grow up with siblings who pressure them to do things they don't want to may lead to them developing a negative view of other people. This may mean that these individuals are more sensitive to pressure from a romantic partner, and therefore may also report high levels of Romantic Pressure along with Sibling Pressure.

Doughty colleagues (2013) reported sibling conflict as negatively correlated with intimacy in a romantic relationship. In addition, being skilled in conflict resolution has been found to have a positive effect on the quality of the sibling relationship (Kramer, 2010). Considering these findings, as well as the results of the current study, it seems that learning effective conflict resolution and social understanding not only benefits the sibling relationship, but also provides a foundation on which the romantic relationship can continue being a source of intimacy for individuals.

Doughty and colleagues (2013) also found that sibling control is likely linked with romantic power. These findings seem to mirror the results of the current study, in that those

who reported not experiencing Sibling Dominance were more likely to report fewer experiences with Romantic Pressure.

Implications of the Current Study

As previous indicated, we could not reject the null hypothesis. However, the results show that many aspects of the social experiences in the sibling relationship that may be linked with how individuals experience romantic relationships, such as how intimacy with a sibling may set up an individual for success in romantic intimacy. The results of the current study support previous research ideas that the impact that social learning from siblings can have on future relationships. These findings could be beneficial for not only guiding future research, but also be informative for people who work with families, such as therapists, social workers, or other mental health practitioners.

Limitations to this study may include a lack of cultural and ethnic diversity, as well as a low male participant rate. For these reasons, generalizability of these results may be restricted. Another limitation is the retrospective component of the study, in that asking the participants to describe their sibling relationship from their adolescence may affect the reliability of their responses. In future studies, it may be interesting to examine if the same relational patterns that occur with sibling socialization also apply to individuals who identify as being homosexual. This study would also be at the mercy of participant diversity and availability.

There are many benefits of continuing research in this area. Studying sibling relationships can shed light on the reciprocal connections between the sibling relationship and other family subsystems (Whiteman et al., 2001). In addition, past research has shown that the

sibling experience is found to have an effect after controlling for parent-child relationships, which highlights the sibling relationship as an impactful one (Doughty et al., 2015). In practice with families, identifying how socialization in the family of origin impacts later relationships may normalize problems, and show clients that maladaptive patterns are learned, and can also be changed (Shalash et al., 2013). Continuing this research will contribute to the goal of relational research by exploring how people can create happy, healthy, lasting relationships.

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Appendix A: Consent to Serve as a Participant in Research

1. I hereby consent to take part in research directed by Ellie Jack at St. Cloud State University. Ellie Jack is a master's student in the Marriage and Family Therapy Program, in the Department of Community Psychology, Counseling and Family Therapy. I understand that other persons will assist Ellie Jack in conducting this research.

2. Further, I understand that:
 - a. *Purpose.* The purpose is to study the close relationships of undergraduate students at St. Cloud State University.
 - b. *Requirements.* My part of this research is to complete a set of surveys and a demographic information questionnaire. The same requirements will be asked of all participants in his study.
 - c. *Time needed.* The total time required will be approximately 30 minutes.
 - d. *Voluntary participation.* My participation is completely voluntary, Even after I begin participating, I will be free to stop at any time. I have the right to stop after I have started participating, or I have the right to decide not to participate in this study. Although the researchers ask that I try to answer every item, I understand that I can skip any item that I simply do not wish to answer. (I do not need to give a reason for skipping any item.) In no case will there be a negative effect for my non-participation or non-completion.
 - e. *New developments.* I will be told of any new information that develops during the course of this research that might affect my willingness to participate in this study.
 - f. *Benefits.* I will receive a debriefing sheet that explains more about the study. General benefits will come for myself and other participants in the form of an increased scientific understanding of close relationships that undergraduate students experience.
 - g. *Protections.* I understand that the following precautions have been taken for my protection: (1) no part of the surveys will ask for my name or other identifying information, my responses will remain completely anonymous; (2) no questionnaire asks me to describe specific incidents; (3) I am free to discontinue my participation at any time for any reason; (4) although the researchers would like me to answer every item, I am free to skip any question or item that I find too sensitive or stressful; (5) when the results of this study are published, only aggregate data (for example, group averages) will be reported.

3. My questions about this research have been answered. If I have further questions, I should contact:

Ellie Jack
 Department of Community Psychology,
 Counseling and Family Therapy
 St. Cloud State University

ejack@stcloudstate.edu

Signature _____

Date _____

Appendix C: Written Debriefing

This sheet will explain the purpose of the research project you have participated in. It will outline the independent variables and research hypotheses. It is crucial that you do not discuss the information on this sheet with any of your friends (who might inadvertently communicate with future participants). Please sign this sheet as soon as you finish reading it, place it back in the envelope provided, and seal the envelope. Thank you for your help.

1. *Nature of this study.* This project would best relate to the interpersonal relationship areas of psychology.
2. *Findings of related studies.* There is little previous research looking at the impact of sibling relationships on romantic relationships. Research has previously shown that having a positive or negative relationship with a sibling will affect how an individual socially develops (Padilla-Walker, Harper, & Jensen, 2010). In addition, gender differences have been found with regards to social skills preparation, particularly when considering sibling relationships. (Doughty et al., 2015). Specifically, it has been noted that older siblings often affect the social development of the younger sibling (Taumoepeau & Reese, 2014)
3. *Independent variables.* These are the variables in the experiment that are used to predict other variables. There are three independent variables in this study. The first is the birth order of the participants. We are looking at primarily younger siblings. The second is the gender constellation, being the combination of your gender and the gender of your sibling. The third is the relationship quality between siblings. This information was gathered from the survey you completed.
4. *Dependent variables.* These are used to measure the effects of the independent variable. This study only has one dependent variable, which is the relationship satisfaction with your current romantic partner. We gathered this information from the survey you completed.
5. *Hypotheses.* The research hypothesis for this study is as follows: Individuals who report a positive relationship with their opposite-sex older sibling during late adolescence will report higher romantic relationship quality in early adulthood than individuals who report a positive relationship with their same-sex older sibling.
6. *Control procedures.* These are the procedures that reduce error or unwanted variance. In this study, birth order was controlled for, as recruitment required all participants to be the younger of two siblings. This was done because we specifically wanted to examine the experiences of younger siblings.

I have read the above information concerning the nature of the study The Adolescent Sibling Relationship as a Predictor of Romantic Relationship Quality in Emerging Adulthood. I agree not to disclose this information to potential future participants.

Name (print) _____

Signature _____

Date _____