

PRIVILEGE IN FAMILIES:
COMPLEXITY IN ADULT SIBLING RELATIONSHIPS
CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Overview and Purpose of the Study

Privilege in families can be displayed in a number of ways. Privilege may be due to gender, birth order, marital status, parental status, socioeconomic status, educational attainment, or occupational status. In this study, I explored relationships among adult siblings and examined their perceptions of how privilege is distributed in their families. Life course, phenomenological, and feminist perspectives guided this study. These frameworks were used to examine the perceived meaning of changes that occurred across time, individual and family construction of meaning and roles within the family, and conceptualizations of ways that individuals are overlooked and marginalized within families, respectively.

Many complex relationships within families evolve as individuals either make life choices or find themselves in situations where their circumstances, or the circumstances of other family members, contribute to their individual and collective roles. The adult sibling tie warrants attention in the family literature because even in old age, most people have at least one living sibling (Brubaker, 1985; Cicirelli, 1991; Connidis, 1989; Shanass, 1979). Although sibling relationships contain characteristics common to other kin and nonkin relationships, they also exhibit characteristics unique to the sibling tie that are worth examining (Cicirelli, 1995).

A great deal of potential exists in exploring the characteristics of adult sibling relationships that will enable researchers and practitioners, as well as siblings themselves, to see and understand this dynamic family tie. Siblings fulfill many roles throughout the life course, such as serving as caregivers for parents (Bank & Kahn, 1982; Simon, 1987) as well as caregivers for each other (Avioli, 1989; Simon, 1987). Many facets of an individual's experience within a family influence the nature and duration of the relationships among members, both individually and collectively.

The influence of gender, marital status, and parental status play a significant role in relationships among adult siblings (Bedford, 1995; Cicirelli, 1995; Connidis, 1992).

The significance of the sibling bond is evident in sibling terminology. Sibling terminology is used to connote that a relationship is especially close, as when a friend is described as “like a sister” or “like a brother” (Lee, Mancini, & Maxwell, 1990). Sibling terminology is also utilized in religious organizations, fraternal orders, and the military where the usage of such terminology signifies both a sense of solidarity and equality (Pollack, 1967).

The purpose of this study was to examine relationships among adult siblings, with particular attention given to the structure and process within the family of origin. I chose to investigate the issue of privilege because I was curious about uncovering the impact that perceptions of being treated differently may have on adult sibling relationships. I was interested in discovering how privilege is described in families and how individuals within families are either recognized or ignored. I explored the complexity of the relationships among adult siblings by seeking answers to questions of who is “in” or “out” of families at a given time and what factors influence the interactions among family members.

Personal Involvement in Adult Sibling Relationships

In order to maintain a level of awareness about my own position in this research project, I examined ways that my personal experience as an adult sibling both informs and inhibits the process. My selection of this research topic evolved from a number of realizations. In the course of assisting my advisor with a research project investigating older parents of adult gay or lesbian children regarding their strategies for dealing with non-normative life course transitions (Allen & Wilcox, 1996), I was intrigued by the potential influence other family members may have the life course transitions of individuals and families. I became particularly interested in how siblings interact with each other and the ways in which they either offer assistance and support or are disengaged from each other.

As I thought about this further, I began to examine my own relationships with my 2 sisters. These include age, ordinal position in the family, marital and parental status, educational

attainment, and occupational status. In terms of simple demographics, my older sister and I are 37 and 36. We are both single. My younger sister is 31 and is married with two sons.

The privilege that is afforded in our family is expressed in a number of ways. As I describe areas of privilege, I am very aware of my efforts to simply state the “way things are” and my attempts to avoid judgments that are connected with any degree of “intention.”

As I have examined how we interact with each other and how we are treated by our parents, several observations emerged. I see my younger sister experience privilege through her normative life course transitions of being married and having children. When our family is together, the activities are inclusive of the rest of us, but center around my sister and her family - particularly her sons, since they are the only grandchildren. Another reason for this is the geographic distance between my sister’s family and our parents and extended family.

I experience privilege in our family originating from my educational attainment, my life course transitions of graduating from college with a Bachelor’s degree, a Master’s degree, and being in a position as Assistant Dean of Students for 10 years. I also experienced privilege as I was growing up arising from my success in public arenas such as recreational and school sports teams, clubs and organizations, involvement with music, church groups, and in peer relationships in general. Another aspect of privilege arises from the geographic distance between where I now live and where I grew up. By having less contact with my family of origin I am not as involved in the day-to-day activities that create conflict for the members of my family who live closer to each other.

My older sister was involved in the same types of activities, yet her extraordinary skills lie in areas that are not as “publicly visible” as mine. She has a great deal of skill in arts and crafts and sewing, for which the rewards are public at times, but not as much an arena for an audience. While we were growing up, her privilege came from the fact that she is the eldest sibling. I remember experiencing frustration because she was, at times, able to do things before I was due to the age difference. I also remember many times she was upset because there were some established “rules” according to age that were broken when I was allowed to do things at the same time she did them.

As I think about the privilege that each of us has due to different circumstances at different times in our lives, I recognize some discomfort in writing about these experiences. I feel this through a combination of feeling a sense of betrayal to my family and feeling the need to defend my opinions as just that - opinions. I also have a level of awareness that my perceptions are formed from my interpretation of lived experience. By recognizing this, I have an increased level of awareness of the mixed emotions the participants in this study experienced as they talked about their interpretations of their family life and their relationships with their adult siblings.

Statement of the Problem

In previous research, priority has been given to marital relationships and parent-child relationships, and the sibling tie has been a neglected area of research (Allan, 1977; Bank & Kahn, 1975; Bowerman & Dobash, 1974; Irish, 1964). The adult sibling tie has only recently been studied as a differentiated relationship, since the early 1980s (Bedford, 1995; Cicirelli, 1995; Goetting, 1986). Attention in the empirical literature to the sibling bond over the last 15 years has resulted in the description of several unique characteristics of this relationship.

Cicirelli (1995) noted five characteristics that are unique to the sibling relationship. The sibling relationship is usually the longest one that an individual experiences in a lifetime. It is ascribed rather than earned. It is maintained at an intimate level more by daily contact in the home during childhood and adolescence, and at more of a distance through telephone calls, letters, and periodic visits in adulthood. It is often seen as relatively egalitarian. There is a long history of shared experiences in common, as well as nonshared experiences. The existence of some of these characteristics was challenged as they related to expectations and behavior among the sibling groups in this study.

The relationship among siblings and the framework of the family in which they grew up have been found to contribute to the closeness of siblings in adulthood (Bank & Kahn, 1982; Ross & Milgram, 1982). Feelings of closeness among siblings are also related to the amount of contact they have with one another (Cicirelli, 1980, 1982). Relationships among siblings tend to receive less attention in adulthood when siblings are raising their own children, and resume when their

young adult children leave the parental home (Bank & Kahn, 1982; Bedford, 1989b; Gold, 1989). Single women are more connected to siblings and their families, and family networks in general, than are single men (Longino & Lipman, 1981). In the realm of family obligations, especially caregiving for parents, single siblings are seen as having more time due to the fact that they do not have “families of their own.” It is difficult for them to demonstrate that their time, work, and relationships are valid endeavors and are at times not seen by others as legitimate excuses (Connidis & Campbell, 1995; Finch, 1989; Simon, 1987).

In order to study privilege in sibling relationships, it is necessary to take into account family of origin issues as they relate to parental expectations, whether they be real or perceived. Over the past 2 decades, research about the relationships between parents and adult children has become more prevalent. One of the reasons for this is the change in demographics involving an increase in the life span that enables parent and child relationships to overlap for a span of around 50 years (Hagestad, 1984; Mancini & Blieszner, 1989; Sutor, Pillemer, Keeton, & Robison, 1995; Umberson, 1992). The key themes in the research literature regarding the nature of the parent-young adult relationship deal with the expectations involved in the child’s transition to adulthood. In contemporary society, the normative developmental expectations through early adulthood and midlife involve experiencing a period of childhood and adolescence, obtaining an education, entering an occupational field, getting married, and having children (Modell, Furstenberg, & Hershberg, 1976).

An adult child’s privilege within the family of origin can depend on a number of cultural and societal factors, as well as the attitudes of family members regarding the importance of normative life transition patterns. Ryff, Schmutte, and Lee (1996) analyzed the concept of “how children turn out” and the connection between the success or lack of success of an adult child and parental well-being. The different relationships adult siblings have with each other may also be influenced by an individual sibling’s “perceived success as an adult” to their parent(s), other siblings, or society in general. Roles in the sibling subsystem are dynamic and evolve over time as family members are born or die, and as individual roles in the family system shift (Cicirelli, 1985, 1988).

Research Questions

Lather (1991) stated that “if critical inquirers are to develop a ‘praxis of the present,’ we must practice in our empirical endeavors what we preach in our theoretical formulations” (p. 80). For research to go beyond the realm of providing a picture of what the world looks like, it is important to embrace the value of theory as empirical endeavors are examined to enhance understanding. Without self-reflexion, there is a risk of only looking at an experience in one way, that may ignore the goal of emancipation of the researched and the researcher. The way I envision emancipation as it relates to this project is to raise the level of awareness of the participants in this research project to recognize and reflect upon individual and collective experiences that may affect adult sibling relationships. To see something in a different way that does not yet move those researched toward an ability to speak in their own voice with understanding does a disservice. To look through a different lens, but still have blinders on, may result in simply casting one’s view upon a different place, not expanding it to include multiple views.

The research questions identified the phenomenon I studied (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), and provided a framework for the development of the in-depth interview guide (see Appendix A). Four research questions guided this study:

1. How do adult siblings describe their relationships with each other over the life course?
2. In what ways do gender, marital status, and parental status of adult siblings have impacts upon their perceptions of their adult sibling relationships in adulthood?
3. How do adult children’s perceptions of their parent’s expectations of self and other siblings influence their perception of their sibling relationships?
4. In what ways are adult siblings privileged at various points in the life course?

Guiding Definitions of Key Terms and Concepts

The term *siblings* has been defined as “individuals who share common biological parents” (Cicirelli, 1991, p.291). In this study, the use of the term *sibling* referred to individuals who have shared a common experience growing up in the same family. Individual participants were asked to define their experience.

The terms *sibling relationship(s)* and *sibling connection(s)* were used interchangeably and followed Cicirelli's (1991) definition: "the term 'sibling connection' refers to the total of the interactions (actions, verbal and nonverbal communication) of two (or more) individuals who share common parents, as well as their knowledge, perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, and feelings regarding each other from the time when one sibling first became aware of the other" (p. 291).

As a starting point, Peggy McIntosh's (1995) explanations of *privilege* and *privilege systems*, uncovered in her exploration of white *privilege*, male *privilege*, and heterosexual *privilege*, were used. After interrogating her own *privilege*, McIntosh concluded that "We usually think of privilege as being a favored state, whether earned, or conferred by birth or luck. . . . The word 'privilege' carried the connotation of being something everyone must want. . . . some of the conditions . . . work to systematically overempower certain groups" (p. 83).

I sought to uncover a conceptualization of *privilege* as it applies to adult *sibling relationships* in the family. The complexity that surfaced by interviewing multiple family members added multiple interpretations of privilege within the same family, as well as between families.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Theoretical Frameworks Guiding the Study

This study was guided by three theoretical frameworks: a life course perspective, a phenomenological perspective, and a feminist perspective. The application of these perspectives offered an approach that allowed for the multiple meanings of individual and family characteristics and the examination of individual and family meanings as situated in varying contexts and experiences in time. Utilizing these perspectives allowed for the examination of the process involved in creating and maintaining expectations of self and others. Incorporating these perspectives also enabled an exploration of the impact that varying expectations have on individuals, family ideologies, and the larger society.

A Life Course Perspective

The focus of the life course perspective is examining change over time. The scope of life course involves the interdependence of trajectories over the life course (Elder, 1978) and gives a theoretical framework for studying human development and aging within a constantly changing society. Using the life course perspective gives attention to the dimensions of time, process, and context (Elder, 1991). It offers a theoretical orientation that links family, individual, and historical time (Hareven, 1987).

The basic assumptions of the life course perspective are the “multiple time clocks,” the social ecology of the family, the diachronic analysis of the family, and the heterogeneity and diversity of family structures (Bengtson & Allen, 1993). The “multiple time clocks” assumption involves the examination of ontogenetic time and ontogenetic events, generational time and generational events, and historical time and historical events. Key concepts used to describe life experiences are trajectories and transitions (Elder, 1991). Trajectories are described as long term changes that take place over several periods of the life course, whereas transitions are short term changes from one event in the life course to another. The social ecology of the family involves the social structural context, the social construction of meaning, the cultural context, and the changes in the nature of

events with the changes in the state of society. The diachronic analysis of the family deals with homeostasis and change over time, and the interaction of age, period, and cohort effects. The heterogeneity and diversity of family structures examines diversity and difference, aging diversity, and structural diversity.

The key concepts that I used to help guide this research are the multiple social contexts of development and the heterogeneity and diversity in the changes throughout development. The multiple social contexts of development involve the sociocultural structure of development, the social construction of meaning in developmental processes, and the cultural context of development. In this study, the past and present development of individual siblings and the ways that their experiences within the family and outside the family have changed over the course of their relationships with their siblings was explored. The heterogeneity and diversity in changes throughout development focus on recognizing diversity and difference and examining the increase in age diversity over time, and the increase in structural diversity over time. These concepts were incorporated into the research process as sibling relationships were examined through exploring the change and stability in various aspects of individual and relationship characteristics.

The strengths of the life course perspective are the examination of individual development within the context of events occurring across time and comparison of similarities and differences among cohort groups. This framework highlights stability and change through generations and lends itself to the use of qualitative methodologies that offer in-depth examination of life histories (Bengtson & Allen, 1993).

Aldous (1990), however, identified several critiques of the life course perspective. The multiple contexts used to examine events lead to a high amount of complexity that may make the results difficult to understand. Moreover, the results of studies done through cohort analysis have limited generalizability across time. Finally, the inclusion of the examination of a number of developmental contexts may make it hard to determine the relevance of the results for specific areas of study.

Nevertheless, the utility of the life course perspective as applied to the contexts of family relationships and parental expectations related to this study are demonstrated in the following two empirical examples. Rossi and Rossi (1990) used a life course perspective to guide their study of three generations with respect to the effects of affiliative ties among family members on gender, kin obligation, and support. They also examined the influence of close ties and cohesion in the family in early stages of development to determine whether or not there would be differences in treatment of individual family members later in life. They found that ties established early on did extend across the life course.

Aquilino (1996) utilized a life course perspective to examine the predictability of adult children's return to the nest and the effects on parental satisfaction. Using data from the National Survey on Families and Households, he looked at the effect of the adult child's return to the nest in terms of the overall life trajectories of the adult child and the impact of the transition of moving back to the parental home. He found that parents' satisfaction was related to the reasons adult children returned home. Autonomy in adulthood is seen as a measure of success. If the adult child's move home was seen as temporary (after college or military service) it was interpreted as a move toward autonomy, and parents' satisfaction was higher.

A Phenomenological Perspective

The phenomenological approach to family studies focuses on the construction of meaning in defining what constitutes "family." The scope of phenomenology extends to include an expansive configuration of individuals and groups while it attempts to integrate multiple alternatives that can be applied to the definition of family. Through phenomenological interpretations, the boundaries of those who may be considered "family" are individually defined and therefore can be much more inclusive than researcher defined boundaries might be.

The basic assumptions of the phenomenological approach are subjectivity, language and meaning, and indeterminacy (Gubrium & Holstein, 1993). The assumption of subjectivity addresses the fact that the existence of people and events are subject to the interpretation and meaning that each individual attaches to them. In the construction of meaning, people assume the

existence of past, present, and future time. These assumptions are derived from subjective interpretations rather than from concrete objects with which people can identify such meanings. The assumption of language and meaning indicates an event gains meaning through the interpretation attached to it. The conversations that people have and the exchanges with others that take place construct meaning out of events and relationships. The concept of indeterminacy assumes that events and relationships are subject to interpretation within a unique context that may result in the attachment of very different meanings from those associated with the contexts. For example, a behavior seen as an act of discipline in the home could result in an interpretation of child abuse in the court system.

The key concepts that guide the phenomenological approach are the life world, intersubjectivity, stock of knowledge, and action (Gubrium & Holstein, 1993). The concept of the life world refers to the fact that events and relationships are socially constructed and are seen in terms of the world of everyday life. People construct meaning from what they see in the world around them. The intersubjective nature of this approach calls attention to the fact that because personal meaning is attached to objects people encounter, interpretations will vary across individuals, resulting in many interpretations of what “reality” is in a given situation. One’s stock of knowledge consists of the accumulation of understanding about events and experiences. Those understandings are attached to objects and filed away for potential future use. The accumulation of a stock of knowledge is not necessarily orderly and is constantly changing as items are added and deleted through ongoing experiences. The concept of action is the element that enables people to use their interpretations of the world around us and formulate meanings through the interaction with other individuals and groups.

The concept of organizational embeddedness states that although people may attach meanings to specified people and consider them “family,” the existence of a larger organizational context through which interpretations may be judged could cause others to assign differing meanings. For example, in a study of life in a nursing home (Gubrium, 1987), Maida Wood described her family to be the individuals she lived with day to day in the nursing home. Because her relatives decided

to place her in the nursing home without consulting with her, she felt she had been betrayed and no longer considered her biological ties as “family.” The individuals in her world with whom she shared her life came much closer to her idealized vision and interpretation of family than the individuals who took the control of her life away from her.

The use of family mapping (Levin, 1993) provides a phenomenological approach to understanding individual construction of the meaning of family that has potential applications for therapy, teaching, and research. The first of three components involved is to develop a “family list” on which the participant is asked to “write down a list of everyone you would consider family.” Next, given pieces of paper cut out in triangles and circles to represent men and women, respectively, participants are asked to assemble a family map by placing the shapes in positions that represent their definition of family. The third component is to conduct a verbal interview with the person who assembled the map in order to assure accurate interpretation of the family list and the family map. Participants are asked to explain why they included certain individuals and excluded others. They also give their reasons for the positioning of the shapes as they construct their family map and state the meaning of the existing relationships and configurations.

A phenomenological approach was also used by Brock and Jennings (1993) to reconstruct the ways in which mothers had educated their daughters about sexuality. A sample of women in their 30s was asked what they remembered about the sexuality education they received from their mothers. They were also asked how satisfied they were with the type of information they received. The study focused on women between 30 and 39 years old since that provided an appropriate period of time between adolescence and adulthood to assume they would have a mature understanding of sexuality education. The techniques of convenience sampling and snowball sampling were used. The authors stated that the two research questions were left very open in order to maintain the value of the phenomenological approach and allow each woman to construct meaning from the subjective interpretation of her memories and level of satisfaction.

A Feminist Perspective

Osmond and Thorne (1993) outlined five themes in using feminism to examine the study of families. The first is to begin with the assumption of the centrality, normality, and value of women's (and girls') lives. Feminism also takes gender as an organizing concept, with two basic elements. The first is the social construction and exaggeration of differences in the power structure between men and women. The second is the utilization of those differences to sustain power relations between men and women. The analysis of families must be done in a sociocultural and historical context. Because feminists assume the centrality of women's experiences and emphasize the structural aspects of gender, they question any unitary conception of "the family." Feminists also prefer methodologies that are action oriented and value committed. It is important in feminist research not only to understand the world, but also to change it.

As it pertains to family studies, in doing research for women, Thompson (1992) outlined several considerations. First, it is essential to recognize that experiences are embedded in a broader societal context. Researchers and practitioners must struggle to adapt to the contradictions of families. It is necessary to try to create a vision of a nonoppressive family. Diversity among women and families must also be recognized. Finally, it is important to challenge and rethink the field of family studies from a feminist perspective.

The feminist epistemologies used in research should be value-sustaining and politicized (Lather, 1991). Feminism rejects the idea of research that is value-free and attempts to examine ways in which the validity of the results of feminist research can be increased (Allen & Baber, 1992). Feminist researchers recognize the vital and personal connection between the researcher and the researched. Both the recognition of the researcher's experience and the processes through which research is conceptualized and conducted need to be shared with others in order to gain a full understanding of the knowledge that is created, examined, and critiqued (Baber & Allen, 1992; Du Bois, 1983; Krieger, 1985; Lather, 1991). In addition, it is important not to forget the "strategies for action" in feminist methods (Baber & Allen, 1992). One of the important contentions of

feminism is that research should be action oriented with the intention of developing new ways to examine the world and expand descriptions of perceived reality.

Summary

The use of life course, phenomenological, and feminist perspectives allows for the exploration of adult sibling relationships and examination of the multiple meanings that are created and sustained by individuals and families as they perceive and experience one another. A life course perspective enables attention to be given to changes over time in a number of contexts. Phenomenology informs the interpretation of the construction of meaning surrounding individual and family behaviors and events. Feminism attends to hearing and respecting multiple voices and perspectives, while recognizing the value of difference and the importance of both individual and collective contributions to families.

Sibling Relationships and Family Expectations

The scope of this research project includes a number factors influencing sibling relationships. To provide adequate background and understanding, this review commences with an historical overview of research on siblings. This section is followed by separate sections on methodological and substantive issues examined in existing empirical work on adult sibling relationships. In addition, literature is also reviewed that pertains to parent-adult child relationships, parental expectations, and family structure and roles in order to explore further the concept of complexity in sibling relationships and privilege in families.

Historical Overview of Sibling Literature

Irish (1964) noted the dearth of literature on the interaction of siblings with each other. Factors that accounted for this lack of research involved attention focused on the adult-child dimension, Freudian thought that stressed developmental issues in infancy and not socializing influences during childhood and youth, and occupational pressures on teachers and therapists to focus attention on dating, courtship, and marital interaction (Irish, 1964). Schvaneveldt and Ihinger (1979), echoed the paucity of research that Irish identified in 1964. Their review of sibling

relationships attempted to extend the work of Irish (1964) in addressing the issue of lack of theoretical and empirical work in this area.

Sutton-Smith and Rosenberg (1970) summarized the effects of birth order and sibling status on personality and intellectual development. Lamb (1982) noted a number of differences in research that had been published in previous decades and the research that was emergent in the early 1980s. He delineated the differences as a shift from effects to processes, increased appreciation of cultural variability, and development across the life span.

Through a review of research, Goetting (1986) proposed developmental tasks of siblingship over the life cycle in the United States. She outlined development tasks for childhood and adolescence, early and middle adulthood, and old age. The tasks identified for childhood and adolescence included companionship and emotional support, delegated caretaking, and aid and direct services. In early and middle adulthood, the developmental tasks included companionship and emotional support, cooperation in the care of elderly parents and ultimately the dismantling of the parental home, and aid and direct services. In old age, companionship and emotional support, shared reminiscence and perceptual validation, resolution of sibling rivalry, and aid and direct services were identified (Goetting, 1986).

By outlining developmental tasks in siblingship, Goetting (1986) noted that sibling support typically persists throughout the life cycle, with some tasks being constant and others being identified with a particular life cycle stage. The research priorities she proposed included discovering the important antecedent variables of sibling help, gaining insight into the helping process, the need to understand siblingship tasks in the context of the larger family system, and contributions that would probe the ways changing family patterns affect sibling task performance (Goetting, 1986).

Bedford (1989a) noted that research on adult siblings is accelerating. There has been a differentiation of adult sibling relationships over the previous decade with researchers recognizing the importance of sibling relationships across the life span (Bedford, 1995).

Methodological Issues in the Study of Adult Siblings

A methodological issue that Connidis and Campbell (1995) raised concerns the impact of conducting analysis using data on one sibling versus data on the entire sibling network. They explored this issue in their research and were able to observe the sibling relationship in the contexts of family structure and the nature of a specific ties between the respondent and one sibling to whom they considered themselves to be closest. In addition to looking at individual sibling bonds, the authors examined sibling networks in relation to gender, marital status, and parental status.

In determining the unit of analysis, problems also arise when data are collected from only one individual regarding connections with all siblings in the family (Cicirelli, 1991). Bedford (1995) cited pragmatic factors as influences on the fact that most sibling research is done using the single dyad as the unit of analysis, but also stated that “justification also comes from evidence that personal well-being might be related to close personal relationships, rather than to support networks as a whole” (pp. 205-206). Comparisons among adult sibling studies are difficult due to differing units of analysis, age groups, response categories, and measurement tools (Bedford, 1989c).

When information collected from all potential sibling dyads in a family are used in data analysis, the issue also arises that respondents with differing numbers of siblings will be unequally represented in the overall data set (Cicirelli, 1995). One solution for this problem could be to determine an average score of the target sibling’s relationship with all siblings on the variable being studied, or with all siblings of a given gender (Cicirelli, 1989). An alternative approach is to study all potential sibling relationships using a qualitative approach. Interviewing multiple family members and representing all perspectives in the data set adds to the understanding of the total sibling subsystem.

Seltzer (1989) emphasized the relevance of the mathematics of relationships and sibling research. To examine the interpersonal combinations among different numbers of people, Seltzer used an adaptation from Mott (1965) that demonstrates the possible relationships with respect to the number of family members. Mott’s figures are based on the sum of all possible subgroups plus

one, accounting for the possibility that the entire group can also act as a whole. For example, the possible relationships in a family with four members would total 11; with five members they would total 26; and with six members they would total 57. Seltzer (1989) suggested that future research on siblings attend to possible combinations and coalitions of siblings, moving away from the one-on-one relationship.

An alternative approach to the examination of sibling relationships through the use of an individual respondent, a sibling dyad, or a composite view of sibling networks is to conduct a case study of one family (Cicirelli, 1995) or a selected group of siblings (Bank & Kahn, 1982). In both approaches, detailed descriptions of the complexity of the sibling relationships within the family were elicited in order to better understand issues of family functioning (Cicirelli, 1995) and intense sibling loyalties (Bank & Kahn, 1982).

Components of Sibling Relationships

Ross and Milgram (1982) studied the perceptions of closeness, sibling rivalry, and critical incidents and their consequences to the relationships of adult siblings. Their sample consisted of 75 volunteer participants ranging in age from 22-93 years, with a gender composition of 28 men and 47 women. This exploratory research was conducted in 13 small groups with 4 to 6 individuals in each group. The framework of the family in which siblings grew up contributed most significantly to feelings of closeness in adulthood. Though sibling rivalry was more difficult to discuss due to the attachment of social stigma, the perception was that it was originated and maintained by both parents and siblings.

Critical incidents were categorized as normative (expected) and idiosyncratic (unexpected). Incidents related to value differences fell into two major categories: personal values as at odds with family values, and personal values at odds with other sibling's personal values. Although personal values being at odds with family values was more prevalent, twice as many participants disagreed with family values as supported them. Personal values among siblings centered around issues of life styles and morals and generated long-term feelings of resentment and strong emotions.

Connidis (1992) studied life transitions in the adult sibling. Through a sample of 60 sibling dyads ranging in age from 25-89, life events including marriage, having children, divorce, widowhood, and the death or health problems of family members were examined. The negotiations among siblings of commitments to one another was the focus of the study. Following marriage of a sibling, changes in relationships demonstrated closer ties, improved relations, less closeness, and less frequent contact. Reporting of categories examined was based on responses, not respondents, therefore change in ties due to marriage showed both closer ties and less closeness reported. Following the other life events studied, having children resulted in siblings being emotionally closer and having more frequent contact; divorce and widowhood resulted in siblings being emotionally closer, having more frequent contact, increased support, and an improved sibling tie; family members' death or poor health resulted in greater emotional closeness between adult siblings.

Finch's (1989) concept of "legitimate excuses" shows a connection between expectations and obligations of family members due to their relationship and parent status. Family members have difficulty refusing to help or interact with each other unless they have a reason that is perceived as valid by other members. Married members and members with children are seen to have "legitimate excuses" when they are unable to spend time or offer assistance due to their obligation to their family of procreation.

In their research on closeness, confiding, and contact, Connidis and Campbell (1995) found several significant effects. Data for their analysis were taken from a study of social support networks of 678 residents of London, Canada. Due to the focus in the study on sibling relationships, the analysis included the 528 respondents who have one or more living siblings. In the model for single dyads and the mean score for sibling networks, gender was a significant factor. Men were less close to their closest sibling and to the sibling network than women were. Sibling's marital status was also significant for the emotionally closest sibling, with widowed siblings closer than single siblings.

Bedford (1995) stated that the processes of how relationships are initiated, maintained, and terminated have different meanings in relationships with kin than with nonkin. This occurs partially because sibling bonds are enduring and cannot be severed. I challenged this assumption through the investigation of ways that sibling bonds are negotiated. The statement that “sibling bonds cannot be severed” may have truth from a biological perspective, but from a phenomenological perspective, it is both the perception of the bond and the behaviors that siblings exhibit toward each other that create and maintain or interfere with the sibling relationship.

Regarding geographic proximity, having good health and a higher income increases the ability to maintain sibling ties. Significant levels of interaction continue to occur even though geographic distance creates a negative effect on the amount of interaction (Connidis, 1989). Emotional closeness was found to be a more significant factor than geographic proximity taken by itself, and the emotionally closest sibling is not necessarily the sibling who lives nearest by (Connidis & Campbell, 1995). Further, emotional closeness had a powerful influence on confiding, telephone contact, and personal contact among siblings. This finding reinforces the link between feelings and behavior, and supports the view that sibling bonds are not based on obligation alone, but exist through more voluntary actions.

Parent-Adult Child Relationships

To explore the complexity of sibling relationships, this study examined the relationships between parents and their adult children. Over the past two decades, research about the relationships between parents and adult children has become prevalent. One of the reasons for this is the change in demographics involving an increase in the life span that enables parent and child relationships to overlap for a span of around 50 years (Hagestad, 1984; Mancini & Blieszner, 1989; Sutor, Pillemer, Keeton, & Robison, 1995; Umberson, 1992). In their review of the past research on aging parent-adult child relationships, Mancini and Blieszner (1989) delineated the key themes to be the change in population, roles and responsibilities, interaction patterns, relationships and individual well-being, and care provided by adult children.

Hagestad (1984) examined the continuous bond across the life course of the parent-child relationship. The three dimensions of time in this examination were individual time, family time, and generational time. In the research on parent/child relationships, Hagestad introduced the principles of alpha and omega bias. Alpha bias pertains to the vast amount of work done on the relationship between parents and their young children. Omega bias addresses the research focus on the other end of the life course where adult children are providing care for their elderly parents. There is a considerable gap in the research as it pertains to the parent/child relationship when both are adults. The three concepts Hagestad presented to characterize the relationship are socialization and influence, patterns of support, and developmental reciprocity.

Bringing together research on individual development and family relations would contribute immensely to the study of the parent-adult child relationship (Ryff & Seltzer, 1995). The two have not been previously connected due to the training of the researchers in each discipline. Also, the complexity of family research makes it difficult to shift from the study of the individual to the family as a whole. Ryff and Seltzer utilized the example of Erikson's generativity principle to demonstrate that, although it would seem to be a logical place to make a connection to the larger family system, the constructs used are devoid of any connection to the family. With regard to research on the family, Ryff and Seltzer used caregiving to show how more attention could be paid to individual development of both the giver and receiver of care. They pointed out three places in the course of caregiving could be examined - the decisions prior to, and the beginning of the caregiving relationship; the period of time where some mastery of the caregiver role has been reached; and the experience of the former caregiver after the role has ended.

Relationships between parents and adult children and the quality of those relationships evolve over many years (Brubaker, 1985). Investigators who examine the quality of the relationships between parents and adult children need to include the examination of the long history of the social bond under investigation (Arling, 1976). Bedford (1992) examined the concept of perceptions of parental unfairness in the treatment of offspring during childhood in order to assess the consequences for the well-being of the adult child-parent relationship. She examined the concept of

fairness and described it as implied “consistency with principles, consistency between parents, and appropriateness to the need of children” (Bedford, 1992, p. S149).

The results of the study indicated that the more adult children felt they had been treated worse than their siblings, the less affectional solidarity they perceived with their parents and the more conflict they felt in their relationships. Similarly, the more parents felt they treated their child worse, the less affectional solidarity and the more conflict they perceived in their relationship with that child.

Parental Expectations

Ryff, Schmutte, and Lee (1996) analyzed the concept of “how children turn out” and the connection success or lack of success of an adult child has to parental well-being. They looked at child’s levels of adjustment (getting along) and attainment (getting ahead), social comparison to the offspring of parents’ friends and siblings and attribution of responsibility to their child’s degree of perceived success, and the effect of differences in sons and daughters. To deal with the principle of not being able to be objective in the reports regarding their own children, telephone interviews were conducted within a year of the initial interview with spouses of research participants. Reports from both parents showed a similar measurement of their child’s success, so they concluded the principle did not apply.

Rossi and Rossi (1990) analyzed the structure of normative obligations and the exchange of support. The results in these two areas were part of a larger study (Rossi & Rossi, 1990) of parent-child relationships among three generations. The data were collected through face-to-face interviews. Participants ranged in age from 19 to 92 years and were initially recruited through door to door solicitation in the Boston area. The researchers examined parent-child relationships across the life course, gender of both parent and child, differences and similarities with regard to perceptions of the relationship, and the effect of early family experiences on subsequent relationships.

The data collected on the structure of normative obligations were taken from self-administered vignettes that the participants responded to at the completion of the interview. The

vignettes dealt with hypothetical situations involving either a crisis or a celebratory event. For each vignette, the gender, type of event, and type of relationship (both kin and nonkin) were varied. The purpose of the exercise was to determine relationship patterns with regard to an individual's obligation to respond to both types of events. The results demonstrated that the strongest sense of obligation was found one link away in the relationship context (i.e., parent, child, sibling), and the obligation weakened as the number of links increased. Regarding the exchange of support, the middle generation (G2) was asked a series of "yes" or "no" questions about support given and received, and a spinoff sample was obtained for G1 and G3 that were asked identical questions. Between parents, the support from children was always greater for the mother. The level of support was higher toward mothers who lived alone, and the type of support given by sons tended to be in the way of advice and financial support, where the daughters gave more emotional and interpersonal support. The influence of early family experiences characterized by a high level of cohesiveness led to a more extensive and diverse exchange of support by both parents and children, as well as a stronger measure of obligation in both crisis and celebratory events.

Family Structure and Roles

The effects of adult siblings' number, gender, and birth order on their relationships with parents was examined by Spitze and Logan (1991) based on personal interviews with both adult children and their parents. They examined three mechanisms by which family structure may affect the relationships and behavior between individual parents and children. The first process they examined was that sibling structure may produce different expectations and attitudes toward filial responsibility or gender roles on the part of parents or adult children. The second looked at the assumption that children reared in different family structures may develop relationships with their parents that exhibit different qualities of closeness with them. The third was that parents' needs and time available for contact and assistance may be viewed differentially by children with varying sibling structures as being met by alternative sources.

Their analysis demonstrated that sibling structure does not affect children's closeness to parents, attitudes about filial responsibilities, or attitudes about gender-typing of those

responsibilities. The analysis of contact, helping, and visiting, using the adult child's perspective and the parent's perspective were not totally consistent. They found that daughters were more likely than sons to adjust their visiting or helping behaviors in accordance with the availability of other siblings. Spitze and Logan's interpretation of the data lead to somewhat different conclusions depending on whether the reports from the children or parents were analyzed. The adult child respondents were asked about each of their siblings and parents, but there was only one adult child respondent for each family, and the same procedure was used for the parents. The results were not clear-cut and consistent and emphasized the need to gather detailed information on family structure in the collection of data on parent-child relations. The authors reported the need to gather data from each of the siblings in the family in addition to parents from the same family in order to provide for a more complete picture of the influential factors and complexity of individual and family roles.

The examination of the definitions of kinship ties and chosen family bring many questions about the ways in which individuals form relationships and create bonds of love and protection. Weston (1992) stated that "descriptively speaking, the categories of gay kinship might better be labeled families we struggle to create, struggle to choose, struggle to legitimate, and - in the case of blood or adoptive family - struggle to keep." (p. 136) Taking into consideration the wide range of possibilities in the formation of family relationships, and the ways in which individuals interpret and exemplify these ties throughout their lives, is necessary in order to allow researchers to attend to the multiplicity that exists in family structures.

Kinscripts is Stack and Burton's (1993) framework to describe and understand the networks established and maintained in families. The framework is derived from life course perspective, studies of kinship, and literature on family scripts. Kinscripts are based on the propositions that families have their own agendas, interpretation of cultural norms, and histories. The authors conducted an ethnographic study with urban and rural, low-income, multigenerational, Black, extended families in the northeast, southeast, and mid-west portions of the United States. The kinscripts framework was developed through this research to interpret both individual and family

role transitions, transmission of family norms, and the negotiation, exchange, and conflict in families as they establish the life course of the family and individuals within and around it.

Through examining three culturally defined family domains, Stack and Burton (1993) demonstrate how individuals and families interact to include and exclude members throughout the family life course. Kin-work, kin-time, and kin-scription are the domains used to examine this interaction. Kin-work defines the work that families must accomplish in order for them to survive over time. Kin-time describes the preferred timing and sequencing of role transitions and the performance of kin-work by each member of the family. Kin-scription adds an awareness of how power is utilized with the interaction of kin-work and kin-time. The tension involved in the kin-scription revolves around the conflicts sometimes created when individuals are attempting to set their own agendas at the same time that families are attempting to impose agendas and recruit individuals for family work. In some instances, kin-scription demonstrates the dimension of power through inclusion in the network and recruitment for kin-work and at other times power is exhibited by the family through exclusion of individuals from kin-work.

Another description of an important component of family structure and roles is the "homeplace as a site of resistance" (hooks, 1990, p. 41). hooks's feminist work emphasizes the importance of the homeplace and women's roles in its establishment to acknowledge an understanding of the need for a safe place to discuss ideas and promote activism. The homeplace is not only described as a place where family life occurs, but also a place to nurture shared ideas as well as give comfort in difficult times. The significance of the homeplace can be described in both a literal and figurative way. hooks described the homeplace in the literal sense: "There we learned dignity, integrity of being; there we learned to have faith" (hooks, 1990, pp. 41-42). She talks of the homeplace as a place that is radically political. The concept of the homeplace is not exclusively taken in the literal sense of a house that one returns to for shelter and conversation. The establishment of the homeplace as a site for these discussions is crucial, and it can also be the embodiment of any venue that is comfortable and safe for the expression of ideas--no matter what the physical representation.

hooks (1990) illustrates the critical message of the need for both the places to exist and the discussions to emerge. The ideas of resisting the dominance of men in the homeplace, and resisting the oppression and exploitation of the structures and constructs of society, reinforce the concept of the establishment of a homeplace to persevere. A line in the quote hooks shares from Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hahn describes resistance as perhaps meaning “opposition to being invaded, occupied, assaulted and destroyed by the system” (hooks, 1990, p.43). His statement brings to the fore both the sadness of resistance still being necessary and the debilitating effect it can have if there is no conversation about how “the system” treats its members.

Significance of Research in Relation to Existing Work

One limitation of the research literature on parent-child relationships is that few studies collect data from both the parent and the adult child (Aquilino, 1996; Ryff & Seltzer, 1995; Suito, Pillemer, Keeton, & Robison, 1995; Umberson, 1992). I addressed this need, along with the unit of analysis question in sibling research as noted earlier. The contribution of this study is the addition of multiple perspectives and voices within the family as well as between individual family members based on the relationships between siblings and existing and perceived parental expectations.

I contribute to the activist agenda in family studies by examining concepts that further the understanding of diversity in families and allow others to view the world from the perspective of others whose voices are being silenced. Lather (1991) explained that empowerment is not something that can be given to a person, it is something a person must grasp for her- or himself. The use of a feminist theoretical and methodological approach that includes and values all people widens the focus of normative expectations and enables the inclusion of previously excluded “others.”

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Overview of the Research Design

The methodology of a research study is an integral component that sets the stage for the data that are to be collected, the course of the discovery process, the experiences of both the researcher and the researched, and the fluid movement of the data themselves through the multiple phases of the research process. Methodology “refers to the way in which we approach problems and seek answers” (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984, p. 1). I conducted this study utilizing an integration of qualitative and feminist methodologies.

Qualitative methods in family research focus on “the processes by which families create, sustain, and discuss their own family realities” (Daly, 1992, p. 4) and have the ability to listen and attend to both the spoken and the unspoken stories. A feminist perspective includes methods that encourage the acknowledgment of the larger social reality of research (Leslie & Sollie, 1994). My goal was to use methods that expose the depth and breadth of participants’ experiences. I also focused attention on maintaining an awareness of the context and the process surrounding the data by asking the research questions and listening to the responses in a careful and respectful manner.

Qualitative Methodologies

The use of qualitative methodologies enabled me to explore the ways different people make sense of their lives (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). For a variety of perspectives to surface in the course of data collection, qualitative methodologies provide space to ask questions that emerge during the research process and grant opportunities for myself and the participants to clarify and enhance meanings that arise through the shared experience. Strauss and Corbin (1990) outline the skills needed for doing qualitative research as the abilities “to step back and critically analyze situations, to recognize and avoid bias, to obtain valid and reliable data, and to think abstractly” (p. 18). Qualitative approaches allow for the examination of topics that are complex where the meaning and interpretation of experiences may be different for various people at different times (Rosenblatt & Fischer, 1993).

Qualitative methods are well suited to discover and uncover information about which little is known (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In this study, I explored how privilege in families among adult siblings creates a complex dynamic that involves real and perceived ideas, expectations, and experiences for individuals, dyads, subsystems within the family, and the collective family unit. Through the investigation of family traditions and rituals, I examined both overt and covert examples of privilege.

Feminist Methodologies

Feminist methodologies were engaged in my research project to challenge assumptions and create new knowledge. Until words and concepts are created to acknowledge previously unnamed experiences, they are mute and invisible and therefore powerless to inform understanding or claim their own existence (Du Bois, 1983). By investigating privilege in adult sibling relationships, I was searching to find and name the experiences of individuals in the family sibling subsystem who are overlooked and marginalized.

Through the opportunity to speak in and listen to their own voices, participants explored the meaning they and others assigned to their lives. The aims that Lather (1991) stated of “turning critical thought into emancipatory action” (p. xv) guided this research by constructing a qualitative feminist study to create understanding, self-awareness, and empowerment for myself, the participants, and the eventual recipients of the knowledge created.

Feminists “attempt to do more than describe oppressive conditions” (Baber & Allen, 1992, p. 18). It is important to allow the voices of the participants to be heard, and enable them to have the choice and ability to change their world, as well as understand it (Lather, 1991). In feminist research, traversing the space that becomes an agent of change means to find the balance between being a conduit of information and a victim of chaos. On one end of the spectrum is the authoritarian approach of being the omnipotent giver of information, and on the other end the degree of involvement and inclusion that creates chaos and total lack of control. Excitement exists in the tension created between the two. There must be the basis of knowledge available that creates

an arena for exploration, while at the same time creating enough space in that arena to offer a place for all.

Reflexive Process

Allen and Farnsworth (1993) defined reflexivity as a “critical process of increasing self-awareness and sensitivity to the experiences of others” (p. 351). The reflexive process, is the tendency “to reflect upon, examine critically, and explore analytically the nature of the research process” (Fonow & Cook, 1991, p. 2). I incorporated the reflexive process into my research through regular reflexive conversations with my dissertation advisor, committee members, and colleagues; through writing process notes; and through keeping a research journal during the entire research process. The reflexive process also enabled me to identify and differentiate my personal agenda from the research agenda (Daly, 1992).

Sample Selection Procedures

Sample Selection Criterion

The criterion for participation in this study included: families in which there were at least 3 adult siblings, all siblings were over the age of 30, and there was at least one living parent. The reason for the selection of this age range was to recruit participants who have had the opportunity at least to begin to establish themselves in a chosen career or occupational path. Interviewing a parent in addition to the adult siblings enabled me to obtain a perspective and collect information directly from them on expectations, views of success, and perceptions of privilege. When I talked to the initial contact in each family, I told them I wanted to interview all of the siblings in the family and at least one of the parents. The mother in each family was the parent who agreed to participate.

As shown in the review of literature, varied results are obtained when investigating the influence of gender on adult sibling relationships. By allowing gender to be an organizing concept in the sample selection through varying the gender composition of the families selected, closer examination of the intersection of gender and birth order, marital status, and parental status was possible.

I chose to address the difficulties with the unit of analysis that were noted in the review of literature by requesting to interview all of the siblings in each family. Interviewing each of the siblings enabled me to collect data that represented actual perspectives and ideas of each member, as opposed to selected dyads or one sibling as a spokesperson for other family members.

Sample Selection

I used a snowball sampling technique (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984) to recruit participants. Through personal contact, I talked to 25 acquaintances and asked them for information about people they knew that met the selection criterion of my sample. I began this process in October. Through these acquaintances I was given the names and descriptions of 12 potential families.

Since I had determined that gender would be an organizing concept, I recruited a sister only family, a brother only family, and a mixed gender family. I also sought diversity based on marital and parental status. Each of the acquaintances I talked to contacted a member of the family they proposed for me to interview to ask if members of the family would be willing to participate in the study. At that point my acquaintance gave me the names and telephone numbers of the individual contacted. I called each initial contact to confirm that he or she would participate in the study and to obtain the telephone numbers for other family members.

In all of the families, the initial contact I talked to had either already spoken to the other family members or asked for the opportunity to do so prior to my contacting them. The first contact person was a member of a sister only family. The second contact person was a member of a mixed gender family with one never married member. I had the most difficulty locating a brother only family. It was also more difficult to locate families with never married members. I began setting up interviews for the 2 families who had agreed to participate as I continued to search for a brother only family.

I encountered considerable problems in contacting the person whose name I was given for the mixed gender family. I left 3 messages before he returned my call. When we finally talked, he wanted me to wait to contact the rest of his family until he had a chance to confirm that they would participate. I continued to try to contact him to get the telephone numbers of the other family

members. The acquaintance from whom I had originally gotten his name also continued to contact him in an effort to move the process along. Eventually, she gave me the telephone number for his sister.

Finally, I called his sister and got the numbers of the other 2 brothers in the family. My acquaintance called the mother and told her about the study. The mother told my acquaintance she would be willing to participate, but when I called her (the mother) she told me that she had thought about it some more, and did not think she wanted to participate. She said she did not think she wanted to share information about her family because her husband had recently passed away (2 years ago), and it was still too difficult to talk about.

At this point, this was the only family I had found with a never married sibling, after 12 referrals, so I decided to continue contacting the other members of the family before I made a decision about whether or not to keep the family in the study. When I finally talked to the eldest brother in this family, he told me that his mother had called him and asked that he not participate in the study. He said that she was having problems with his involvement in the study, and he felt he needed to respect her request for him not to participate. I decided to keep this family in the study because the other 3 family members had agreed to be interviewed. I thought by interviewing the other family members I might get a better understanding of the reasons this mother denied my request to participate. I was also curious about why she called her eldest son and asked him not to participate.

During that time, I found a brother only family and began setting up interviews with members of that family. All of the siblings in that family were married, and all of the siblings in the sister only family were married. The brother who was not going to participate in an interview was the never married sibling, so I decided to add another mixed gender family with 2 never married siblings to increase the diversity pertaining to the marital status of the participants.

I contacted each of the participants an average of 2 times in order to set up the interview, with the exception of the participant with whom I had difficulty connecting. I made 12 attempts to contact him, and the interview was finally set up by my acquaintance who called him.

Each participant was informed that the interview would take from 60 to 90 minutes to complete. Initial consent to participate in the interviews was obtained verbally over the telephone during the initial contact. Two participants had to reschedule the interview. One was due to an obligation at work and one was due to one of his children being sick.

Sample Description

The sample consisted of a family with 3 sisters, a family with 3 brothers and 1 sister, a family with 4 brothers, and a family with 2 brothers and 1 sister. The adult siblings ranged in age from 30 to 60, with an average age of 42. The mothers in the sample ranged in age from 62 to 70 with an average age of 67. Table 3.1 contains the pseudonyms, family type, birth order, and ages for the 4 families in the study. I included the 2 family members who did not agree to an interview in all of the demographic information. Table 3.2 contains the educational backgrounds of the members of each family.

Table 3.1 Family Type, Birth Order, Age

Family Type	Pseudonym	Birth Order	Age
1	Rhonda	1 of 3	50
sister only	Lisa	2 of 3	48
	Peg	3 of 3	45
	Deb	mother	69
2	Keith	1 of 4	50
mixed	Joe	2 of 4	47
	Barb	3 of 4	44
	Neil	4 of 4	43
	Shelley	mother	70
3	Paul	1 of 4	41
brother only	Dan	2 of 4	39
	Gerry	3 of 4	37
	Jack	4 of 4	30
	Maggie	mother	65
4	Bob	1 of 3	38
mixed	Carol	2 of 3	36
	Jeff	3 of 3	35
	Elaine	mother	62

Table 3.2 Educational Background

Family #	Pseudonym	Educational Background
1	Rhonda	High School Graduate
1	Lisa	Master's
1	Peg	High School Graduate
1	Deb	High School Graduate
2	Keith	Bachelor's
2	Joe	Bachelor's
2	Barb	Bachelor's
2	Neil	Bachelor's
2	Shelley	High School Graduate
3	Paul	High School Graduate
3	Dan	Bachelor's
3	Gerry	Bachelor's
3	Jack	Bachelor's
3	Maggie	Associate's
4	Bob	High School - pursuing Bachelors
4	Carol	Master's
4	Jeff	High School Graduate
4	Elaine	High School Graduate

Three siblings were never married, including 1 who has been cohabiting with his fiancée for approximately 3 years. The remaining 10 siblings have been married. Of those who have been married, 2 have been divorced once and are now remarried. One has been divorced twice and is presently unmarried. Two of the mothers in the sample have been married once and are currently married. One mother is widowed. One mother is in her second marriage to the same individual. She and her husband were divorced for around 7 years before they remarried. The marital and parental status of participants are displayed in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3 Marital and Parental Status

Family	Pseudonym	Marital Status	Parental Status
1	Rhonda	married once	adopted son 25, adopted daughter 19
1	Lisa	divorced twice	son (1st marriage) 21, daughter (2nd marriage) 17, daughter (2nd marriage) 13
1	Peg	divorced once currently married	step-son 23, step-son 21 adopted daughter (second marriage) 11
1	Deb	divorced once remarried 1st husband	daughter 50, daughter 48, daughter 45
2	Keith	never married	none
2	Joe	married once	son 15, daughter 13
2	Barb	married once	daughter 14, son 11, daughter 4
2	Neil	married once	son 8, daughter 3
2	Shelley	widowed (married once)	son 50, son 47, daughter 44, son 43
3	Paul	divorced once currently married	son 7 (neither marriage), twin step-daughters 11
3	Dan	married once	son 13, son 10
3	Gerry	married once	son 12, son 9
3	Jack	married once	step-daughter 9, son 1
3	Maggie	married once	son 41, son 39, son 37, son 30
4	Bob	married once	son 2, daughter 1
4	Carol	never married	none
4	Jeff	engaged - cohabiting	none
4	Elaine	married once	son 38, daughter 36, daughter 35

Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected through the use of semi-structured in-depth interviews (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Kaufman, 1994). An interview guide (see Appendix A) was utilized to organize the interview process. Probes were initiated to follow up by requesting further information or an explanation to clarify my understanding of information previously shared by the participant (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). The interview guides were developed based on the research questions, the review of literature, and the theories guiding the study. I also developed a worksheet to collect demographic information from participants (see Appendix B). Separate interview guides were developed for siblings and parents.

Pilot Study

I conducted three pilot interviews. Although the pilot interview data were not used in the study itself, the process contributed to refining the interview guide and demographic worksheet. I conducted one interview with a male (age 30) from a family with 10 siblings to test how the interview questions would work for a larger family. I also conducted separate interviews with a woman (age 49) and her mother (age 82) to gain additional information about interviewing multiple family members.

The pilot interviews enabled me to make adjustments to both the demographic worksheet and the interview guide. I became more aware of additional confidentiality issues raised by interviewing multiple family members as I did the first pilot interview. Toward the end of the interview I asked him to think about how he would feel if he knew I would be interviewing everyone in his family. I asked him if there was anything we talked about that he would want to be sure his siblings did not know about. At that point, he reached over and turned off the tape recorder and told me about a family secret that only a few of his siblings are aware of. He also said that several of the things that he talked about were not common knowledge with all his siblings.

In conducting the second and third interviews with the mother and daughter, another issue of interviewing multiple family members came up. I interviewed the daughter first. As I was interviewing the mother I found that she continually made references such as “I’m sure my

daughter told you ...” I began to realize that subsequent family members that are interviewed may make assumptions about what I already know about their family.

It was important to establish rapport and make the participant feel at ease as the research process began (Daly, 1992; Kaufman, 1994; Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). I asked each participant to select the location of the interview. Of the 16 interviews conducted, 4 took place in the participants’ home, 4 took place in my home, 2 took place in my office, 4 took place in the participants’ office, and 2 were conducted over the telephone. All but 2 of the 16 participants lived in the local area. I conducted telephone interviews with the 2 participants who live outside the local area. Table 3.3 shows where each interview was held. The length of the interviews ranged from 40 minutes to 2 hours and 40 minutes. The average length of an interview was one hour.

Table 3.4 Interview Location

Family #	Pseudonym	Interview Location
1	Rhonda	my home
1	Lisa	her home
1	Peg	my home
1	Deb	telephone
2	Keith	did not interview
2	Joe	my home
2	Barb	my home
2	Neil	his office
2	Shelley	did not interview
3	Paul	his office
3	Dan	my office
3	Gerry	my office
3	Jack	his office
3	Maggie	her home
4	Bob	his office
4	Carol	her home
4	Jeff	telephone
4	Elaine	her home

Confidentiality of Participants

To protect the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants, and insure compliance with established guidelines for research involving human subjects, I obtained approval to conduct this research from the Institutional Review Board at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (see Appendix C). At the start of each interview, I distributed and explained to each participant the Informed Consent for Participants of Investigative Projects (see Appendix D). When I was confident that the participant understood the process outlined in the consent form, I asked them to sign the form. I offered each participant a copy of the consent form.

Research Journal

Throughout the research process, I continually recorded information in my research journal. I included questions I had about the logistics of conducting the interviews, notes from discussions with my advisor, my thoughts about strategies for future interviews, and my feelings about the overall process of obtaining a sample and conducting the interviews. Field notes were recorded after the completion of each interview to preserve both my observations about the environment and the questions at that time that remained unanswered or not understood (Kaufman, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). After all 16 interviews had been completed, I reviewed all of my field notes and compiled a set of summary notes outlining the issues that seemed salient at that time.

Data Analysis Process

Each interview was audiotaped and transcribed verbatim. I hired 4 individuals to transcribe the interview tapes. I made copies of the audiotapes before giving them to the transcriptionists. I provided transcriptionists with several computer disks and asked them to make a back up copy of each transcript on a different disk. When I delivered the interview tapes to each transcriptionist, I reviewed the issue of confidentiality with them. I stressed the importance of not sharing the information in the transcripts with anyone and explained the process of review and approval for investigative research dealing with human subjects. I also attempted to distribute tapes of participants from different families to each person so one transcriptionist was not working with all the tapes from participants in the same family.

Analysis of the data was guided by a combination of procedures outlined by Allen (1989), Bogdan and Biklen (1992), and Taylor and Bogdan (1984). As I received the completed transcripts, I reviewed each one while listening to the audiotape. I made corrections to the transcript on the electronic copy as I listened to the tape and clarified information that the transcriptionists found inaudible. After completing this process, I printed the corrected copies of the transcripts. I then made a copy of each transcript and the original was securely stored while the

duplicate copy was utilized to conduct data analysis. I grouped the transcripts from each family together and made the duplicate copies for each family on different colored paper.

I spent two days reading through the transcripts for each participant without taking any notes. This enabled me to get a feel for the total data set. After I completed reading all of the transcripts, I recorded process notes about my reflexive interpretation of the data and my ideas about the themes I saw emerging at that point. Along with the list of themes, I recorded the theories that were related to each theme. During the next reading of the data, I made a list of potential coding categories. At that point, I developed a preliminary coding scheme including 41 coding categories grouped into 8 coding families.

After discussing the preliminary coding scheme with my advisor, I revised the coding scheme to include 36 coding categories and 9 coding families. I began to read through the transcripts and apply the coding scheme to the data. I made multiple copies of the coding scheme sheet and after coding each transcript, I recorded which codes were utilized for each participant. I used this procedure to determine whether or not the codes I had developed could characterize the data. After coding the transcripts for 2 families and reviewing the sheets for each participant, I felt that some of the coding categories were too broad and some were too specific.

I once again met with my advisor and revised the coding scheme. My revised coding scheme included 27 coding categories and 7 coding families. I went back to code the transcripts for the remaining 2 families and found this coding scheme to fit the data more accurately. After coding the transcripts for the remaining 2 families, I went back and recoded the transcripts for the other two families using the revised coding strategy. As I recorded the numbers of the codes on the transcripts in the margin to the right of the text, I also made a note in the margin to the left of the text highlighted in a different color to indicate where on the page each question was asked. This made it easier as I reviewed the transcripts to locate information on a specific question.

After coding each transcript, I created a document ordered by coding category and electronically moved all of the coded text into that document. After completing this step, I had one document with all of the coded data arranged according to the coding scheme. I printed a copy of

this document which was 111 pages in length. As I analyzed each section and looked for consistency or inconsistency within each coding category, I discovered 2 categories that could be collapsed into one. My final coding scheme included 26 coding categories and 7 coding families.

I struggled with the unit of analysis as I wrote my analysis. It was necessary to analyze data in some of the coding categories by comparing members of each participant family to each other. The analysis for other categories was stronger through the comparison of individuals. The complexity of the data led me to reorder the coding categories in order to write up the most effective and efficient analysis chapter.

I continually examined my position of researcher as both insider and outsider (Westkott, 1979). The fact that my family of origin meets the criteria of the research participants positioned me as an insider, while my role as researcher and the differentiation of other personal characteristics (marital status, parental status, race, cultural and ethnic background, level of educational attainment, socioeconomic status, and occupational status) positioned me as an outsider. I was able to establish connections with the participants by sharing my own stories, but I was careful not to make assumptions due to my own experience as I analyzed the data.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

In this study I explored the subjective meaning of family and the multiple ways that privilege in families is viewed. Through examining adult sibling relationships in 4 families, I heard many descriptions of what being a family means and many interpretations of what being a sibling means. As siblings talked about their own lives from childhood through adulthood, the complexities of their relationships with each other were woven throughout. Their stories make visible the myriad of ways adult siblings experience both connection to and distance from each other as they attend to the details of their own lives. Amount of contact among family members ranges from hundreds of miles in geographic separation to daily contact through working together for a family business.

This study is based upon in-depth interviews with 13 adult siblings and 3 mothers. Gaining perspectives from each family member enabled me to listen to the many ways individuals create and interpret both a unique and collective understanding of “family.” As I talked with each of the adult siblings in the study, it was clear that the interpretation of success across time and in adulthood was tied to how their parents envisioned success, in addition to their own hopes and dreams. Hearing the stories told by mothers about their expectations and desires for their children was an important piece in the creation of my understanding about sibling interaction in these 4 families.

Each interview revealed another person’s contribution and added familiarity and clarification to the concept of “how we describe family.” Through speaking to multiple family members, the phenomenological assumptions of subjectivity, language and meaning, and indeterminacy were evident. Each person’s interpretation of the meaning of relationships within the family and what they viewed as significant were parts of the whole that comprised “family.” Just as there were similarities in those descriptions, there were also many differences.

By recalling events in the earlier stages of family life and speaking about how things have changed across each person’s life course, there was also a discourse about an underlying strength in the unconditional love shared among family members. As each of the participants talked about

how they perceive each sibling to be unique, there was also a common thread among siblings. They often spoke of a feeling of closeness and comfort by saying they had always, and would always “be there” for each other.

The storyline of my study is about how participants describe their family of origin and their sibling relationships across time, particularly in adulthood. Their universal descriptions of “family” are grounded in the language of being close, being tight, and getting along. These statements are often accompanied by a qualifying claim that “everything is not perfect.” Some maintained a harmonious picture of family and sibling relationships. Some kept family harmony as the dominant narrative, while interjecting elements that may be inconsistent which they did not or would not elaborate. Some chose to stumble through the contradictions and spoke of the impact of the inconsistencies.

The analysis is organized around five general sections. In the first section, *I Believe in the Legacy of Family*, I present accounts of “what family means,” how families communicate, and descriptions of sibling relationships. *What Privilege Means* is the theme of the second section. The foundation of what privilege means to each person is laid by presenting their responses to being asked directly to describe examples of privilege in their family. This section includes illustrations of how birth order and gender influence privilege. Participants’ portrayals of how family members have been treated differently are also presented.

Parental Expectations and Success, the third section, includes siblings’ perceptions of parental expectations, and mothers’ descriptions of expectations for their children. Representations of what “success” means are explored by participants, along with their perceptions of success “achieved.” The fourth section, *Dealing with Change and Life Circumstances*, involves experiences of working as a family to deal with celebration, adversity, and planning for the future. In this section, participants talk about the pleasure and pain of enduring bonds among siblings, ways their family has “pulled together” and the times they have experienced being “pushed apart.” Siblings also shared information about discussions pertaining to parental caregiving and matters such as the naming of an executor or the bestowal of power of attorney.

The final section describes Justifying Privilege. Although there were many times that elements of privilege emerged, there was also a need to justify why some members “have” and others “have not.”

I Believe in the Legacy of Family

Throughout the interviews, participants spoke of what their family is like. They gave descriptions of how they conceptualized “family.” They talked about how their family spent time together including events, traditions, and family rituals. They also spoke of how gender roles were experienced as they were growing up.

Wearing the Family Crest

Descriptions of family included general statements of love and support, personal and familial beliefs, and values that exist throughout generations. At times these comments were solicited through my asking the question “how would you describe your family?” At other times, the descriptions were included as part of a response to a different question or an interjection during a summary statement. There were still other times when these words were spoken as a “disclaimer” to justify that above all else, and through any specific difficulties experienced, a general allegiance to family is what is important. Mothers in the study described their families with a sense of satisfaction and pride:

Of course family comes high on the list. I guess that’s one of the main things. . . . I would just say they’re great. . . . If we really had to get down to the nitty gritty, I’d say they are human. (Maggie)

I guess we're just a typical family. We love each other and we also fuss and fight. . . . But, I've enjoyed raising the children. Been a challenge at times I'll tell ya'. (Elaine)

They put family first. . . . they are mighty fine girls. Now, don't get me wrong. It's not perfect. We have our differences and we agree to disagree. But we get along real well, and you'd be surprised even though they're different. . . . Maybe I brag too much, and said too much about, it hasn't been perfect at all, . . . everything's, I think it's kind of like even keel. . . . We have our ups and downs and we have our disagreements, but everything just has worked out real well. (Deb)

Within descriptions of the closeness of families, both parents and siblings often included statements of how they are close, but also experience times when they “fuss and fight.” At the end

of one interview when asked if there were any other important characteristics about family that generally describes them, a sibling from the sister only family stated:

Basically we get along pretty good. You know, like I said, we have different agreements but we get along. And we share everything. Sometimes we may share too much. But I know sometimes you feel like maybe you're putting a burden on them that you shouldn't put on them. We help each other out when we have to. I mean we always have and always will. I don't know. We love each other. We fight and fuss. (Rhonda)

When asked what kind of things would stand out if someone asked what your family is like, Rhonda's sister, Lisa, responded:

Supportive of each other. Close. Um, normal. I mean, you know, we fuss and fight like anybody else but we get over it, and get on with life. (Lisa)

When I asked her to elaborate on the meaning of "supportive" and "close" as it pertains to her family, Lisa explained that to her, it meant:

Financial help. Going to court with you. Holding your hand when you're crying and helping to take care of the kids and get them to the doctors' appointments and to all the places they've gotta go and just knowing you're never alone. (Lisa)

Responses to the question of "how would you describe your family?" from members of 2 different families included the use of the word "dysfunctional," but also moved to the explanation of closeness and unconditional love:

Probably pretty typical. . . . Dysfunctional. But I think when I say pretty typical I mean that, I guess that in terms of some families that I've seen, we're atypical in some ways. Just the fact that my parents are still married after 39 years. And also the fact that at these, at our ages that not all of us are married. I think that's probably a little different. And I think we're pretty close. I mean, we've definitely had our problems and still do some, but I think overall we're really close and I really enjoy my family and so we have fun when we get together. (Carol)

Dysfunctional. That might be the word. I don't, I'm not sure of the definition of dysfunctional. . . . But we all, I mean we all have a certain, a real sense of family. I mean, obviously I think I could call any of my brothers at any time of day or night from anywhere and if I needed help, they would be there. I have no doubts, and they know that about me, too. So that's an understood thing. There are no, there's no hidden hatred or anything, resentment that I know of. (Gerry)

Many participants tied their descriptions of family together with closeness and a sense of being there for each other in a way that some described as unconditional. The following quotes provide examples of how siblings from 3 different families describe this alliance:

I just always think family is such an odd, odd institution. It's like, all these people are so different and again, people you wouldn't necessarily choose to associate with, but yet, God,

you just love them so much. It's, I think that we're definitely more unconditional with our families than anyone else. (Carol)

I feel like there's a certain amount of, there's a comfort zone that we're, that I'm able to enjoy, knowing that the companionship of my family is constant and something that's there. It's always there, and it's something that I'm, probably take for granted. (Jack)

Joe and Barb spoke of the messages their Mother conveyed to them that family is constant by her word of "if you can't come home, where can you go" and her gift of unconditional love:

To stay a family, and you only have your family, and I really believe that. We have friends, but friends go and come and if, you know, Mother's thing was if you can't come home, where can you go? Well, the same thing, if you don't have your brothers and sisters. . . . I don't think there's anything that, short of death that they wouldn't come to me and do whatever I needed done. (Joe)

I told my son, about a month ago, we had this real big falling out, he and I. And after the falling out was over, we had this long talk. And I said to him, my Mother gave us two gifts, and I give those gifts to him. And they are: my Mother instilled in us that we could do anything and be anything we wanted to be. . . . I believed that with all my heart. And the second thing she truly did give us was unconditional love. I've always known she may have disapproved. She may not have liked something I did. She may not have liked me a whole, but she always loved me. Those were the two greatest gifts. And she gave those to me, and I believe, beyond a shadow of a doubt I have given them to my children. (Barb - Joe's sister)

Descriptions of family by siblings from different families also included a sense of intergenerational connection. This connection was evidenced through talk of the importance of extended family as well as the concept of passing on values and an understanding that embodied "family" to their own children:

I had a great conversation with my son the other day. And I think as he's grown up I've tried to embody certain things . . . I said, 'son we're going to have what is in your world's going to be known in the future as a father-son talk.' And I said, 'just as my Dad had one with me, I'm going to have them with you.' And I said 'it's my duty. It's my duty to embellish certain things on you.' . . . I would say, and I'm sure you sense that, I was blessed. I generally tend to see the world with a glass more than half full. I've taken great satisfaction in having brothers and sisters. . . . I always believe, and this is in my own words, maybe somebody's written about this, but I've always believed in the legacy of a family. (Neil)

Our family was pretty tight. Oh, always tight. And remained tight with our, with my parents' family, our folks, and to a degree that's, not as much, of course a lot of them have passed away over the years. I'm talking about my Mother's parents and my Dad's parents, but there still remains a close tie, in that regard. (Dan)

Members of each of the 4 families talked about a feeling of closeness, the importance of having a sense of extended family ties, and the transfer of beliefs and values from one generation

to the next. There was also a focus on the aspect of being there for each other, no matter what the circumstances.

Family Time

Many recollections of how family has spent time together throughout the years revolves around holidays. When asked to talk about traditions and rituals, family gatherings such as reunions were mentioned by members of two different families. Three members of the same family talked about the family reunions they have attended:

Well, I don't know if you could really call it, I guess it is a tradition. We always went to a family get together. And then from the time the kids were just real small up until a couple of years ago we always had a family get together. . . . The kids always loved to go there. (Elaine - mother)

The family reunion, and that's a big event, that's one that I really hope that even when my parents are gone, that we'll continue. (Carol)

Every Fourth of July they have a family reunion. I made it two years ago. . . . It's a really unique build up of people. And you generally see people you haven't seen in quite a few years. . . . It's just gonna be a lot of pranksters there. It's gonna be a lot of jokes and it's gonna be a lot of laughing and a lot of fun. (Jeff)

Members of 2 different families spoke specifically about the fact that their families have been together at Christmas:

But we have never spent a Christmas without each other, never. And that goes back from when we were little. And when we were little I guess maybe it got started. Because when we were little, it seemed like everybody'd come to Granny and Pa-paw's. And then as we got, when we came here, we were always together. And then, of course, when we got married and all, it was just assumed we were gonna be at Christmas. Most of the time we're spending the night with each other on Christmas eve. (Rhonda)

Holidays we all get together at Mom's. Always for Christmas. I had the revelation this past Christmas that I was 41 years old and I had never not been at my mother's house Christmas morning. . . . You know, not too many people could say that. And no matter where I was living or what I was doing or what was going on, I've always managed to get to my mother's house by no later than about 11:00 on Christmas morning. And my brothers all, as far as I know, can say the same thing. I mean that's pretty neat. (Paul)

In describing family traditions and rituals, a number of participants also spoke of more specific events that stood out for them:

We do always gather in the kitchen, and we have this chop block in the center of the floor and, for the blessing, and hold hands. And, it's from, the tradition comes down from my Mother's family, then we all pass the kiss around after the blessing. (Maggie)

Buttering noses on birthdays. I know some families do that, we've always done that. (Carol)

Yeah, you knew you made it, you knew you were growing up when you got out of the card table. . . . That was not only at home, but at my grandparent's house, it was the card table in the bedroom of all the places. . . .It's a difficult transition. It's hard to get to the big table. (Gerry)

Three members of one family referred to the fact that they are all still members of the same church they attended together as they were growing up:

We attend church, nearly every Sunday. . . . All the girls go to the same church. (Deb - mother)

We all happen to continue to go to the same church, which is probably kind of unlike, you know, not that common in today's world. (Peg)

And then of course we've always all gone to church together. . . . We still go to the same church we went to 35 years ago and still do. (Rhonda)

Experiences that revolve around cultural heritage were also an important part of growing up and understanding the meaning of family:

An interesting thing about our family that I really take great pride in is my Mother grew up at a time, with two parents who were Lebanese . . . and there was a lot of prejudice back then. But some how, my Mother grew up strong, extremely strong. So I grew up having no idea what prejudice was. I guess because she had experienced it. . . . But she can tell stories about, back then Lebanese were not allowed in the country clubs and in certain restaurants. I mean, even here in town. (Barb)

Through descriptions and interpretations of what "family" means, adult siblings and mothers in each of the 4 families illustrated a sense of belonging in the ways they shared family time.

Ways We Communicate

Communication styles from no talk to small talk to letter writing were evident. Some participants described their sense of an innate understanding that needed no explanation, while others relayed a strong preference for face-to-face interaction in order to deal with issues directly.

The said, the unsaid, the assumed. From general conversation to the discussion of vital family issues, many modes of communication are exercised. Although for some individuals there was a discourse that assumed a universality regarding communication style, it became clear as others in that family responded to the same question that no common ground exists.

The "unsaid" or "assumed" communication was explained on a number of different levels. This was described through content, context, and process. The following statements were made by

members of the brother only family when I asked them about the type of communication that exists in their family. Paul and Jack characterized communication in their family as an understanding that does not require words. Dan responded by saying there are not “intense” conversations. While Gerry stated they simply “don’t” communicate:

We don’t, we communicate in a lot of different ways that other people don’t see or know. There’s a lot that goes on in my family that’s unsaid. (Paul)

Nothing. Nothing. And my wife talks about this constantly. We don’t communicate with each other. Which is different from my wife’s family. And she’s talked about it many times, she says my Mother is the king of small talk. (Gerry)

I don’t think, you mentioned intense, we don’t have a lot of, I don’t think, intense, deep, soul searching, probing kinds of things. (Dan)

When I think of my family, I don’t think about little this and little that or what maybe this person’s thinking or something like that. I guess because somewhere I feel like I know what they are [thinking] and maybe I’m comfortable to think that. That their thoughts are positive. And if they’re as positive as mine are, I can’t sing enough praise for the family. (Jack)

Although Paul talked at the beginning of the interview about the “unsaid,” when I asked him a direct question about the way people usually go about dealing with concerns they may have with another family member, he responded:

Pick up the phone and call. We pretty much hit things head on. There’s not a lot of bullshit. I mean it’s pretty much head on. None of us have time for niceties. You know it’s just cut to the chase. (Paul)

Throughout the interview with Gerry, he referred back many times to his comment that his family does not communicate with each other at all:

We don’t communicate, and, you know, I’m cool with that. I don’t, it’s not like I’m trying to push it to be any different. . . . And neither is anybody else. So, we’re certainly not the Waltons. (Gerry)

In the sister only family, each sibling spoke of a comparison between the “usual” communication style and an “exception” to that rule as they talked about an incident that occurred last Thanksgiving. Rhonda sent cards to Lisa and Peg telling them she was upset that they had not contributed their fair share, in her opinion, of doing the clean-up after dinner. Lisa talked about the way conversations ensue when there is an issue to be dealt with, and then talked about the recent departure from that “norm.” I asked, “how does that happen?” and she responded:

Pairs. . . . Well see that was, you know not aimed at anyone in my family. It was just a matter of me being ready to share with them. And we would just take long walks and just talk, you know, away from the kids and whatever and just talk and talk. So I remember lots of long walks. Usually it was just Mom and us girls. You know, we'd go and, now just recently Rhonda got a bee in her bonnet and got upset. But she couldn't face us with it. So she wrote me and Peg letters you know expressing her discontent. (Lisa)

Her sisters also described the ways they usually communicate and the recent exception at

Thanksgiving:

It's, 99.9% of the time always . . . it would've been immediate exchange, and we would've just thought, well she's having a real bad day or I'm having a bad day or whatever. So that's norm. This, this writing the note was totally out of norm, and I really, Lisa and I, we, she and I did get together and have lunch . . . we talked about it and I said, we just felt like in that case, because it is the exception, it's really never come up before, that we're probably better off not acknowledging. I think Rhonda was probably felt like she got it off of her heart and her shoulders. And when we were all together at Christmas, maybe if anything was going to come up, she could've stuck the knife in. (Peg)

Sometimes it's indirect and they know you're mad. You know, but this year what I did, I was so tired, and see I did this. I wrote a little letter, they may have told you. And I don't know, I never did even hear. See I never did even hear if they got the letter or anything. And I just wrote this letter stating my concern that after Thanksgiving I was so tired because I had stayed in the kitchen all day. . . . But I felt bad, see I feel bad because I can't let Mamma do that. So I'm, I always feel really bad. . . . And I got really upset. So, instead of just thrashing out this time, I just wrote a little letter to Lisa and Peg telling them my concern and that I hoped that from now on that the kitchen duty would be nobody sits down until everything's done. And we did do better at Christmas. (Rhonda)

Some siblings preferred more direct communication, either in person or by telephone. Neil talked about his preference for face to face communication, especially to discuss important issues:

For me personally, it's generally face to face. If I have something to say to you that I think it's significantly important, I don't want the phone. I want to see you in person. I think there's a very formal, there's a very dramatic sense to somebody looking you right in the eye and saying 'hey this is what I believe's happening, this is how I feel about it.' (Neil)

When I asked how he would go about dealing with his family if he felt concerned about someone or about a specific situation, Jeff replied:

I probably would call them up and ask them what was going on. You know, and tell them that I had thought about them a lot and this is the way I felt about the situation. Of course, if I didn't have all the information, I would ask them for it on it and then I would give them my opinion. (Jeff)

When I asked the same question of Dan about his family, he responded:

I wouldn't go through anybody, well you don't, you don't, none of us I think would go through anybody, we just go right to who it was. That's just a waste of time. Something else like that. I don't think any, no I've never, like, 'I heard so and so,' you don't, in fact, and I hope that none of my youngsters do that either. (Dan)

Two siblings, from different families, expressed how their communication styles have been affected by the fact that they are adult children of alcoholics:

So we all sort of, and Karen, truly, we had a strict code of secrecy, and didn't even realize it. I can't even explain this to you. But, I would have, until I was in my thirties and when I moved back here, I had never ever verbalized it to another human being, never! (Barb)

I basically talk to the other sibling about the other one, and very little. My younger brother and I will talk directly more about one another to one another, but Bob and I don't a lot. Bob and I don't talk about a lot of deep stuff in terms of family, and I think that's probably real indicative of the way we are about things. My Father is an alcoholic, and so we grew up with that whole alcohol business . . . I have done a lot of facing the issues and counseling. Jeff has done minimal, but he has made some effort so Jeff can talk about some of that stuff, and we can talk about what it was like growing up and what it's like now. Bob's total denial, he won't talk about it, he denies that there was ever a problem. . . So, it also affects the way we interact, like Jeff and I are comfortable talking about it, Bob and I don't and Bob and Jeff don't. (Carol)

When I asked Carol's brother Bob about the things that his parents tried to instill in him, his response included a reference to his Father's drinking:

My Mother wanted to make sure that we got her religious beliefs, I imagine. I imagine she would. It seems that way now. Um, my Father drank a lot when I was little, when we were younger. (Bob)

Later in the interview when I asked Bob about whether he thought his Dad's drinking "affected each of you the same way or did you have an awareness of that when you were growing up?" his response was:

I just decided that, you know, if I had a family I wouldn't do that [referring to his father's drinking]. I think it bothers my sister. Sometimes she still, she gave me that line like 'children of an alcoholic have problems with relationships.' And I said, 'give me a break, take responsibility for yourself.' I'm not that close to my brother. I can't tell you really how it affected him. (Bob)

When I asked Carol if she has conversations with her parents about issues of significant importance to their lives, she described her communication patterns with both of her parents:

My Mom and I do. My Mom and I frequently will. My Dad and I never do. And even like I wanted to when I was going through counseling, intense counseling, I really wanted to tell my Dad all these things that I was feeling and I wanted to tell him that I'd forgiven him for some of the stuff he put us through growing up. And so that was in my counseling session every week was working on, now when you go home, this is what you're gonna say and I came home and I chickened out, I couldn't say a thing to him. So I came back and I was really disappointed and my counselor said, why don't you just write him a letter? So I sat down and wrote out this, like an eight page letter, and sent it in his Valentine card. And Mom said he got it, and he just sat and cried and cried while he read it. And that was like, it's really weird Karen, because it's like it changed our relationship, and we started getting closer. That

was when I was in Colorado and I started feeling like, okay, I can go home now. But he's never, ever acknowledged it to me. Never acknowledged it, even though he talks to my Mom and my Mom communicates it to me, but I feel like at least, for now that's okay. (Carol)

Avoiding conflict, maintaining harmony. For some, the style of communication was influenced by their desire to avoid conflict and their need to maintain a sense of congeniality among family members:

My biggest role probably, if you look back, would be to say 'let's don't get upset about this.' Mom, Dad, and I'm talking trivial, just junk stuff. Where we are eating at Thanksgiving or those kind of things. And I think that's the part that, you have to really monitor yourself and try to restrain. (Joe)

I'm am not very good with confrontations anyway. I do not like them, as opposed to Paul who lives for them. (Gerry)

I don't confront many people with many issues. I don't like the idea of any type of heated discussions. I think there's, you know, it really depends on what it is. (Jeff)

There's probably those little things like you said, gunny sacking, I think is the term for it. But it doesn't ever seem to boil over, it never comes to a head, and like you say, it's never on the table. I never want, if my Mother does something that really ticks me off, I don't want to say, 'You know you upset me by doing that.' For one reason, my Mom's had headaches, her whole life, and whenever something gets really stressful, she gets into her headaches, and I don't want to cause that. At least that's what I blame for not bringing it up anyway. (Gerry)

Giving and receiving advice. The topic of giving and receiving advice surfaced as individuals spoke about raising children, marriage, and dealing with personal issues. Siblings from 3 different families talked about their guidelines for advice giving:

Well we kind of share what's happening with the kids and that kind of thing. I never presume to tell anybody how to raise their children. And, I guess Rhonda's more the one to offer advice. She likes to offer advice on everything. (Lisa)

There's a couple small principles that I abide by. Even though I've been married just short of 10 years, and I've had children for 8 of those, there are two steadfast rules personally in my life. I do not give anyone advice on marriage and I do not give anyone advice on children. I don't feel I'm qualified to, even though I'm involved in it, I'm learning on the job. (Neil)

Of course I give them my opinion and I let it go at that. I don't, that's a tough one because I don't discuss a whole lot of things with them. I discuss a few things with my Mom over the phone but I can't get my Father to talk on the phone. He says that he spent his whole life talking on the phone and he just won't hardly talk on the phone. But I pretty much just give her my opinion. And if I have a problem, I do the same. I ask for their opinion. Doesn't mean I always take it, but I always weigh that factor in. (Jeff)

As participants told stories about particular events and the way things were handled, varying communication patterns emerged. This will be seen most clearly later in this chapter as it pertains to siblings planning for their parent's future with regard to caregiving and power of attorney/executor issues. The differences in communication styles were more evident when siblings talked about an issue that was significant or contested.

Sibling Characteristics

I asked participants to characterize the ways in which they felt siblings were the same as and different from each other. Within these descriptions and throughout the interview, they also talked about attributes of sibling relationships in general, roles they perceived were held by specific siblings, and instances of a particular closeness between two siblings at given points in time.

Participants who used the approach of talking about each sibling individually to answer questions usually did so in birth order, from oldest to youngest. The integration of gender and birth order issues permeated the descriptions about sibling relationships. There were underlying stories about privilege that appeared in direct and subtle ways throughout the interview.

We're the same, but different. Accounts of how siblings are the same, different, or both involved many types of stories. Some participants referred to general personality traits, others spoke about common interests, and others highlighted more specific characteristics. Three members of the family with only sisters talked about attributes that have been present over time, while a fourth, Peg, began by focusing on the fact that their differences have recently become more visible. They each talk about the fact that "they are all different" while at the same time all 4 find a way to say Rhonda and Peg are also the same:

I think our differences have really been more openly on the table in just probably the last 2 or 3 years. We've always known we were different, but because of, maybe more struggles and stress that we're dealing with now in this at our ages, the differences are even more apparent. . . . Well, Lisa is the analytical, a good decision maker, pretty much on the straight and narrow. . . . Rhonda is far more hyper. . . . Rhonda and I are probably, well I know we're the more social. (Peg)

I don't know how we're similar. Well I'm not near as hyper as either one of them. (laughs) You know, they're both more - get out there, get it, and go, get things done. I don't worry near as much as Rhonda. Rhonda's a worry wart, she worries about everything. (Lisa)

Now Lisa's laid back. She's quiet. She's had a rough life, a real rough life. She's had two marriages that failed. And of course she's divorced now. And I don't know why. I think the reason is she'd let people, she's not as outspoken, she doesn't let her feelings out. . . .Peg is, she's got a personality of her own. She's a little bit like me, she likes to talk, she's into sales. She takes control too. . . . And she's likes to help and take care of everybody else. You know, it's like, but she's always late. (Rhonda)

I mean, they were different. Rhonda'd like to talk on the phone a lot. Peg loved to talk on the phone a lot, Lisa could care less. Lisa was my reader. She loves to read and still loves to read. And they all did average in school. . . . She [Lisa] went out for some things, but not like Peg and Rhonda. They had to be in there, you know. . . . They were very, very active where Lisa was more to herself. (laughs) (Deb - mother)

Rhonda and Peg also brought up the issue that while growing up Peg was the one who seemingly created the most difficulty for their parents. Each of them talked about their perspective of the “shared knowledge” and at the same time pointed out there was a “missing piece” to the story:

I am more daring. I've always been the one who would go out there and I, I probably gave my parents a more of a fit than they ever did because I was, you know, I did my party scene. I've been there, I've done that. Probably not as much as Rhonda might think I have (laughter) . . . Yes, and among siblings I mean, you'll see after the interviews how different we really are. (Peg)

Of all of us, she gave mom and dad the most trouble, and I can tell you that. Lisa and I never really gave mom and dad a whole lot of trouble I don't think. Peg tried a few things I understand when she was a teenager. Her life, she's changed a lot. I think she did things when she was younger that she probably would never do now or never even think about it, and I don't know all of those things but I know some of them. (Rhonda)

As the members of one of the families with brothers and a sister described each other, they spoke on a variety of levels. As she described how she experienced her brothers through her father's illness and death, Barb stated:

Joe is probably the softest of us all. He would be the one I'd want to protect from anything, thinking he can't, although he thinks he's the strongest. He does, but he really is a softy. He probably thinks of himself as the maternal person, the Father person now. . . . Neil is the one who's very business minded and wants to keep all the affairs in order - the will, and the statement - he wants to do all the business thing. Keith is by nature, and I say this very lovingly, this is no criticism at all. He's a self-centered person. He's absorbed with himself, but I think that comes from the acting profession and he had to be. . . . So he's removed from the family. He came, he did, he does what he needs to do. (Barb)

Neil and Joe also spoke about Keith's distance from the family, both in terms of personality and geographic distance:

Keith's strength is that he is very comfortable being aloof. He's the eldest, and he never minded to be out there. He wasn't and didn't require the closeness. And we pretty much always accepted it. (Neil)

Keith has just been gone. I mean, he lives away. . . . Just being in town, probably for all the **wrong** reasons, but ended up being the right thing for me. I wouldn't change, but Keith chose to be gone which was beyond my realm of what I would do. (Joe)

Differences were talked about by Neil in terms of personality characteristics and academic focus, while Joe talked about how he saw age as a factor that separated them:

My siblings specifically were diverse. My older brother [Keith] though more focused on arts, had an athletic side to him. . . . My other brother Steven was very athletically oriented but also did satisfactory, sufficient enough to go on to college and graduate in Business. My sister, talented in many areas and many ways, was a balance. And I was somewhat like that. (Neil)

We all were the same, but different. Age difference was probably the thing. Keith was with a different group, I was in a different group, Barb was in a different group, Neil was, because we were that, in high school, being apart. (Joe)

Joe and Neil both talked about following their siblings as they went through school. They spoke of the association that was made by teachers regarding other family members. Throughout the interview Joe brought up many times that he sees himself as distinctly different from his siblings as far as academic ability is concerned:

And I still go back and say, they were very intelligent people, all 3 of them. Well written, well schooled, very knowledgeable, well thought of. I got along great with people so it wasn't, Neil and Barb didn't have it any rougher after me, since Keith was there. But the teachers - I think it was a benefit to have Keith in front of me, without question. 'You're Keith's brother?' I mean they treated me good. They liked him. (Joe)

It was really comical as you're going through school, they would sometimes say, 'well are you Keith's brother or Joe's brother?' Because Joe, being perceived the athlete and Keith the academician, I would have to say 'I'm both their brothers.' And they were wondering - well wonder what this one's like. (Neil)

Barb and Joe described the similarity of being overachievers. Barb talked specifically about the impact being seen as outgoing and self-assured had on her throughout life:

You will find in talking to all of us, we are all overachievers. Lots of different reasons for that, but we're all overachievers. Competitive people. I'm not sure so much about the other ones. I do know that I've had trouble in my life because people see me as very secure and very outgoing and very self-assured. And for a very long time, I was none of those things. So I got in a lot of trouble because people responded to me thinking that's who I was. (Barb)

Over achievers. There was never any way I was supposed to finish college. . . . Not, I don't mean that by being President of the United States or anything, just general norm, we're

basically over achievers in whatever was going on. . . . I don't mean in any grandiose sense, just for the smallest thing, whatever it is. I think that's the biggest thing that's there. (Joe)

Maggie, the mother of the family with all brothers, described the characteristics that stood out for each of her children:

Paul is quite a charmer. He's quite smart. He really enjoys the business world. . . . Dan, you just have to think of his dry wit, to start with. And he's very intense. He had an ulcer in second grade. (laughs) . . . But, when he works, he works hard, and when he plays, he plays hard. . . . Gerry is very, he takes structure in the family quite seriously. . . . He's very aware of what the children are doing, and very careful to put down guidelines. He's [Jack] a smart kid. He's a smart kid. He really has a lot of wit, also. . . . Everybody loves Jack. . . . I'd say he and Dan probably have the most just quick unexpected wit about them. Paul is a more factual type person. Gerry is really good to go along. He doesn't come up with a lot of quick answers, but he's steady. (Maggie)

Every member of the family talked about the common family interests that include car racing and an interest in music:

We all have an interest in car racing. We had a race car. It was not official on track or anything. My dad, he raced cars at one time. . . . Gerry and Jack and I, we can sing a pretty good bit. And Paul can sing every now and then. He's deaf in one ear. (Dan)

Gerry talked about the fact that he saw similarities between Jack and himself, and would put "Paul off by himself and Dan off by himself." He then spoke of individual attributes that stood out as unique in particular siblings:

Paul has very definite thoughts and ideas about things, such as religion, as politics, and always his own individual things, which he backs up with things he's read. He reads quite a bit. He's smart. He's very intelligent. He's not intimidated by anybody or anything. . . . I would say that would separate him from all of us. . . . Dan is one of the most loyal people I know. . . . He's very concerned with what people think, what people think of **him**. He's very, very intent on doing what he's supposed to do, and he does it. . . . But he is still one of the most, he's very outgoing. . . . Real friendly. When people describe him, they say 'he's a nice guy,' because he is a nice guy. . . . So actually I guess we're all quite a bit different I think. (Gerry)

Just as Gerry mentioned the fact that Paul is not intimidated by anybody or anything, Paul mentioned having a power struggle with his Dad. When I asked him if he had seen that occur with any of his other brothers, he responded:

No, I'm the only one that will just stand right in his face and just be belligerent about it. . . . I have been out there most of my life, just right out there on the edge. And Dad lived that way up until he quit drinking. And a large part of the problem between he and I was we'd both get to drinking at the same time and the gloves would come off and all hell would break loose. We had just a real terrible power struggle going on. . . . I'll still do it every now and then. I don't like myself when I do it. . . . I've always seen myself as - not always, but for a long - time I've seen myself as his equal. (Paul)

Paul described commonalities among his brothers that centered around having grown up in the same town and going through the same schools. His characterizations of how he and his brothers are unique included:

Dan's very, very focused. . . . Gerry is very organized. Well I wouldn't say organized, methodical about things. He's very methodical, to a fault almost. He's the most conservative of all of us. My dad and I have talked about this. We'll both roll the dice in a heartbeat, double or nothing. Dan will sign on but he won't look. Gerry would never roll on you, he'd just think it to death. Jack would make side bets (laughter). . . . Jack is the most, probably, we all have our quirks, but I think that probably Jack is the most well balanced of all of us. I really do. . . . I have traits of all of them and they have traits of me. . . . I'm not going to try to describe myself. I'll leave that to them. (Paul)

As I asked Jack to describe some of the ways that he perceived his brothers as the same and some of the ways they are different, he first spoke of having common interests, a sense of pride, and striving for a goal:

We all have things that set you apart from the others. As far as common interests, I think we were all brought up obviously with a push towards, I hate to say a push towards excellence or something like that. There was a certain amount of pride always, growing up. And in doing so, I feel like, we all feel like there's a goal there. (Jack)

Following that, I asked him to talk about his perception of who his brothers are and the kind of relationship he has with each of them individually. His reply was:

Oh it's all so similar. It really is. This is a situation where I guess it would be easier to point out the differences but I don't know exactly what they would be. . . . I can't point out any differences really. They all have different, their personalities are different. The conversations I'm sure are different. I can't what you'd call pigeon hole that. I really can't. . . . Don't really care to. (Jack)

In the other family with brothers and a sister, Carol began by describing the differences in terms of whether or not she would view them as a friend if they were not siblings:

Bob, if he weren't my brother, he probably wouldn't be someone I would choose to hang out with, but because he is, there's that sense of obligation I guess. I've kinda gotten past some of the characteristics that I don't like in other people, and it's like, that's okay, that's him. . . . Bob would do anything for me and he's real giving. . . . I wish that we were more in line but. . . . Jeff and I are very different, too, but even if Jeff and I weren't brothers, he would be somebody I would, he would be a good friend. Even though we are different, we have a lot of similarities, too. Jeff hasn't had the experiences that I've had, but he has that same sense of adventure and daring and risk that I don't think Bob necessarily has. . . . He's got a great sense of humor, too. . . . The three of us get together. My dad's got a really good sense of humor and we just have a blast. (Carol)

The other 3 family members included an illustration of how certain siblings possessed certain traits and characteristics that were similar to those of their parents, and an uncle in one case:

I don't know that they all have the same. Carol and Jeff are both sort of high strung, nervous type people. Bob's more, they're like their daddy, but Bob's more like me. He's sort of calm and easy going. He doesn't get upset very much. (Elaine - mother)

Bob and Carol they're alike but yet they're different as well. It seems like Carol has steered her whole life toward her goals, and I think maybe now she might be regretting it a little bit. . . . I guess Bob was too until he met Pam, his wife. And now it seems more that he's working towards his family, well I guess it would be his career too. . . . I think that Carol and I have a lot of the same personality. I don't think Bob is as out going as Carol and I, but of course I think that Carol and I get that from our father. . . . And Bob takes more like, takes more after my mother when she's more of an introvert than what Carol and I are. Matter of fact, Carol and I could almost pass for twins. (Jeff)

I see similarities between Carol and myself and Jeff and myself. Carol pursued her education a little more where my brother has no interest in that. And, maybe that's gotten us a little closer. . . . She's a worrier just like my father. She'll worry at the drop of a hat. . . . I think I'm probably more like my mother. She doesn't really share her emotions a lot. . . . I think he's more like my uncle, little more independent, doesn't come around the family as much. (Bob)

Carol and Bob both spoke about the ways their differences regarding political and social views have an impact on their relationship:

When I say we're different, Bob's **very** conservative and I'm probably, well, I know he considers me a liberal and we can't talk about politics. We just, we end up getting into bitter arguments over it and he's a racist and I hate that. I mean all of the things that I **hate** about people, he has, and like I said, if he weren't my brother, man, I'd be like, he's a jerk. So we just sometimes we choose just not to discuss that stuff and if we do get in discussions, like I said, it usually ends up in an argument and I hate that aspect of our relationship. . . . Jeff is not as conservative as Bob. He's still a little racist and that bothers me about him but he's not so in your face. I think he respects me more, that he doesn't make issues out of things that he knows will upset me. (Carol)

I can't really say we're on common ground politically, philosophically, or anything. I'm probably closer to my brother on that, on that part. . . . My sister's a little more liberal, a lot more liberal, a lot more socially oriented than I am. Whereas, my brother's a little more conservative, I would imagine, or just from what I gather and from what I've seen. (Bob)

Bonding experiences. In addition to descriptions of how siblings are seen as having commonalities and unique traits and personalities, relationships among siblings were also talked about in terms of shared experiences and notable distinctions. Two brothers talked about the implicit continuity that exists when they all get together:

As far as what we do, we've always been so close that I think when we get together it's not something that's out of, it's not something that doesn't feel normal. And so it's immediate

interaction. It's immediate laughter. It's immediate fellowship of sorts. . . . It's always, it's a very relaxing time, something I always look forward to. (Jack)

My brothers and I could go for days without seeing each other and I mean it's just like there's no catching up to do. It's just pick right up where you left off. It's just a continual relationship, I don't know how else to describe it. It doesn't take very much for us to explain something to each other. We use sort of a short hand that is made up of idioms and phrases and things like that that were from years past that nobody else would ever connect. (Paul)

In another family, Barb described the existence of a bond that can be “felt” by others in the room:

There is an exceptionally closeness to the 4 of us. . . . But truly, when we are in the same, and to this day I think it's true, when we are in the same room together, there is something that people can feel in the air. There's just something. There's that kind of bond that you wouldn't sense otherwise. (Barb)

Barb's brother Neil spoke of the messages taught to them by their mother that they were all special and unique, while at the same time they were expected to share an accountability to each other:

Collectively, and I can address that pretty easily, I always felt we were very unique. And that was pretty much presented to us early on as my mother's viewpoint of the world is that you're all very special. You're all very special in your own way. However, you owe an allegiance to each other, an obligation, and an allegiance to support each other, to comfort each other, and to be there. (Neil)

In addition to the feeling of allegiance that is “just there” in the previous examples, gender is sometimes seen as creating a perception of difference and belonging in sibling relationships. Jeff and Carol both mentioned the role that gender played. They spoke of this not only in relation to their immediate family, but in the context of their experience with their cousins while they were growing up:

Our relationships, when I was growing up I was close to Bob and as I got older I got closer to Carol. Of course as siblings are you know boys are boys and don't want anything to do with girls. But it made it hard on Carol because she's from a family of seven boy cousins and one girl. And that made it tough on Carol growing up. But Carol, growing up was basically one of the boys, hung out with us. (Jeff)

I guess I'd probably describe myself as I'm very different, **very** different than my brothers, to the rest of my family. I've often wondered how I got to be the way I am. And just in terms of values and interests and experiences - just **so** different. My relationship with my brothers is very good and it's always been pretty good. Of course we went through the stage where, especially me being the only girl, and I'm also the only girl out of all my cousins on that side, there was a difficult time when we fought a lot, but as a rule, we are very close. (Carol)

Another way the perception of gender roles is seen in this family stems from the emotional connection Jeff expresses in his relationships with his mother and sister:

Jeff always, one thing he always does, he always tells you he loves you - all the time when he comes in, when he leaves, when you talk to him on the telephone. When he was at home and I'd cook a dinner, he'd always tell me 'Mamma that was a good dinner.' None of the other children ever said anything like that. I mean they just took it for granted. (Elaine)

Every time we talk on the phone, every time he hangs up, he's always like 'I love you, Carol' and I'm like, gosh, that's so sweet. I don't hear that as much from Bob, but again, we see each other all the time. (Carol)

Members of one family described how their own personality characteristics and the roles they take in the family have an impact on how they view their relationships with each other and ways they have dealt with situations within their own families:

Usually the decision maker is Rhonda. Because usually if she doesn't make the decision it doesn't suit. (laughter) . . . I'm definitely a go with the flow kind of person. . . . I'm a keeper inner too. I mean, I let things bother me a long time before I just let it all out and share it. They all had no idea with my second divorce that I was as miserable and had been as miserable for as long as I had been. (Lisa)

Rhonda is a real social bud, and I would say, just because I've had to do a lot of reading lately, ultra codependent. If, you know, everything has to be right around her, and I think that's probably why in the last two years, we're all coming more to terms with the fact that if one of these kids is not looking and acting right, we can't let it just want to make us crawl up in a bed and never come out. (Peg)

Strategic closeness--sibling dyads. A number of participants talked about a certain affinity experienced between two siblings. This was either described as an ongoing bond or a closeness due to a particular experience. Neil and Barb both immediately paired off the 4 siblings in the same way. Neil went on to talk about his comfort with each sibling, while Barb gave a description of her relationship with Neil that she felt had its own uniqueness:

Individually I would look at it this way. Joe is my best friend. Probably my best friend in the world. And, when I've needed somebody to be there for me without question, it's been Steven. . . . I think Keith and Barb identify heavily with each other. I think Joe and I more closely, Barb and Keith more closely. I feel comfortable communicating with all of them. I just haven't been on as many journeys as I have with Joe. (Neil)

And Neil, being the youngest, now I think Neil and Joe are closest and Keith and I are closest. But Neil and I have a closeness that transcends talking, or doing for each other. And I'm not sure it's reciprocal. I can't tell you that it is. And it's not really that important, I mean, it'd be nice if he felt the same way about me that I feel about him. But I have a bond with Neil that I don't have with another human being. (Barb)

As Barb talked about her relationship with Keith, she made the point that their closeness is enhanced by the fact that they do not share day to day experiences with each other:

We [Keith and I] are probably the closest. And I do believe that one of the reasons we're so close is 'cause we've never lived in the same city together. . . . There's a closeness that you can afford when you're not talking about the nitty gritty icky stuff from day to day. . . . We probably look the most alike. We probably are the two most liberal in the family. And I think there's a closeness, too, that comes from the fact that he is much older. (Barb)

Lisa and Rhonda talked about being closer because Rhonda took care of Lisa's son when he was young and they lived next door to each other. They both also spoke about spending more time together because Lisa is divorced:

I guess Rhonda and I've been closer until just recently and I think she's going through something. I don't know, but she's seemed to pull away a little bit recently. Before that we talked every day. But I guess it's really, we're both so busy right now so we don't talk every day. She took care of Brian when he was little and I had to work. I ate a lot of meals there rather than eat by myself because we used to live right next door to each other. (Lisa)

I'm closer I guess to Lisa because she lived beside of me for a long time, and I helped with Brian. And then, she kind of, I don't know, she depends on us. We do more for her, and we're always together and she's always calling my husband Mark. He's done more repairs and more stuff for her than you could shake a stick to. . . . And she's kinda, the third leg, but it doesn't bother us, we just do it. So we just spend more time together. (Rhonda)

Elaine talked about the geographical distance between her children being a reason that Jeff is not as close as Carol and Bob are. However, when Jeff and Bob described their feelings of closeness to Carol, they both included the fact that the distance is really not a factor for them:

Well I guess Carol and Bob of course have a closer relationship and they do quite a few things together. But that's probably because Jeff is not here. (Elaine)

I'm closer to Carol now, both geographically and probably relationship wise. I get along well with my brother. It's just living away, we're just not as close, and even the distance wasn't there, I'd still be probably closer to my sister I would have to think about how, I think we're closer now. We talk more. She's involved with the kids some. They're nuts about her. (Bob)

Carol and I developed a pretty close relationship being that we lived together and well we worked together too. . . . We became pretty close and we talked about a lot of things that Bob and I, that I could never talk to him about. He's not the easiest person in the world to talk with. He's not someone that if I had a personal problem I'd talk to him about. I'd probably go to Carol before him. I'm sure I probably could but I just wouldn't feel as comfortable because I never did. Being closer to Carol and spending time with her in her teen years or older, her and I just developed a little closer relationship. (Jeff)

Members of the family with only brothers did not talk about any particular closeness between pairs of siblings. Due to the 7 year age difference between Jack and the rest of the brothers, Dan talked about the fact that Jack was not really “in the mix” while they were growing up:

We were babysitters for Jack. . . . Well since Jack wasn't in the mix really growing up, it was more Paul, Gerry and I as far as in those early developing years. (Dan)

At the end of the interview when I asked if he had anything else he wanted to talk about, Dan spoke of the closeness he has felt recently to his parents:

On a personal note, I'm a lot more closer to my parents now than I've ever been. I see me getting older and see my parents getting older. And I really, you know the love is so intense and so deep and you've just gone through most of your lifetime not communicating it . That's a shame. It really is. But I feel so close to them now, it's a desperate closeness. (Dan)

What Privilege Means

Capturing the meaning of how privilege in families is perceived was challenging. Just as there are multiple interpretations of what “family” means (Gubrium & Holstein, 1990) and a variety of ways relationships between siblings are explored, the descriptions of privilege varied. Examples of privilege emerged throughout each interview.

Toward the end of the interview, I expressed my interest in the concept of privilege in families. I asked participants to talk about ways they feel that any particular sibling has had more or less privilege, or times that siblings have come in or out of the family fold.

Participants generally talked about privilege in terms of fairness and gave examples that involved comparisons between “those who got” and “those who did not.” When participants explained what privilege meant to them in their family, they used words such as jealous, competition, shunned, alienated, resentment, even, favoritism, guilty, and fair.

Elaine initially responded that she did not feel one of her children had more privilege. As she talked about the issue, she explained that maybe she did do more for Carol:

I don't think they did. I don't think one did have more privileges than others. They probably did. Carol used to say the boys got to do more things than she did and the boys said Carol got to do more things than they did. But I don't think they actually did. . . . I think they still think Carol's probably the pet of the family. But I don't. I don't think I ever had one. (Elaine)

Well, I think that, it may be true that I may do a little more for Carol than I do for the boys. But she's been here so much more than the boys, in the last few years. . . . And, I don't

know, maybe they think that we do a little bit more for Carol, and maybe we do. 'Cause she's single and, I don't know. I don't know whether they think that or not. (Elaine)

The hidden message in Elaine's comment about helping Carol out because she is single was talked about in many other ways by both Elaine and Carol. Listening to Carol talk, the implicit privilege in her family comes from following a normative course of growing up, having a family, and "being settled." This issue is also addressed later in the chapter in terms of what success means to Elaine, and Carol's perception of what being successful means to her parents.

Carol talked about how each of the siblings in her family has privilege. For her, she felt her education gave her privilege, and privilege for her brothers comes from the fact that one is a "family man" and the other is envied because he "enjoys life." Although the ways each of them have privilege are different, it is still seen as a comparison and privilege is awarded in each category to whomever comes out on "top" in their category:

Well, mine would definitely be, and I think that both my brothers and my parents would see this, has been of education, and the relative ease with which I got it. My parents paying my way and supporting that. I didn't have to work to do it. . . . But **definitely** education for me would be one. . . . For my older brother, again it would probably be the family, being married with children and doubling his family by having in-laws. He's real close with them and all his brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law, so I think that's an aspect that we would look at him and think that's a privilege for him. . . . Jeff would be, he has the most fun of any of us. He has, even though he's in a relationship, a monogamous relationship, a committed relationship and one that will probably last, he's not in any way tied down. He's not tied down with children. He is in terms of like fiscal responsibility. But they have a fun life. . . . So that would be, I think a privilege of Jeff's, is that he's fun. He enjoys life. More than probably my brother and I take advantage of. (Carol)

The first thing Carol's brother Bob talked about when he described privilege in his family was the fact that his parents paid for Carol's education. He then spoke about ways that financial assistance had been given to each of them by their parents. In both cases, privilege to him meant a comparison of making things "fair" or "even" among all the siblings:

When my sister went to school, my mother took a job there just to pay for Carol. They never made that offer to me. And I kind of asked my mother one time, I said, 'Well you know you sent Carol to college.' And she goes, 'Well she's a girl. And we figure that if she stayed here and went to school she'd have to buy a car.' And I just go, 'well, I had to buy a car.' . . . They gave me a loan when I bought the house. They ended up just giving me half the money. And I tried to pay them back and they said they wanted to do it. And I know they did the same for Jeff. I don't know how much, but I'm assuming it was comparable. And I think they've loaned Carol some money. So they've been pretty even handed as far as that goes. As far as being outs, no, nobody's ever been on the outs as far as I've never felt alienated, never felt shunned. And they've never felt that way about my brother or sister. (Bob)

Bob's response also included an example of Jeff being distant from the family due to individual choice. In both quotes Bob "speaks for" his parents as he tries to stress that his parents were "even handed," and although Jeff may have thought he was "the black sheep," he was "loved dearly" by them:

Now maybe my brother may have felt a little alienated at times. But I would say he did it to himself. I mean he put the distance between them. But if there was ever any alienation it's been repaired long ago. It was kind of the way he left. Just picked up. I mean we knew where he was at. But it was like he picked up on the spur of the moment and was just like out of here. And, you know, I don't even know if he felt that way. But maybe a couple things he said, maybe like he thought he was the black sheep. But I can tell you my mother loved him dearly and so's my father. (Bob)

Jack's initial response to the question about privilege involved a description of the lack of competition between family members. The concepts of comparison, competition, and fairness have been evident throughout the participant's responses to the question of privilege:

I mean, I've never felt as though there was any type of competition between myself or my brothers. As far as life in general was concerned or success or failure, I think everyone's been geared work as hard toward success as possible. (Jack)

He went on to talk about the general way that there have been struggles and the underlying strength that exists and enables him to move on. His last statement indicates that he is referring to his parents as he measures the issue of privilege:

I've been fortunate enough not to see any of my brothers or myself fall by the wayside to a drastic low. . . . Because I can certainly think back everything's not been great. Everything's not been perfect. But we didn't expect it to be and nobody told us it was going to be. . . . There's an underlying strength there that always, that allows me to look at things and feel very fortunate. But as far as looking at the others and thinking, well there's no jealousy there. There's no jealousy as far as, it's not something I've ever really thought of as far as their relationship with mom and dad. It doesn't matter to me. (Jack)

Joe's initial response to the question about privilege also included the ways he feels each of the children were treated by their parents and the issue of comparison between siblings surfaces again:

I don't think it ever set him apart from me or their love for me or their view of me. . . . It was a real sense of pride that, with my Dad, that my brother was an actor. But it was like any father, you know. . . . So it never, I've never had what I consider to be a, considered them to have privilege over me, or vice-versa. So it's not anything that I would, I'd ever, even cross my mind that because Barb had an orthodontist and for a husband that they were going to do, I just never, never was anything that, I don't think carried any weight with my Mom and Dad. (Joe)

An example given by Peg pertained to the distribution of financial assistance to all 3 of the siblings by their parents. Another common theme as siblings talked about privilege was that the issue of being “aware” seemed to offset the issue of something being fair or unfair. As she shared this example, Peg stated “it may have been a subconscious thought” and it “didn’t even hit me as a concern.” Her quick response to the question about privilege with this example seems to send another message also:

Maybe an example of that came up about a year or so ago when mom and daddy went back and revamped you know their financial, and some of the things that they've got in the picture. They perceive that they had fallen short, particularly with me, on some of the financial support and things over the last few years. Now it had never really, it hadn't even, it might have been some subconscious thought in my mind, but nothing that ever said to me well, it didn't even really hit me as a concern. . . . A year or so ago, my mama said it's really bothering dad. He is so concerned that he feels like we've cut you short. So they did a few things and, Rhonda and Lisa were very much aware. . . . And nothing, just three or four thousand dollars. And I guess in dad's mind that helped to offset some of the things that they felt like they just along the way been doing. . . . It's more, it was more from their perspective and not from a sibling. (Peg)

Lisa also spoke about the help she and Rhonda have received from their parents and the fact that she would not feel resentment about how they go about helping any of their daughters. Once again, the issues of comparison and being fair emerge:

As we've been older, I guess probably they've helped Rhonda and me more than they have Peg. Me through my two divorces and the financial stress of all of that. Rhonda and Dan had gotten into some financial stress and they helped them, whereas Peg hasn't had that need. . . . I would never feel any resentment towards any of that. I mean, it's their money and whatever they want to, however they want to do it. I'm glad they do spend a lot of it on themselves. (Lisa)

Paul’s response was that there had been times when favoritism was displayed, but they “pretty much equalized out.” Once more the statement of “not being conscious” of it came up. He also spoke about putting *himself* “outside the family circle,” but said it has “just never been” for others in his family:

Favoritism? . . . There have been instances. But you know, over the years, it's just something, it's pretty much equalized out. I'm not real conscious of it. But I've, it's not a part of my thinking process. . . . Other than the times that I removed myself from it, there really haven't been any where anybody's been outside the circle, so to speak. I mean it's just never been other than the times I've done it on my own. (Paul)

In Barb's reply to the question about privilege, she talked about the motivation for everyone to work toward keeping their family intact is the sense of extended family she and her two brothers with children want to create:

I think one of the greatest motivators, I know it's true for two of my brothers. The fact that we have children. We will go the extra mile and the extra effort to do family oriented activities and events and things because we want our children to grow up with a strong sense of **extended** family. . . . I think we put up with a lot from each other. (Barb)

As Barb thought about other examples of privilege, she spoke of the dynamics when her father was ill. She talked about the clarity of an existing "hierarchy" and a definite "pecking order:"

I will tell you that the dynamics became testy when my Father was ill. Because all of a sudden, you try to figure out who's got the hierarchy in the family to make the decisions, to be by the bedside in the critical moments. Now I can tell you this. I was not close to my father. I don't think any of us really were, close to my father. But I can tell you this. I can already tell you that when my dad was critical, I stepped aside to an extent, to allow room for my brothers, that I will not do when my mother becomes critically ill. Come hell or high water, no matter who I offend or whatever, there are things I will not defer to when it comes to my mother, and there are things that will, so see, yeah, there was a pecking order there buddy. (Barb)

It's the "Order" of Birth

Two members of the same family responded to the specific question I asked regarding privilege in families with examples in terms of privilege afforded due to birth order:

Well, Paul being the oldest. He was learning to be the oldest, to grow up, and we were learning to be parents. So I know there were times when there were problems. Because the others didn't understand. And he didn't and we didn't either. But as far as them every saying, you favor the other one more than, it would have to be just, really, the childhood thing with Jack. They said 'Boy, Jack gets away with that, and he, well, we didn't get away with that.' That sort of thing. . . . And I'm sure he did get, as I would say each one got away with more, because you relax more yourself, and you learn more, too. (Maggie - mother)

Growing up there was a big difference. The difference between Paul and I and Gerry and I was, there was a giant valley there between Paul and I, Paul being the first born. I can remember him being able to do things and me being able to accept readily that - well he's the first, or he's older, and I'm not old enough yet. But then it kind of got muddy when, well I'm that age now and I'm doing it, but they're letting Gerry do it too. Or it wasn't far behind anyway. . . . I don't think it means near as much now. In fact, it's just a matter now, I guess you do whatever you can handle. You know, if so and so can handle that, then handle it. Each of us have our different strengths. (Dan)

Several participants viewed birth order as a significant factor when they spoke of sibling relationships. I did not ask questions about the role of birth order in families. In addition to the

impact of birth order demonstrated earlier as participants responded to the question about privilege, birth order was talked about throughout the interviews.

Because I'm the oldest. As participants talked about their experiences, included in their responses were explanations and justifications stemming from being the oldest. A common thread that runs through these statements is having privilege “by default.” Privilege as a result of ordinal position is not something you “earn,” it is something you are just “born” with:

One of us got a bedroom by theirselves. And I can't remember who it was. Probably me. . . . Since I was the oldest I deserved it, right? (Rhonda)

We're the executor of the estate, being the oldest, me and Dan [husband]. I assume that they, [Peg and Lisa] know. We haven't even discussed it that much with Mom and Dad. (Rhonda)

'Cause I'm the oldest (laughter) probably. I don't know, Lisa, being by herself, if something happened to dad, mom might want to go live with Lisa. (Rhonda)

Rhonda's the oldest. And she was a little bit spoiled I reckon. . . . And, well, there's about two and half between each one of them. It was just enough, I reckon, they had enough babyhood that was enough for each one of them. (Deb)

And then of course I'm the oldest too. And I was flattered but at the same time I was pretty overwhelmed that, at what that reality could wind up being. (Paul)

She's [mother] closest to Keith in a different way cause he's the oldest. I see it in my own family. I'm close to my daughter because she's the first born and all that. (Barb)

They designate my older brother by default, just I think the age, . . . he's also the oldest and a male, and I think that has something to do with it. I also think that, because he's a family man. But I think that's some of their reasons and there's probably some validity to it is that, in some aspects, he probably is the most responsible. We laughed, my mom and I were laughing about, financially, he's definitely the most responsible. I'm totally irresponsible when it comes to money management and my parents know that and I think that a lot of times they think that I live a frivolous life, and I don't think they see me as a real responsible person. (Carol)

Although it seems there is “nothing you can do” about birth order, there are times when one can lose the “status” attached to birth order. This was demonstrated in one family when the role of being the eldest was seen in terms of responsibility taken or action performed. Neil talked about the fact that Keith is chronologically the oldest, but he views Joe as being the oldest as it applies to the role he perceives Joe occupies:

What I didn't perhaps see in that scenario was the oldest brother being the oldest brother. I mean he was sometimes perceived younger than I, because he was so creative and so aloof and one minute's in New York and another in California and wherever. I mean, from my

perspective, Joe was the quote, unquote older brother - the stable rock that you knew you could find in any emergency, that you knew would be there. (Neil)

So at times, it's not a matter of when one was born, but what one does that determines one's role in the family. Neil's concept of responsibility and "duty" to family was also referenced in a statement by Barb:

The other two brothers are very judgmental about he [Keith] doesn't pull his weight. We're here, we're taking care of mother, and they [Neil and Joe] are wonderful. But Neil is the one who says, 'Why isn't he here? And I don't care if it's inconvenient, he needs to come here. He needs to be part of this family. He needs to take care of his family duties.' (Barb)

Being in the middle. There were fewer references to being the middle child mentioned. Barb and Lisa, from different families, talked about their experiences as the middle child. They used the language of birth order to understand and account for their "uniqueness" in terms of family:

I am a firm believer in birth order. . . . Joe and I being the 2 middle children, we probably are the most testy with each other. I guess I had blinders on for years and years. Maybe there's a competitiveness there. I didn't feel it, but I think maybe, I don't know. I think being the only girl there were some compensations made for me that he really resented. I think it's interesting enough to be the two middle, but to be the only girl in the middle, I think he probably got the short end of the stick a lot of times, and I didn't realize it, but he certainly did. (Barb)

Well when we were growing up I definitely had some of the middle child syndrome. You know, that Rhonda got to do more and go more, that kind of thing. And Peg was the baby and she got petted more and more attention that way. So I had a little bit of that middle child thing. (Lisa)

Rhonda also used birth order as an "explanation" as she attempted to find reasons for the fact that Lisa keeps her feelings to herself and is not as outspoken:

Now Lisa's laid back. She's quiet. She's had a rough life, a real rough life. She's had two marriages that failed. And of course she's divorced now. And I don't know why. I think the reason is she'd let people, she's not as outspoken, she doesn't let her feelings out. She just takes it. . . . You know, keeps her feelings to herself. I more or less let my feelings out. And part of that, I don't know what it is, the middle child. (Rhonda)

The youngest--the baby. As other family members talked about "the baby" they spoke in terms of being "spoiled" or "having it easier" or being "babied":

Jack. Well he is my baby. (laughs). And he doesn't even mind that I introduce him as my baby. In fact sometimes he even reminds me to do it. (Maggie - mother)

The only, only way I could answer that would be, possibly Jack, because he's the baby, and because he was here with me longer by himself. Because I could certainly not say that I love one any more than the other. . . . But I sort of think that he even reads me better than the others. And that would be for the same reason, now wouldn't it? (Maggie - mother)

Jack is, always figured he was spoiled a little bit. (laughter) That's the baby. . . . We're 7 years apart. Where there's just two or less between the rest of us. I don't know why I say he's spoiled. Actually, I think he was a little spoiled. But he is still one of the most, he's very outgoing, real friendly. . . . Even today, I think Jack's my mom's baby. Always will be I suppose. So, yeah, (pause) yeah, he probably had it a little easier. (Gerry)

So, and Peg, now she's the one that's (laughter) you know, she's the baby. Maybe because she was the baby she got babied. (Rhonda)

The views of "being" the youngest were varied. Being the youngest was an important part of Neil's identity. It was the first thing he talked about when he described what his family is like, and it was the first thing he talked about in the "summary statement" he gave:

Yeah. I would like to summarize for just a second. Being the youngest, unknowingly so, I didn't have the appreciation for not having to be responsible until much later in life. I don't know about other people that are young, but until I had my own child, or marriage and then children I never had to be responsible for anybody but me, and that was a very dramatic change in my life from my perspective. (Neil)

Jeff mentioned being "babied" as he was growing up, but that it was due to a speech problem. He also mentioned that Bob was the first one to be "babied" and that Carol was the "favorite" because she was "the girl." Jeff talked later about being the baby as he talked about the impact his leaving home had on his parents:

I think growing up I might have been babied a little bit more than the others because I did have a speech problem. . . . Bob, of course him being the first, he got his babying when he was young but then I think when he got older he kind of was looked over a little bit. And then Carol being the girl, she was kind of the mother's favorite. Mom spent a little bit more time with her than she did the two boys. And then I think me coming on in the later years, I spent more time with Dad than either one of the other two kids did. I don't know what kind of effect that might have had, but that's, that's the way I perceive it. (Jeff)

Well I think it had a pretty good one because I was the youngest and it was the baby leaving the nest, the very last one. (Jeff)

Talk about birth order by the youngest siblings also centered around the age difference between siblings and wanting to "act older" or "tag along" to find their place:

In growing up, it was always 'big brothers' and I think it made me grow up a whole lot faster. I can remember when I was old enough to even think about being older or growing up, I was always trying to make leaps and bounds and I always wanted to act older than I really was. (Jack)

Bob, he's an older brother! Of course I used to try to tag along. He didn't want me to, and now I kind of think he would like to spend more time with me. And of course I'd like to spend more time with him. But us being so far apart makes it tough. Carol, she was a big sister! (Jeff)

While answering the question about privilege, 2 members of the same family talked about privilege in terms of birth order and gender:

I think I'm close to my mother in a way the boys will ever be, simply because I'm the only female. But I do know that Joe and my mother are close in a way that none of the other boys will be. There's just that, especially since my Dad's gone, he's assumed that for my Mother. She's closest to Keith in a different way cause he's the oldest. I see it in my own family. I'm close to my daughter because she's the first born and all that. (Barb)

In a humorous sense, clearly my sister, clearly. It was always relayed to us that she's the only girl in the family and that if there were new clothes, she was gonna get them. . . . But, new clothes were going to go to her and we needed to make sure we waited on her and she got, like, to the bathroom, she got special considerations. . . . And you know in the evening, she'd take dance lessons, and we all had to sit and watch. . . . Also, of the responsibility side, she seemed to come out of things, talking about those Saturday mornings [family cleaning day]. My recollection is there was so much difficulty getting her up that they'd just let her sleep. (Neil)

Gender and Privilege

The role of gender in families was salient in two ways in this study. By responding to a specific question about gender, participants talked about how they experienced gender roles as they were growing up. They also spontaneously raised gender as an issue throughout the interview.

Growing up with gender. In all 4 families, traditional gender roles were prevalent. In the family with only sisters and the family with only brothers, memories of the tasks performed in and around the house generally fell along gender lines, with the exception of cooking which seemed more gender neutral and was more a result of interest than an assigned task. In the brother only family the mother performed tasks that may have been given to daughters. In the sister only family the father did "outside work" such as yard work and cutting the grass:

Both of our parents worked. And so we were responsible for having the supper on the table when they got home. . . . And then we had to take turns doing the dishes and setting the table and all that stuff. . . . Daddy would never let us do yard work, mowing. For some reason he was afraid for us to touch a lawn mower so none of us never really did that. (Lisa)

Well we cut the lawn. I know that. . . . No, we did guy stuff, boy chores I guess. . . . I guess anything, my mother, bless her heart, I guess she, she did it. (Dan)

I mean I've never missed a day seeing my dad behind a lawn mower. He's always says that's why he had four boys. But Mom taught us all the rudiments of cooking. (Paul)

In the 2 families with both female and male siblings, traditional roles performed by women inside the house and men outside the house seemed to prevail as well. Jeff and Carol talked about

the household division of labor in their family. In both families there was talk about “being the only girl” in terms of “having” privilege, yet Carol also stated that her brothers did not even have to make their own beds:

Carol generally helped Mom inside and of course the boys, Dad always took such pride in his yard. . . . We spent most of our time doing chores in the yard or in the garden with Dad when he got home from work. And Carol spent most of the time inside with Mom either, you know sewing or helping with dinner or whatever it might be. (Jeff)

My Father didn't let me touch a lawnmower until I was grown, and I'd loved to mow, I wanted to, I'd beg him to mow and he's like, no, no, your brothers will do this. . . . I had to do the dishes and I hated that, and my brothers never did the dishes. No, I was the one that had to do the dishes and so there was definitely difference in our jobs according to the gender. . . . Oh, I had to make my bed every morning. My Mom made their bed. (Carol)

Neil spoke of the traditional gender roles that existed in his family growing up as he talked about Barb helping with dinner and the “passing of the torch of young manhood” through the males in the family:

Barb, I remember that part of it more than anything else, things like setting the table, you know, basically helping after dinner, that type of thing. I remember Joe and Keith early, in their early years, had to put coal in the furnace. Once they got old enough, sort of the passing of the torch of young manhood in our house was coal fire furnace, you had to go down there and fill the coal bin up, and if you ran out of heat during the middle of the night, once again you would understand that it wasn't acceptable. So, it was perhaps traditional in the sense that, boys did boy things, girl did girl things, pretty clear set. (Neil)

Several participants talked about cooking being done by those who had an interest in it. Neil spoke of this in terms of being “unconventional” in his household:

Jeff liked to cook, and none of the others liked to cook. So he did that. (Elaine - mother)

Well I think what was interesting is my Mom and Dad formed somewhat of an unconventional or untraditional relationship in the sense that my Dad liked to cook. So, and I don't mind cooking and sometimes, in fact enjoy it. I mean, just last week I wanted to make a cake. (Neil)

Being gender conscious. In general, when I asked the question about gender roles, the responses pertained to descriptions of tasks performed growing up. There was also a consciousness about “traditional” and “nontraditional” gender expectations. Lisa shared her recollection of being labeled the “tom boy.” Lisa's sister Peg talked about the influence of growing up with both her grandfather and biological father in her life, and the impact of the divorces in her family:

When we were younger, I was always labeled the tom boy. I never did understand why exactly. You know, but they cut my hair like a boy. . . the others had their hair long and mine got cut like a boy. They got real pretty little cakes with the doll in them and the pretty dresses, and I got a little boy fishing on top. (Lisa)

I always felt like that the men in the family liked me best. For some reason, because I never cried. So Pa-paw would get ready to go to the store and we'd all ask to go, and he'd say no. And they'd start crying, and I wouldn't cry, and he'd let me go. (Lisa)

I think because my grandfather was in the picture with my grandmother, I did have a father figure in my life. If there had been just always females around, then that might not have been as healthy. . . . It's like you, I'm trying to get into my real inner psychological self here, thinking, ok, my dad and my mom, that didn't last. I was six or eight months old here, they parted ways. I had a marriage on round one that I thought everything seemed perfectly fine with and out of the blue here this is going down the tubes. . . . You know, so the security thing. And I don't know if, gender wise, if I had had a continual father in my life it that would have mentally made me look and act any differently. (Peg)

As Carol talked about how gender roles currently are played out in her family, her initial impression was that there is not a real consciousness about it:

When the three of us are together, I really don't sense a whole lot of differences in terms of characteristics of genders. It's like I said, I think it's mainly, maybe it's this subconscious thing like I was talking about with my parents. I feel like my older brother is given the responsibilities and I think it's because it's a man, because he's male but I don't really sense a whole lot of well, you'll do this because you're female and I'm male.

In order to have her illustrate an example of what happens when her whole family is together, I asked Carol to describe "who does what" at a family gathering such as Christmas. She immediately realized that the traditional gender roles they grew up with do, indeed, still exist:

Well, now that you mention it, I guess we do, because my mom is the main cook and the females will help. And once we have finished eating, it's my mom and the females that clean up, while my brothers and my dad sit out in the den and do whatever. So, yeah, now that you mention it, I guess we do fall into that. And then we usually will open gifts after we eat and it's always the female that passes out the gifts. Yeah, it's usually me and then after the gifts are done, it's always the females that clean up the wrapping and, the men don't do shit! (laughs) (Carol)

Barb talked about the traditional values in her mother's family and the consequences of how men were valued in the Lebanese culture:

Well, something that was interesting that happened in our family is, I come from a family of three great looking brothers. I always thought I was the ugly duckling. And, it was real interesting to me because, my mother came from a family where men were valued, it was that old world thing. And so all of the relatives on that side, they just always looked to the males. I always grew up thinking that they were much better looking, much, just, I just had the ugly duckling complex, I think. And I think that was an interesting thing. . . . Oh, I internalized it, I internalized that. I did sort of get, I did sort of try to rationalize that it was the male thing. But I'm never quite sure I believed it. (Barb)

Other accounts of gender roles included interpretations based on conservative values as well as the presence or absence of the experience of living on one's own and learning to do things due to necessity. Carol and Jeff both talked about how this occurred:

I think probably the biggest difference in Bob and Jeff and myself - Bob still, I think, conforms to the traditional roles of men and women. I think probably the reason that Jeff and I don't as much is because we both have lived on our own for long periods of time where if it got done, we did it, it didn't matter if it was a stereotypical male role or female role. If it got done, we did it, so he learned to cook, and he learned to do the household chores, and I learned to basic car maintenance and things that would be traditional male roles. . . . Bob is very conservative and he probably really buys into that role stuff more than Jeff and I do. And I also think that it has something to do, particularly with Jeff, he's in a relationship with a woman who would challenge him on that stuff and I don't think Pam is as assertive when it comes to that as probably Jean is. (Carol)

My brother Rick, he lived at home until, until basically he got married. He moved away for a few years, and when he moved back he moved back home. So he had mom to do his laundry and cook for him and he basically didn't move out again until he was married, and then he just went from mom to a wife. So I see him doing a lot of stuff like my father would've done, which kind of aggravates me. Dad's got two legs and two arms and so does Rick. He can care for himself just as good as mom could. And I see Rick doing this to his wife as well. (Jeff)

Unequal Treatment -- What it Means, How it Feels

Several siblings talked about how they were each treated differently by their parents, and how that was something that was "understood" by siblings. Even though there is "talk" about how they understand why one sibling was treated differently, the question they are *really* asking is "why?" These statements comprise a piece of the "underlying structure" that uncovers elements of privilege on different levels:

I'm sure they treated us all differently. I know Peg was growing up it was a lot different than we were. She didn't do as much for herself and I don't think, I don't know if there were rules or what, but I don't think they were enforced maybe as much with Peg as with Lisa and I. . . . I never ever thought that they did more for one or the other, and we never think about that. I know Mom and Dad helped Lisa a lot when she went through her divorce. . . . And they've given to each one of us at different times. But we never discuss it. We never think about it. I mean, I don't think any of us have ever said 'well you did that.' (Rhonda)

We've been fortunate to be raised where there's never been jealousy. . . . There's just never, maybe it's because they didn't show partiality or what one got the other may not have been getting, but it never, I don't know how all that came out as well as I think it did. I think there is a lot, you know jealousy can happen. I've seen in a lot of people and I don't have much tolerance for it. We're probably gonna have to continue to, to cope with, with our differences now and how we make decisions in, in this, these next five to ten years of our life. (Peg)

My parents have always been there on a steady basis. They've always been very supportive of anything that happens - certainly relationships between them and any of the brothers or myself are going to be different, but it all has to be handled, you have to maintain. And so it's always a case by case kind of thing. (Jack)

Some siblings spoke of the fact that their parents have done more for other siblings, or that they have spent more time with one particular sibling. Gerry spoke about how it feels to be treated differently by his mother because she does not watch his kids, but she does watch Jack's. He also talked about how frustrated he is with always hearing from his mother how wonderful Jack's son is. The tone of his voice and the way Gerry talked about this displayed his anger with the conflict created by being treated differently than his brother:

Mom never keeps my kids. When I've asked her to, I feel like I'm imposing. Like I said, maybe this is in my head, maybe it's not. Maybe she's mad at me. . . . [She keeps] Jack's. Of course he's got the baby, the littlest one, which I can't help but keep on hearing how cute he is and how 'it's the best looking grandchild I've ever had.' (Gerry)

Rhonda talked about her parents spending more time with Lisa and helping with her children more, and justified it by saying it's "because she is alone." Once again, she makes sure she adds the comment that "doesn't bother me" and rationalizes the "need" as the issue:

Now mom and dad have spent a lot more time with Lisa the past 6 or 7 years, however long she's been divorced, because she is alone. And when they come to town, that's kind of where they go, the stopping place. And they have helped her with her kids more I know. They have just given her son a car. But, I mean that doesn't bother me because it's just, they need it. (Rhonda)

Carol talked about how she was hurt when her father designated her brother Bob as the one to receive information when their mother was recently in the hospital:

When my mom was in the hospital this fall and she was in Cardiac Care Unit, you know how only one family member can be designated that they'll give information to. Well, they designated my older brother and I remember feeling a little bit hurt, like **why him** all the time? My Dad designated him. My Dad **stinks** in crisis situations. . . . While they were admitting her, my dad was so sick. I had to take him home. . . . And he at one point said 'I think I'm gonna have to go to the doctor.' . . . My brother [Bob] got really mad and told him, 'suck it up and act like a man.' But he's [dad] just terrible, so he knows that Bob's much more levelheaded and he gives responsibility to him, and I remember thinking why not me? And at the same time, a little relieved that it was him. (Carol)

When I asked Bob about whether or not he thinks there are any differences in the way their parents treat each of the siblings now, he responded:

I think, it's kind of funny. I don't know if Carol's mentioned anything about this but my father will, it's like he's still the father with her. He'll tell her to do this, do this. It

drives her nuts. It really drives her nuts. She tells me it drives her nuts. And sometimes he'll start that on me but then he doesn't push it. (Bob)

I asked him if he had any ideas about what makes that different. Why does he think his father does that with his sister and not with him? He replied:

Because she doesn't have anybody to take care of her probably. She's not married, doesn't have a husband to tell her to do this. She's a little free with her spending I think. He's a little more conservative than that. (Bob)

Barb talked about her experience when she made some changes in her own life, and how she perceived that to be taken by her family:

When I changed, and I broke out of the old patterns, well they didn't like that one bit at all. Because they've been able to manipulate me, they've been able to, and when I finally, and I'm telling you Karen, truly, I didn't mature until I went through this counseling. I was still a kid. Entangled in all of this mess. I had never grown up. And when I got this counseling, you see, I broke all of the, and nobody liked that. (Barb)

Parental Expectations and Success

Perceptions of parental expectations and success, when talked about explicitly, converged around global themes of honesty, fairness, happiness, and simply "being a good person." As parents and siblings talked about expectations and the meaning of success, two levels of understanding were apparent: lessons learned and specific messages that were spoken, and underlying intuitive assumptions that were merely "known."

What Our Parents Expected

Siblings talking about parental expectations and values that were instilled in them while they were growing up in several different ways. Some of them focused on particular expectations that seemed more important to one parent:

From my father, his was always, he would try to instill in us probably respect. Honor. Doing your best. Excellence is what he would go for. My mom would be more toward the loving aspect of it, the caring for other people. I guess that would be the way I would split it. . . . And really more, more empathy, I think, from my Mother's side. (Gerry)

My father, it would be hard work. He always stressed that. My mom, caring and manners probably. Like I said, mom was a very loving mom, huggy kissy mom. Which of course when I was a teenager that embarrassed me as it does any teenager . . . But you know that'd be it. Dad was hard work and mom was manners and caring. (Jeff)

A real sharp sense of right and wrong. More my mother than my father. My father's never been above bending rules. Honesty. Never ever, ever no matter what, there are no extenuating circumstances do you ever hit a woman. I remember that one. . . . There's God,

country, you know. We were raised going to Sunday school, for whatever reason. You know, the basics. I mean I feel like that we had a fairly normal upbringing. Although, I know it was different, but I don't know, is there really an average out there? I really don't know. (Paul)

Other participants also spoke of overarching principles, including a religious foundation. Dan also talked about a “seed being planted,” and the difficulty of leaving and coming back:

A well tuned religious foundation, by no means manic. I say manic, not extreme. You go to Sunday School and church every Sunday, and then you got to be a Sunday School aide at church. Then I did quit going to Sunday School. But, no we grew up with the importance of church. . . . And from there, you have that seed that's planted in you, but then, then you leave it. You turn your back on it and run to wherever you can go. And I've found that as I came back to it, which I'm so glad I did, sometimes you get so far away it's a long haul back. Oh man. (Dan)

Well, I guess, I mean we knew we were supposed to be honest. We knew we were supposed to not lie. We knew we were supposed to be on time. . . . That you, you know, we went to church every Sunday. I mean they brought us up in church and I guess it was just expected. It wasn't anything that, you know, we just got up. It was just a routine that we did. We went to church every Sunday and, involved in church, and, but you know, we just knew that they loved us and we loved them and we were a family and, and I guess you just assume all those things. It just happens. (Rhonda)

Descriptions of parental expectations also included concrete memories such as academic achievement:

I was always expected to have good grades. And usually if there was B's on there it was, you know, 'how come this is a B?' But then for Rhonda and Peg it was more like as long as there were C's and above it was okay. I felt like there was more of an expectation for me to have better grades. . . . I don't know. I mean I could think, just wanted us to be happy for whatever we decided to do. . . . They're proud of all of us. You know, what we've done. (Lisa)

Neil talked about a lesson taught at an early point in his life by his mother. She used the example of “two yardsticks in life” to convey the importance of measuring the value of your work by your own standards:

And, there was never, I reckon my recollection with my Mom specifically is, I came home one day, this is probably important or at least important in my life, I came home one day and I said, 'gee Mom, look at this.' And she said 'well what's that?' And I said 'I got a 92' or whatever it was 'on this test.' And she said 'you did?' And she said 'well that looks pretty good.' She said 'but let me ask you a couple questions.' I said, 'well, yeah.' And she said, 'was that good because they said it was good, or is that good because you know it's good?' And I said, 'I don't understand.' She said 'son there are two yardsticks in life, other people's and yours. I would be just as happy if it was a 70 and you told me you thought you did tremendous because you worked very hard at that 70. But if you're telling me that you got a 92 and that because that's their yardstick, that you didn't really try, then a 92 is not very good.' And it was an interesting lesson at an early point in life, is that it's as much important what my yardstick says as it is what somebody else's yardstick. And I think that's the

measurement thing with my folks is that, you know, you've got to live with yourself, you should challenge yourself, and you should not belittle yourself or allow others to belittle you if you've given a good effort. (Neil)

Others described their experience more in terms of expectations they had learned from their parents through the example they set:

They were not demanding about that. My Mom lived by example, my Dad lived by example. There were no expectations as to, you had to live up to this one or that one or do this, you did the best you could do. . . . I think the important things to her were that we had character about what we were doing, or had values. . . . But I mean, the biggest thing was you were expected to behave and to be a gentleman or a lady or show respect to your elders. And, I mean, we just, to me, that was a major thing. I think it molded all of it. At least to me it was. I don't know that answers it, but, that's, nothing sticks out that they required. (Joe)

Oh, you know, basic values of truth and fairness certainly were a big thing. They just weren't things that either one of them talked about. As much as, maybe you wanted to try to look and see flaws and say 'well you don't do it that way.' That just wasn't the way it was 'cause in what I recall, it was always, I almost hate to say walking the walk but that's. . . . They absolutely, the example that they set. I don't think it's something, they weren't role playing. It was something that they believed and very, very serious about it. (Jack)

Mothers' Expectations

As mothers described what their expectations were for their children, they talked about general characteristics as well as specific values that are important to them. They also expressed ideals that they saw as factors that would help their children get along in the world, and they saw relational skills as being more important than the attainment of material goods. Each of them also mentioned the importance of gaining a religious foundation.

Well, honesty I reckon is one of the most, is to be honest. Not, and not to lie, not to cheat. And, treat everybody the same. No matter, difference what color or, or anything. And have respect for their elders. I mean, we tried to instill that in them. Money is not, is not everything. Just make a good living and have a good time. We believe in enjoying life and we, we took them to church and Sunday school. They, but it wasn't, we weren't real strict. I mean, we wanted them to go, and we took them, but not, what I'm trying to say is if a friend wanted them to visit with them and maybe go on a picnic or something, they got to go. . . . They, we knew our values, we knew where we, we knew what was right and wrong, but, we could take up a holiday. We weren't, I mean, neither one of our family, they all attended church, and all belonged to church and went, and tried to live good lives but they weren't fanatics. (Deb)

Well I always hoped they'd be kind and loving towards each, towards their brothers and sisters and towards others. And I hoped that they would love God, go to church, learn to love God. And, I hoped they'd get a good education. Carol went on to college, she was the only one. Well and Bob's gone to college off and on since he finished school almost but he's never stayed with it long enough to get a degree. But, I felt like we did good just to keep Jeff in school long enough to get his diploma. But if he had it to do over now, since he's been out of school this long, he would go to school. He realizes it's a rough world out there. (Elaine)

Of course, getting along with other people. Rationalizing, if necessary to the point of being able to forgive and forget. I probably carry the rationalization, too far an extent, but that's my, that's my way of coping with a lot of things. Somebody asked me the other day, says 'are you rationalizing?' and I said, 'Yes, I am.' They said 'do your children rationalize?' I said 'Well, if they do, they got it honestly.' . . . I always, I tried to, of course, I always tried to instill in them the fun of music. Not any particular kind of music, just fun music. . . . Certainly respect. We've always, you know, put at the top of the list. Church, and I feel like it did sink in, although it comes and it goes, with this human family. (Maggie)

When I asked if they felt their expectations were the same for all of their children, or if they felt they were different due to individual characteristics and differences in each child, their responses were more general. They indicated an overall reluctance to categorize any specific child and referred to just wanting the best for them and for them to make positive contributions with their lives:

You know, I can't hardly answer that because I can't even think about having expectations. I just wanted them to be happy and do right and do what they wanted to do and, and I haven't been disappointed. I've been hurt. I've been hurt with their marriages and their divorces and things, but, it, I mean, it was what was best for them is what I considered. (Deb)

I don't know if they were so different. I always hoped that they would all have a good education and be good citizens. And, like I say, then Carol was the only one that went on to college at the time. (Elaine)

As siblings and mothers talked about expectations, there was a tendency to portray values that were "socially acceptable" and a hesitancy to make any strong statements about what they "believed in." The discourse about "not really having expectations" and "being a good citizen" seemed to be a way that both siblings and parents could increase the chances that expectations were being met by conveying an ambivalent description of "what was expected."

How our Parents Viewed Success for Us

Perceptions of ways that success was viewed by parents were talked about in terms of happiness, pride, lack of pressure, a message of "you can be anything you want to be," and in terms of progress made. For some participants, the broad notions of happiness, honesty, and ethics were mentioned:

I think the only concern of theirs would be that we were happy and fed and under roof. I don't think, and I mean that's part of what I'm thinking of as a goal. . . . And, so along with that, happiness, there's also that determination to do better. And there's also, I like to feel like there's a standard of excellence that I'm working towards. And I always try to be, you

always try to be a better person. And always try to be fair. . . . I always feel like, I always feel like there's a common line no matter how far I stray one way or the other. (Jack)

That we were honest. Yeah. That we were honest, ethical, we had a good work ethic. That we, responsible. Although we're different we are still, we brought joy to their lives. (Peg)

Some talked about major life markers such as marriage, family, and owning a home as indicators of success that seemed important to their parents:

Oh, happy marriage, healthy kids. Comfortable home. (Paul)

Probably stability, a stable job. Um, maybe marriage. I don't know. Uh, probably family, they probably hoped for that. Um, I guess now that I think about I heard my, I guess my mother's said a couple of times I always wished for grandchildren, things like that. So she probably would like, well first of all she would like for Jeff and Mary to be married and then I'm sure she'd like for Carol to find someone. (Bob)

Success was also articulated by discussing characteristics or accomplishments that made their parents proud:

I mean I don't think it was anything that, again, that they expected or thought, or, I think they were very proud. I think my dad and mom beamed when they talked about their children, under all circumstances. . . . And then afterwards, there was no, other than being extremely excited for the positive things that you did. I don't think any of them could look up and say, well boy, I was really let down by what you did. I don't think my parents ever said that. (Joe)

They, I think that, they're, I think that my parents are proud of all of us in different ways, and, they don't always show or tell us but I know that they are. Like my dad, he rarely will tell us, will let us know but I'll hear him talking to friends and bragging. Or mom will tell me that he's talked about this or that so I know that they are very proud of all of us in terms of. (Carol)

When it was difficult for participants to come up with distinct descriptions of perceived success, or when they felt like there were no distinct expectations for success, they talked about the lack of pressure they felt:

I don't know. Mom and daddy never did pressure us a lot. And I guess, I mean maybe that's good and bad. I mean they never did put a lot of pressures on us. I mean we didn't have to make a certain grade, we didn't have to do, you know, live up to a lot of expectations. . . . I guess they just wanted us to be happy. . . . So, but they never, I mean, daddy didn't either. They didn't put any, any pressures on us or anything. (Rhonda)

Um, that's a tough one. I don't know because we never really discussed it. Um, they never really came out and said what they expected me to do or what they want me to do with my life. They never pushed me towards anything. Um, I really couldn't say. (Jeff)

But I, so we were different, I mean. But there was no expectation that Keith did this, Barb did this. It was a general norm of - you're expected to do the best you can do. But there never was any push, like a dentist father saying "you're going to medical," or saying "you're

going to UVA because I went there.” We didn’t have any of that. . . . But as far as expectations for each one of us, they were never, there was never any rivalry or pitting one against the other. (Joe)

Neil’s perception of what success meant to his parents was described as an ongoing process that could be measured in smaller components:

I think they would all look at us as projects under work. You know, I don't, I think they acknowledged the successes but always believed there were greater successes or greater circumstances. You know, I think for me they viewed the different things I embarked upon as, in some cases mini-successes, maybe as not. But there were always, you know, ‘what are we going to do now? What's new? What are you going to try? Where do you want to go? Who do you want to be?’ (Neil)

Jack described success as an ability to disengage and a need to “get right back in it.” His brother Gerry stated that success to his father meant “winning” and for his mother there was a “softer” definition:

I think, I don't know, I think they gave me, I inherited an outlook on life that, enables me to, you need to be able to disengage every now and then. You need to be able to, to float and think and be open minded and, but you also need to, there's a time for everything. And you need to be able to get right back in it because you certainly can't wait and succeed. It won't happen. (Jack)

With my father, winning or succeeding. Straight A’s. . . . That’s would he would consider success. Whatever you are doing to win. With my Mother, is was more, be nice to other people, the softer side of it. If you’re a good person, and are good to other people, then I think she would consider it a success. (Gerry)

For some, success was thought of in terms of an understood message that was rendered as a limitless proclamation of “be anything you want, do anything you want:”

My Mother instilled in us that we could do anything and be anything we wanted to be. . . . I mean, I believed if I wanted to be President of the United States, nothing could stop me. She instilled that, and how she did it, by osmosis, I don’t know, because she wasn’t a big talker. (Barb)

Well it would be, do anything you want, I mean you can be or do anything you want, just, be happy. You know that was the ideal thing. Certainly you didn't have to end up being rich. But at the same time I don't, I never got the feeling it was okay to languish anywhere, and just to sit. You never, you never could do that. (Dan)

Success was not measured in and of itself, but through a comparison to what was or what might have been. In situations where one of the siblings was seen as having the potential to “head in the wrong direction” or had experienced a difficult period in their lives, the sense of recovery was seen as the dimension of success:

There was a time that they did a lot of worrying about Jeff, because he was irresponsible and I think they thought he'd never get his act together. Jeff was the one that probably gave them more trouble; he was the one who came home drunk a couple of times, and we never really were sure where he was, so now compared to what he was he is like **major** success. (Carol)

I think that they're proud of me for getting sober and what I've been able to do since then. There wasn't a whole lot that I did before that to be proud of. Although, at the time I was a pretty prideful person. (Paul)

And I think that they're equally as proud of me that I, they're probably more relieved that I got through my first marriage, my social scene, my, they could've probably hung their hat more on what Rhonda was gonna do. And they already knew early on that Lisa had her education and what she was gonna be doing. And they knew I had continuity in my work. But probably they were still worried. (Peg)

After talking about what they thought success meant to their parents, I also asked if they thought their parents would feel their children were successful. While some participants did specify some distinctive ways that each sibling would be considered successful by their parents, the usual response was some derivation of "yes:"

I would say, you know, I've never thought about that. But my guess, and that's all it would be would just be a pure guess, would be that they probably look at all of us as successful in our own way. (Paul)

So I'd say they would think we're all successful in our own right. . . . So that we, even though we've had our divorces within the kids, I don't think, they didn't tag that as being unsuccessful. They just looked at the situations for what they were at the time and so I you know I think they probably think we're all pretty successful, and we all care about them. (Peg)

Yes, I believe they would all three of us. . . . I think my father somewhat envies my brother because he's got a boat and has his own business. . . . He's proud, I know he's proud of Carol. You know she has her master's degree. She has a good job at the college. I know my mother's proud of her and she's proud of Jeff. I believe they feel he's come a long way in the last 5 years since he's been seeing Mary. I would assume they consider me a success. . . . Probably, I have a house and wife and kids, they probably think I'm successful. (Bob)

Mothers' Descriptions of Success

After listening to each mother's response about what her expectations were for her children, I found I needed to find ways to ask about how they viewed success in a different way for each. I anticipated that there would be a degree of hesitancy to categorize or compare their children to each other.

As Deb talked about her children, she interjected in many places how proud she was of them as well as how important it was to her for them to be happy. After she spoke of her expectations

for her children, I asked her to talk about some of the things she thought were important for them to accomplish to be happy and lead good lives, she responded with:

Well, I think, I think they **all** are very good parents. They're excellent parents. And they have a lot of, they've always had a lot of feelings and a lot of care for other people. And they, they're still doing that. They're still, they've never forgotten that you care for other people. And they, they seldom, you know, they just not - they're not bitter, they're not ugly, they don't, they don't talk about people. And get along real good. I mean as far, with other people. . . . But I, they've, well they've always been caring and loving and, even know they just - it doesn't make a bit of difference in the ages or anything. I mean, they could be just as happy with their aunts and uncles and, or anybody else. And they are very, they all were very lucky that they got to know their grandparents. They were all very caring for them, and specially my mother kept them when I worked and, I think that my children the special ones. But they, they, the older people they have a lot of respect for them. They seem to get along real good with, in their jobs, in their work they've been in. They've always seemed like they've got along real well. (Deb)

There were two other places during the interview that Deb talked about her pride in her children and how fortunate she has felt. Both of the following quotes were situated as follow-up statements to stories about general individual characteristics of each of her children, and after describing how her children pulled together and helped the family:

They, it's been, oh, I've just, it's just been very interesting. I mean, I've never regretted, I've never regretted raising a family and having them and I've never, I, it never entered my mind I could, you know I won't, I wouldn't change them for anything. If it, I just consider myself very lucky and I think Bob does too. No big problems. Just a lot of little ones. (Deb)

But, I'll tell you this - if they ever tell you something, you can believe it. Cause they, like I said, I think that was one thing that, well I think it was instilled in my husband and myself too. I think that was one of our greatest assets while we were being raised. Cause neither one of us had a whole lot or was raised with too much. I mean, we all had to, everybody's family had to work. And we'd come up, you know, a whole lot like mine was brought up. But it's a little better times than my time. So I reckon, it was handed down. And I think, the thing I would be proud of is **that**, in my girls - and their love for the family and friends. (Deb)

To approach this question with Maggie, I asked what kind of idea she has when she thinks of success for her children. I asked her to talk about what that means to her, whether or not her children are successful, and what makes them successful in her eyes. She responded:

As long as they're productive members of society, and have values that, that don't hurt themselves and other people, I guess. (Maggie)

As I followed up on that and asked her if she felt like all of her children have been successful in their lives, she stated:

I sure do. I don't know that they have all reached their potential. But they're all still young as far as I am concerned. (Maggie)

The experience of asking this question to Elaine was quite different. After I asked her what some of the things that she looks for in her children's lives that makes her feel like they have been successful, without hesitation she responded:

Well I look at Bob. I think he's been successful. He has a wife. They love each other. He has two children. He's a good husband and a good father I think. And he's a good provider. Right now he's the main, he's the only provider of the family. And uh, he has a good job. He's trying to better himself with a degree. And he does go to church, takes the family to church. I think that's important. (Elaine)

At that point she paused. I waited to hear her talk about her other children. As the pause became longer, it seemed that she was, in deed, finished with her response. I then asked the question "how about your other children?" Her reply was:

Well, it's a little bit harder with them. They don't stay still long enough. . . . I think Jeff probably does. He has his own business right now. He just built a house. He's happy with what he's doing. He's, he has his own lawn service, landscaping. And, he's very, very happy so I guess it could be success. (Elaine)

After the same length pause that occurred after her comments about Bob it seemed, again, that she was finished responding to the question. I then asked her "how about with Carol?" She seemed to have a difficult time coming up with a response:

Well, in her field I guess she's successful in her job. I had hoped that she by this time that she would be maybe married, settled down, and have a home. But she has not done those things. But I mean, you can be successful without doing that I know. I don't know what to tell you about her. (Elaine)

This response was interesting since Elaine's focus when asked about her expectations for her children, education was the one thing that was mentioned in both responses. As she spoke of her expectations, she did not mention anything about the importance of marriage and family. Although Carol has her Masters degree, and neither Bob nor Jeff have their Bachelors degrees, in speaking about Carol the focus was not on her educational attainments but on the life markers of getting married and purchasing a home.

Dealing With Changes and Life Circumstances

Enduring Bonds--Pleasure and Pain

As siblings responded to various questions throughout the interview, they talked about a variety of ways their relationships with each other have been affected by "life circumstances."

References were made repeatedly to having their own family and the responsibilities of raising their children:

With the fact that we all have our own families now, it kind of pulls you apart, a little bit more. (Dan)

Don't seem to get all of us up there at the same time as much [to their cottage]. Of course we all have our own families and our own things to do. (Gerry)

I think it ties in to all of the children and each family unit. We've all had our unique situations where we're struggling with the kids. And our two oldest sons opted to go into this drug scene. . . . Rhonda and Dan, their oldest son he has also been giving them a fit for a number of years. With some of the drug scene, just not being responsible not getting, not getting his life together has been very draining, very tiring, very, it was hard on the whole family. . . . They can come to the lake, we aren't, the door's open, they can have orange hair one day and whatever the next. I mean, we still look at the person within. . . . But, and then Lisa's sitting over here with, single parent, a son who gave her a little bit of a problem but seems to be on track. Daughters who seem to be on track, thank God. Our daughter's doing pretty well on track. So we're all codependent because we are all very close and when we're trying to go through the stress and strain it's affected all of us, and how we've had to deal with it within our own families. (Peg)

The two women who both have all brothers spoke about the changing dynamics among siblings as marriages occur and the jealousy and sadness of it “never being the same again” when they talked about their enduring bonds with their brothers:

It's all complicated when we all get married, and all the dynamics change. . . . I couldn't get a grip when I moved back here on why my brothers and I couldn't get that closeness back. Why things were different. And the truth is, as Keith [oldest brother, never married] told me is, they will never be the same because they, we all married. And it changes it. And I guess, for me, for lots of different reasons, because I'm the only girl, and bringing other girls into the family, I have to be honest and say I evidently have had a hard time with that. But it is, as close as we are and were. There's a part of me who grieves for that fact that it's not the 4 of us. And it never will be again, ever. (Barb)

You know, I don't know if this would be significant or not, but it's a feeling that I get sometimes that makes me really sad. I think about, for 18 years there or 17 years there I grew up in the same house with my 2 brothers and was part of every day of their lives, you know, we knew one another really well. . . . We talk maybe once a month, and that makes me really sad to think that here's someone that you grew up every day of your life for 17 or 18 years and then all of a sudden, it's not that. And that makes me sad. I just get this overwhelming sadness. . . . I don't know if that's typical or, and I get, sometimes I get a little jealous of Jean and Pam because I know that they know them better than I ever will again. (Carol)

Barb also talked about the devastation she feels in losing the closeness with her brother Neil. She talked throughout the interview about the difficulty of her relationship with both her brothers' wives, especially Neil's:

I have the overwhelming, I can't even tell you how I have to reign myself in, to want to look him straight in the face and say, 'Neil, are you happy? You can't be.' That's what I want to say. 'You can't be with this person. Talk to me. Nobody loves you like I love you or cares about you like I care. Please talk to me. Please let me be there for you. Please let me understand and take some of this burden off you and support you.' But it's gone. I think, that for us, it's probably gone forever. He has too much pride. Maybe I've missed it. It is extremely devastating to me to think that I have reached a point in my life where I can not look at him and say what I desperately want to say. . . . So see, as close as we are, it's what my older brother said. And truly he told me, it's like a death in the family. It is. And he said, mourn it. And I did. I said to myself, those days are gone, I'll never be for them what I could have been, or wanted to be, and that's a part of me realizing I have to share them with their spouses. (Barb)

When Joe was responding to a question about changes in sibling relationships in adulthood, he talked about the involvement of family:

But when your husband's involved, your wife is involved, your children are involved - it puts a real difference, and I think that as brothers and sisters, in my estimation, there's a true bond. And even with Keith gone, I look at really more so Barb and Neil because they're here. . . . So I don't think there's any change in that, I mean, I don't think there's much you can do with regards to **how** we were. How we get together, how we do that. (Joe)

I asked Neil if he felt there were any changes in the sibling relationships in their family due to differences in marital status:

No. None. I think Keith having been the oldest and always being sort of aloof to us, he'd be the last person I'd think would get married. You know, I mean he just, he was always going to do his thing, and that was a part of it. So, I haven't seen Keith, in my life, change at all. I mean I've always seen him, although he's the oldest, sometimes in how he's dealt with things as the youngest. (Neil)

As she reflected on the fact that she is not married, Carol talked about her concern regarding the possibility of not having anyone to take care of her in the future:

Sometimes I worry about my future. Say I don't ever marry or am not in any kind of long-term relationship. I really wonder and worry about - what if I become old and invalid? I mean, I'm not gonna have anyone. I'm not gonna have children or a spouse or anyone to take care of me. But I feel pretty confident that my brothers would. . . . At one point, Bob and I were worried about Jeff and worried about - what if he got really sick and didn't have health insurance? And Bob said 'we wouldn't let him be on his own.' And I really believe that. Sometimes I wonder if maybe that's not a subconscious motivator for me to develop such a good relationship with my niece and nephew, is that I want them to feel about me like maybe their, a parent. And so, but I do feel real confident about that. (Carol)

Planning for our Parent's Future

An issue that surfaced during one of the pilot interviews I conducted that clearly illustrated an example of privilege in families involved a family discussion about power of attorney. While I was conducting the first interview for this study with Peg, she mentioned the process that their family

has been going through assisting with her parents as they are getting older. When I asked her about whether or not they have had any discussions about what will happen when their parents start to need more help, she responded:

Yes, we've had discussions, and I guess we're fortunate because both parents are still alive. They still have a sound enough mind that they made financial planning, and we've had open family discussions about the home, and some ideas on what's what. (Peg)

She went on to talk about the designation of executor, and that she was going to visit her parents and planned to have a discussion with them about changing the executor from Rhonda to Lisa. She talked about her motivation for speaking to them about that, as well as the plan she was going to suggest to make that happen:

There is one subject about this that I'm gonna put a bug in mom and daddy's ear. As it's been throughout the years, Rhonda was designated as the executor. Lisa and I are seeing that Rhonda is, she's always had a hard time making decisions. I was gonna say to mom and daddy, 'you don't have to tell us that you've changed that, but why don't you just say that you've had another meeting the financial guy, and ya'll have looked it over again, and that you've thrown all our names in the hat and this time Lisa's came out.' (laughter) If they would look at it for the person who has the analytical, and when we get to a point where those decisions are gonna have to be made, we're gonna need somebody that can make a decision. (Peg)

After the topic of designating an executor came up in the first interview in addition to the pilot interview, I asked a question about it in subsequent interviews. When Lisa (Peg's sister) talked about whether or not they had discussed plans for their parent's future, she said:

Well mom and dad are young compared to most parents. So you know we try not to think about that. They have all of their affairs in order. . . . Just recently Peg asked me if I would want to be the executor if she mentioned to mom and dad that they change it from Rhonda to me because she felt like it would take Rhonda too long to make a decision, and that she would not be in any condition to make you know decisions if something were to happen. . . . Just Peg and I had that one little discussion about it. I've never discussed it with Rhonda. Mom and Dad, they had given us a copy of what they had done. Now they have changed it several times I think. At one time I think they had Rhonda and Dan, and then they changed it to just Rhonda. (Lisa)

There were different responses to how much discussion had taken place among the siblings by Peg, Lisa, and Rhonda. Peg stated they had "open family discussions" about the home. Lisa said she had "that one little discussion" with Peg, but none with Rhonda. As Rhonda spoke about the topic, she stated that they have not had many discussions but that they would all be involved in making decisions together when the time came:

I don't know that we have, we haven't really discussed it that much. I guess assuming, we're the executor of the estate or whatever. Being the oldest, I mean I know that, me and Dan. We haven't even discussed it that much with mom and dad. They have taken care of their business I'm sure. I guess we really haven't. But I'm sure it would, when it came we would just all decide together what to do. . . . We really don't want to think about it. . . . I guess we'll just cross that bridge when it comes. (Rhonda)

Peg described the ideas that “we’ve” talked about with regard to maintaining the family home at the lake and caring for their parents:

Now for health things, they've talked about that and we, I think everybody communicates pretty well. . . . But we've talked about some ideas. And hopefully the idea would be that we could keep their, their lake home in tact because that has been so wonderful for the whole family. . . . And if, so whatever happens, maybe probably if daddy dies first, mama might want to come back to Roanoke. If she's still of pretty sound mind, my hope would be that she'd get a little condo or something on her own, and we could all run around together but she could be independent. I don't think any of us need a heavy day in, day in dose of each other. But I'm sure if she's incapacitated between all three of us we'll work out, living arrangements. And if the same thing with dad, we will do what we can to make sure that he is comfortable. (Peg)

A common response that both Lisa and Rhonda expressed was “we try not to think about that.” Another subject that was mentioned frequently was that of “having their affairs in order.” A variation of this phrase was used by all of the siblings in the sister only family in the preceding section.

The siblings in the brother only family also talked about “plans being made” and “matters being handled.” Since the family business is involved, each of the 4 brothers referred to both business and family arrangements. The company’s recent bankruptcy led to more discussion about plans with regard to the business.

Jack’s response to whether or not he and his brothers have had discussions about plans for their parent’s future, he spoke about his exclusion from that being related to not working for the family business:

The 4 of us, very limited. That's something that once again with me working away from them is not something that I touch on a regular basis. But I know it's something that's been discussed at length between them. . . . Right now I just, I'm sure it's something that's being handled but I wouldn't know. It has been discussed in the past I know. And as thorough as each and every one of them are I know it's something that's not overlooked. (Jack)

Jack's comment that "he knows it's something that's been discussed at length between them" was not confirmed by any of his 3 brothers who work together. Dan's response to whether or not the 4 of them have discussed plans about a will, executor, or power of attorney was:

No we haven't. No. Not that everybody's been involved in. . . Nothing has been firmed out, I don't think, in that regard. Now there are certain business ventures that we have that if something were to happen to dad, if dad were to die then, well that's your mother's. And if both of them are gone then you all split that between you. But that's a very, that's a minute portion of everything that's going on. So no, there's nothing firm. (Dan)

When I asked Gerry about any discussions that have occurred between the 4 of them about executors or power of attorney, he mentioned their recent reorganization due to being in Chapter 11, and that no details have been discussed:

Very, very little. Recently, we have been in Chapter 11, re-organization of our company, and as a result we have really restructured the whole company with thought being given to my Dad's retirement. . . . Certainly no details about executors or power of attorneys or anything like that. (Gerry)

Following up on that, I inquired about what his sense was about how that would happen and also asked if he knew about the existence of a will for his parents:

Well, Paul's always been the take charge type. About things like that though, I'm not so sure that that would happen. (pause) I would probably be more familiar with it simply because with my wife's grandfather, I've been close to that situation. I don't know that a leader would emerge. It would probably be more of a joint effort. . . . I am sure that they have a will, have had it for a long time. I don't know what's in it. (laughs) (Gerry)

Paul talked about the fact that he had only been involved in conversations with his Dad about this, and the reason for that was due his role in dealing with the company's bankruptcy. He also revealed that he has been named as co-executor:

The only conversations I've had have been with dad, because of the fact I had to know everything to deal with all the legal issues. I got involved in that, found out he's got a will that dates I think to '75 or something like that. . . . They were giving us fits in that Chapter 11, and we were looking for every piece of leverage we could get, so he changed it and then named me as co-executor which blew me away. I said 'now listen,' I said 'I'll agree to that under one condition.' He says 'what's that?' I said 'let's get a new estate plan drawn up that makes sense that I could deal with. Don't leave me with this nightmare.' (Paul)

After listening to him talk about the complications of having to attend to legal matters of the company, I asked Paul if his brothers are aware that he is the co-executor of the will. The matter of "knowing everything" was cited again as justification for his involvement and eluded to as a reason that it has not been discussed among all the siblings:

I don't know whether they do or not. I've never said anything to them. You know, I didn't see it as anything to really be discussed. It was, you know, but the reason, I don't fool myself either, I mean, the reason that dad did what he did . . . was because I was the only one that knew it all. . . . And then of course I'm the oldest too. And I was flattered but at the same time I was pretty overwhelmed that, at what that reality could wind up being. (Paul)

Siblings in the third family referred to the recent death of their grandfather and their mother's illness during the past year when they spoke of their discussions:

Actually, with the concerns of my mom's parents just coming up, we have talked a little bit about it. . . . Light discussion -- and it's been mostly because of the situation with her parents that has brought that up. I'm hoping that they just won't forget about and we can discuss this some more. (Jeff)

When I questioned Jeff about how he thought the future discussions would go as far as who would be named as power of attorney, he replied:

I figure the power of attorney probably will be given to Bob. One, because he's close there and two probably because they're going to look at is that he is maybe more settled than Carol is. I hate to say that because I think Carol is just as settled as Bob, but they're probably going to see it as with Bob being married and having a family that he's more settled. (Jeff)

Then I asked how he felt he fit into that picture and he spoke of the distance being a factor and talked in terms of his parents "not asking that" of him:

Well I really don't because I'm 355 miles away, and it would just be so taxing on me. I'm sure that they wouldn't ask that of me. So they would just weigh it out and think that Bob would be the biggest candidate. And plus I probably wouldn't want that job. I think that would be a tough job, and I think that Bob is a little bit more educated than I, and he is pretty good with finances and I think that he would just do better at it than myself. . . . And I just think that Bob would probably be their choice. But I may be wrong. They may would chose Carol. But I know how Carol is with money. (laughter) (Jeff)

I asked Bob if he and his siblings had talked about plans regarding who would care for their parents or who would serve as executor. He spoke of a humorous conversation they had after their mother's hospitalization, and then stated that his assumption would be that he would take care of everything:

Nothing serious. We just kind of, my mother gave us a scare in October. I was sure it was a heart attack. We thought she'd have heart problems, and I told Carol 'well, I'm not taking care of dad if something happens to mom. You're going to have to move in.' And then we were laughing. I said 'I don't know, Jeff has just built a house, he has three bedrooms, dad loves the beach, he can stay with Jeff.' And then when I talked to Jeff we told him, and he, we got a big laugh. We haven't talked seriously. I assume that I would take care of everything. (Bob)

When I asked him if he knew whether or not his parents have wills, and if so was he aware of what was in them, he said:

They have wills. My mother has named me, I was executor or power of attorney. . . . She asked me if I would do it and I said yeah. (Bob)

I asked him if Jeff or Carol are aware that he holds the power of attorney:

I think Carol does. Quite frankly I don't know if Jeff does or not. I assume my mother would have told him. I just assumed that I would handle it anyway. . . . Maybe that's my function in the family.

Following that comment, I asked if it was his function because he is the oldest or because he's married and seen as a little more stable and he replied:

I don't know that it's that. No it's just that I don't think Carol has the experience with some of the financial transactions. God knows I don't have a lot of experience but my parents talk to me now, my father with investments. . . . I guess we haven't had this discussion because we don't like to think about it. (Bob)

Carol's answer to the question about discussions regarding caring for their parents included a reference to the experience of her mother dealing with these issues for her own parents:

Well, we probably haven't discussed it as much as we should, particularly seeing my mom go through the issues with her parents she has lately . . . that's something that I know is a real difficult thing to do, but that's showing both my brothers and I, we haven't discussed it, we probably need to start looking into more. (Carol)

When I asked her about her knowledge concerning the existence of a will for her parents and issues such as power of attorney, the reference to how Carol deals with finances surfaced again.

Not really, we haven't talked about that. Well, we've lightly touched the surface, realizing that we probably need to, but that's it. I know that my older brother, what was it, something my mom was doing a few years ago, and it may have been working on a will, I can't remember exactly what it was, . . . but I know it was something like that and they were giving my older brother responsibility for finances, and I remember I was hurt and my mom looked at me and it was like do you really think you should be in charge of finances, and I'm like, well, you've got a point there. (Carol)

Neil and Barb spoke about Joe being the person who was designated as the one to communicate with the medical staff when their father was ill. Barb added her own modification about how that worked, and talked of how she stepped aside to honor the "father-son" bond.

We did what they asked us which is to set up one person to speak for the family. That was my brother Joe. It's okay by me. It's kind of like Joe saying 'hey, I want you to meet today.' [participate in the interview] And I said 'okay, if you say so, okay.' (Neil)

Joe was the person. In a way, he was the person, but being the only daughter, I was the person who would say “we need to do this for him now,” “Oh no, he’s not that bad,” but we need to do this. I could see it through, men tend to put on these rose colored glasses and they’re in denial. Big denial. But as far as being by his bedside, I did not have, not because I loved him any less, but because I respect different bonds between people and I think there’s a bond between a father and son that was different. (Barb)

As she continued to discuss the situation surrounding her father’s illness and death, she spoke emphatically about expecting the same courtesy from them.

You all have to face, what was your relationship to this person and with the other. Knowing how much to back off, how much to push. It’s knowing when to step aside - and that’s hurtful. When my Dad was going for something, I remember thinking to myself, I’ll step aside now. It’s hurtful, but I’ll step aside now. But they better be willing to do the same for me when I decide it’s my turn. (Barb)

Times We Have Pulled Together

While recalling times that were characterized by a “pulling together” in order to deal with a situation, events such as deaths and tragedies were mentioned most often. Two participants mentioned both negative and positive events:

I guess you can think of both good and bad times. Passing of grandparents. (pause) I guess when you're thinking of events, I tell you it's all been so, in my mind, it's all been a very constant thing. (Jack)

My grandfather's death, recent death, that's a big one. It seems like it's usually trauma. When my mom was in the hospital. When my dad was in the hospital. When the kids were born - that wasn't trauma. Well, it may have been for Pam. When my brother got married, the big events. Yes, not the day-to-day, but the significant events. (Carol)

Deaths and times of grief were talked about by at least one member of every family:

We went to my grandparents' home a lot when they were both still alive and we were young. And I always tell my wife that some of my best memories were over there with my grandparents, loved them dearly. . . . I just have very fond memories about that place. Probably my grandfather's illness probably drew us all closer together. (Bob)

Well, of course, always times of grief. . . . Family members, they’ve all, everybody, has tried to support the other one. And a time in our family life that I think of as, a very, let’s see, what can I call it, well, a time that was most helpful, just to put it most bluntly, was when a minister came about 20 years ago, at a time when, when we needed a minister, we needed a minister as a minister. We didn’t just need a preacher, we needed a minister. (Maggie)

I know the death of our grandparents or, well I guess the first close death that we experience was my father's father. And, that brought us real close. Or like I said we weren't exactly apart at the time but, there was a bond. It was a bonding thing. (Dan)

Well no question, and I mean this is probably too simple, is the death of my father. I was not like my dad. I respected him and admired him. But I was probably, and I don't know this,

but I didn't think and perceive sometimes the way he did. But the death of a parent I think does draw people closer together. (Neil)

Joe also mentioned the death of his father, but answered the question from the position of “nothing that stands out” because they are always together. He did give several examples of things that might otherwise illustrate the point, but came back to being there for one another:

I don't think, 'cause I think we were always together. I mean, there's nothing that would stand out in my mind that wasn't there to start with. To say you know, the death of my Dad obviously, but it didn't pull us together, we were together to start with. The fact that I lost everything I owned and started over and had to get help from my family. But that didn't pull us together, we were already there. I've never thought we were apart as a family, in my estimation. . . . I don't think anybody's been any lower, well I can't say that. Keith's been gone, we don't know how tough life was for him. . . . I don't think there was ever a point of time or anything, 'cause I think we were always - whether we're sitting right in front of each other or not, but we were there for the other one. And I've never considered it any different, in my line of thinking. (Joe)

Lisa and Peg both recalled the time when their father, who is an alcoholic, had his relapse and they all came together as a family to do an intervention and attend family counseling sessions together:

I guess maybe, dad's an alcoholic and when he had his relapse, and we all had to present the ultimatum to him. And then he went and was in treatment and we all had to go you know every Sunday as a group and go through counseling together and get through all of that. (Lisa)

Well I guess your deaths. Oh, well, I know the time. Well I guess, of course dad being an alcoholic, he had a relapse, . . . we had to do an intervention and, of course some of the things that we, we didn't know everything, but then all of a sudden it kind of, kind of exploded and we knew everything, and we had to you know get control of the situation and help mom and decide what we were going to do. And so we did. We, you know, we did an intervention, all of us together. (Rhonda)

Tragic events were mentioned by 2 brothers in the same family. Paul also talked about it being “just like a trap closing” as he described his family's immediate presence when anything traumatic occurred:

One year, over the course of one year, there were three events, tragic events really. Both Paul and Dan, in separate instances, had a bad car accident. And in somewhere during that same, I think it was all during one year, my small, my younger brother Jack was hit by a car. We had, let's see, Paul and Dan were in the hospital at the same time. Yeah. They sure were. In fact a boy died in Dan's wreck. It was a, very tragic, that probably still bothers him today. I know it does. . . . Another one was when my Grandfather died. I feel like we were probably pulled closer together. He was such a good man. We all knew that. (Gerry)

Oh absolutely. My brother Dan had a real, real bad car wreck. . . . I think it killed a neighbor boy. And that was a time that -- anytime anything traumatic's happened to any of us. I mean I

think all of us have had individually traumatic events. Anytime anything traumatic has happened, the family immediately just, zoom, it's like that, it's just like a trap closing. And the death of our grandparents, close relatives, whatever. It's immediate and it's just understood. And it's just there. I know it's there even though there's no set protocol for how it works. It works. (Paul)

Neil also described the way his siblings “close ranks” in defense of each other if an outside confrontation ensues with any of them:

I think also, any outside confrontation with one of us, we close ranks about as close as anybody. If one of us feels or senses that somebody is being unfair, is being unreasonable or unfair with the other of us, it doesn't take anything and we, there's not any question you know, you're picking on my brother or my sister, and I don't care what the right reason is, that's not going to happen. That type of thing. (Neil)

There were two events that Jeff recalled as being instrumental in bringing his family closer together: the letters Carol wrote to their father, and the presence of grandchildren:

The only thing that I can think of that helped a lot is, Carol wrote my father a couple of letters, and I'm not even exactly sure what she said to my father in the letters. But I think that that helped and I also think that my brother helped with having grandchildren. At the funeral we were at just a couple weeks ago, my brother and I were standing there talking and we were watching our father with his son. And Bob and I just looked at each other and it's like, well that's not the man that raised us. . . . I mean he shows so much attention to his grandchildren. (Jeff)

Two participants talked about celebratory events or successes that were experienced and shared among family members:

We've had two 50th and two 60th anniversaries of our grandparents. And then our parents had their 50th anniversary, they had their 50th last summer. And we had to pull together and get it all organized. (Rhonda)

I think other things, happier things where, Keith's success was a pleasant time for us and it drew us together as a family. . . . I think Joe's success in the business world in the 80's, stores were everywhere and had his name, those types of things. The things that drew us closer together, basically, the successes of each other drew us together and then the passing of loved ones like grandparents and parents, those types of things. (Neil)

Times That Have Pushed Us Apart

When I asked about situations that created some distance in the family, there was a significant amount of hedging around issues and an unwillingness to name anything that would be seen as “inconsistent” with a picture of happiness and allegiance.

Jack started by saying he could not think of anything specific, then cited that there *was* a specific event that he *would not* talk about. After interviewing Paul and hearing him describe the impact his struggle with drugs and alcohol had on the family, I wondered if that was what Jack would not talk about. He spent a lot of time talking around the issue and how any problems or concerns that are brought up are always addressed:

Well I think when something happens, no specifically, I can't think of a -- well sure I can. But I'm not gonna talk about it. I can certainly say that there are things that have, I'd hate to say distant, but it seems like when something seems to be working towards that way, it's an immediate reason for a face to face -- I don't want to say confrontation because that's been amazingly minimal. It's incredible how much we've all been able to get along. I think that's because we were raised with an open minded type attitude. . . . I mean, it's not a lot of, there's no problems over here and problems over there and things simmering here and things not happening because I know I hear a whole lot of that, you know. . . . But there's, most anything that's ever brought up - any problems or any, not problems, let's say concerns, they're always addressed. (Jack)

The other members of the same brother only family each talked about distance being created in different ways. Dan replied that there were events that occurred, but nothing that “jeopardized” the relationship:

Oh yeah. But nothing that ever was, I mean, I mean a million things that, as far as just, nothing that ever you know jeopardized literally the relationship. It was nothing like that. (Dan)

Paul talked about distancing himself and indicated that he is not in a good position to judge the rest of his brothers because he was the one that created the distance:

Oh sure. I probably did more to distance myself from the family than any of the rest of the family has done collectively. And that's my judgment. . . . And so I guess I'm probably not in a real good position to judge the rest of them, because I've never felt like any of them did anything to me that would make me want to distance myself from them. It was always the other way around for me. And maybe, I don't know how they see it, but I've done much more that they've had to accept than vice versa. (Paul)

When I asked Gerry if he could think of anything significant as far as times that the family has been a little more distant from each other, he said:

Probably right now. . . . I don't know. The others may not feel that way. I do. I feel like, I feel kind of, almost alienated right now. For what reason, I don't know. Some of it probably in my head and some of it in theirs. You know, it's not always rosy, everything's not always wonderful. . . . Some things, I don't know. Mom never keeps my kids. When I've asked her to, I feel like I'm imposing. You know, like I said, maybe this is in my head, maybe it's not. Maybe she's mad at me. I don't know. (Gerry)

Their mother talked about supporting Paul through the process of his divorce. Though she stated she "felt a little barrier," she also spoke in terms of it not being distancing or pulling them apart:

I don't think, unless there was, well, I don't think there was distancing because we still supported, you know, Paul when he went through the process of divorce. And, they both, they were both hurt, but that didn't pull us, that didn't pull us apart. It just, it may, I think it probably distanced me some, just trying not to interfere. I mean, I only discussed it when they asked me to. I felt, I guess I felt a little barrier. Because, you know, it's totally different being a mother of sons, than a mother of daughters. (Maggie)

Carol and Jeff both talked about being the objects of the distancing that occurred in their family. Carol talked about a relationship she had that was "definitely a wedge," and Jeff talked about buying a motorcycle and the argument that ensued that caused him to leave home:

Yeah. (laughs - nervously) . . . Um, oh, this is real personal, Karen. . . . It was a relationship that I had, that was, **definitely**, it was, any of the work that my father and I had done like to help us, it was definitely a wedge. Um, and yeah, that. (Carol)

When I bought a motorcycle. When I was 19 years old I bought a motorcycle and of course it was a big argument about that, and that is what caused me to move away from home. And I basically haven't been back since. Of course they didn't want me to have it and it came down to you sell it or you leave. And I chose to leave. (Jeff)

The alienation caused by their father's drinking was the first thing Bob talked about. He and Carol both also mentioned the "moving away" that caused a geographical distance, as well as emotional distance:

Well my father alienated us some with his drinking. He alienated the rest of us against him. Of course Carol's move to the west or when she left this area, but never anything on purpose or I wasn't aware of it. Nothing I can think of. . . . Well my brother took off and went to South Carolina, which was a good thing for him to do I'm sure. We didn't see him there for a while. But that was his life. That probably put a little distance. I think it's everybody's growing a little closer now. (Bob)

Well, and the fact that my brother and I both moved away. I mean that, that in itself, on a day-to-day thing. . . . So that and, (pause) probably more so, growing up and living at home, like when I started to leave, or when I did leave, and even though at that point I wasn't far away, I was still emotionally gone. (Carol)

Rhonda spoke about difficulties experienced due to problems with her children at various times:

We've all gone through these things with kids but, I don't think that it's really gone apart, it's that you get just so busy and involved that you just may not be in contact with each other as much. . . . I think a lot of times and over the years we've always told everything, you know, we kind of didn't keep secrets and everything was kind of out. Maybe now as, you know, the kids are older, we don't tell as much as we did when they were little, I don't know. . . . Maybe now, I don't know, I know Peg has been through a lot in the last 2 years, 3 years, with her boys. We've been through a lot with our son who's 25, you know, it goes and comes. (Rhonda)

The topic of “success” came up again as Joe described the difficulty of claiming his own identity during the times when Keith and Joe were both in positions of high visibility:

I would say the successes, once again. I think, you know, me being called Keith's name at church on a regular basis began to annoy me. . . . I would say also that, the success of Joe in the community. As much as I, Keith and Joe, were great supporters of that. . . . But no, never affecting my personal relationship with them, but probably more affecting how I dealt with the person who constantly jabbing with ‘hey Keith.’ Or ‘how come you're not Joe?’ Well, in my family I wasn't supposed to be Joe. He's Joe. I'm Neil. (Neil)

Justifying Privilege

When stories pertaining to privilege were told, there was often some level of explanation about why it was “okay” or “understood.” After Gerry talked about feeling like his mother did not offer to watch his children as much as she does Jack's, he justified that by saying that Jack's son is “the baby,” and his mother loves babies:

Which I can understand with the baby, my mom loves babies so I can understand that. So no, I don't think they're picking on me. (laughter) (Gerry)

Following his statement about how he thought Jack was spoiled because he is the youngest, Gerry talked of understanding the reason because of the age gap between Jack and the others:

And you think, too, with Jack, I'm 7 years older, so when I moved out of the house, I don't know if he hung around 7 more years, I guess he did. And he was the only one there. . . . So, I could see how it could happen. (Gerry)

In the family with only sisters, the conversation about “whoever needs - gets” was framed as an expectation that was very intentionally taught beginning at a very early age. Deb and Rhonda were the only 2 participants I did not ask about privilege directly, largely because they talked so much about it before I had the opportunity to ask the question:

Well, and another thing we have, now I feel like this has helped. When they were smaller, well, Rhonda was of course was the oldest. Maybe she needed a new pair of shoes, maybe Lisa didn't need any shoes. They were taught, and it shows even since they're adults, that I try not to do any more for one than I do for the other. But I did for the one, and when their time come, and they needed new pair of shoes, they got it, or a new dress or whatever. (Deb)

When Christmas time comes, I try to be even as best as I can. But if one of them wanted something real bad that maybe cost ten dollars more, that one got it. I mean, I didn't really mark it down to the penny, . . . and I did the same thing with the grandchildren. I said 'don't ever say to me that you give one something and hadn't give it to me.' For I said I try to be fair, and I try to give to the ones that need it, and the ones that want it. . . . I have done, the last few years maybe I have done a little more for Brenda's children, but it's because they didn't have a Daddy and she was trying to do it all herself. And the other children have never said, if they've said a word, it's never been to me. Because they know better. They know not to. And I think that's, we try to be fair. (Deb)

But of course when we were growing up now if one needed a new pair of shoes and the other one didn't, that was fine. We knew whoever needed whatever, they got it at that time. And we'd never dare say, well you got Lisa this and you didn't get me this - you just didn't, do it. You just assumed it because you knew when you had to have something, you got it. You know, it just happened. I guess we're unusual. I don't know. (Rhonda)

Parental support was an issue that was continually justified by mothers and siblings alike throughout the interviews. One example is Jeff's response to his mother when he called her because Carol was upset that their mother hung up on her when she called to tell her about a job she was taking:

She called me one night and said that they had offered her the job and she thought she was going to accept it, and I cried and she cried. And finally I said 'well Carol I'm gonna hang up now because there's no sense in running up a big bill just listen to each other cry.' And so later that night my son called me. He said 'mama I can't believe that you're not supporting Carol, her move to California.' I said 'well Jeff I don't, we'd always support Carol. I do support her. I said I just didn't want her to go to L.A.' He said 'well mamma, she said you wasn't supporting.' And I said 'we've probably supported her, Carol more than we have any of you kids.' He said 'well mamma she's probably needed it more than the rest of us.' (laughter) (Elaine)

While Joe was talking about how he viewed privilege in his family, he spoke of the natural tendency for parents to be proud of their children, and the explanation that you "can't take that away" from them:

Each person views it different. I mean, I just never felt like, I think that there are times that you're, that a sibling does something that at that moment, you're proud. Not at the expense of the others, but you're proud of them because that's one of your children. I don't ever think that you can take that away from a parent, or use it against them. (Joe)

Joe's sister Barb talked about the differences in the way a mother will treat her daughter's children, because with her son's children there is another mother involved:

You will always treat your daughter's children differently, and have a different closeness with them than you'll ever have with your sons because there's a mother, another mother involved there. (Barb)

Also being the only sister in a family with brothers and a sister, Carol spoke about how she thought it would be different for her parents to have a grandchild from their daughter:

My parents have grandchildren now, and it has taken some of the angst of 'oh my God, we're never gonna have any grandchildren.' I think the fact, a grandchild from their daughter would be really different. (Carol)

Sometimes justification is hard to find when it comes to privilege in families. Three siblings from different families talked about "hidden privilege" expressed to varying degrees. The privilege of growing up in a home where your father was a "big fish in a small pond" made it difficult for Paul during his high school years because it was such a change. He felt the dilemma of dealing with what outwardly seemed like an "advantage" at the same time he was struggling with being "noticed" all of a sudden :

I know that the reality that I grew up with and I know that I was very, very rebellious at a young age. And I think I know now after going through therapy with counselors and just dealing with my own demons at AA and whatnot and being able to live long enough to gain some perspective. I look back now and think that no, it wasn't a Beaver Cleaver childhood because we grew up as sons of a very successful man and in a small town. A big fish in a small pond, you know. And that brought it's own burdens with it. . . . A lot of things changed in my life in the 9th grade. . . . I got noticed all of a sudden. Whereas before I'd been sort of just like every other kid. And all of a sudden I was getting noticed, and it was all because of that house. And then people started talking about what my dad did and all the property he owned and all the business and all this stuff. . . . A lot of things changed. (Paul)

Carol struggled with the pain of not being asked to be a godparent for her niece and nephew, and the tentative desire to talk to her brother about feeling hurt:

Bob really hurt me once because he, I found out that they had asked a couple friends, a couple of theirs, to be godparents. I'd never mentioned it to my brother and I probably should talk to him about it but I talked to mom, I said "Mom," I said, "that just hurt me so much." They know how much I'd love to have children and they know how much I love those kids, why would they ask someone who's not family to be godparents? . . . I'm not sure if it is just the financial thing, or do they think I'm irresponsible and shouldn't have their children, I don't know, but it hurt. . . . I don't know if they would think differently now that they've seen you with the kids. I **love** his kids **so much**. I'd give my life for them if it came down to it. (Carol)

Barb talked extensively during the interview about her own growth and changes she has been through. She spoke in terms of the "status quo" being threatened by change:

When I went for counseling, oh gee, oh Lord, it was, you might as well have just set off a bomb. And Keith helped me understand, because he's always been a person who's been self analytical and all that, we both have. And people who look for growth. It was horrible. My mother almost turned on me, my brothers turned on me. And he explained to me that any time you change, or grow, or investigate - you're threatening the status quo. (Barb)

Another element of privilege related to change was explored by Barb when she spoke about the constraint she feels because she lives in the city she grew up in. Since her mother and 2 of her brothers still live in the same area, she struggled with the complications of how her individual identity and family identity overlap and intersect:

I can have small talk with you, and I don't small talk very much. I want to have a substantial conversation. It doesn't mean that we have to cry and dredge up everything, but I guess what I am saying, if I lived in another city, and my life did not impact on a day to day basis on the rest of my family. For you, Karen, to know who I am, and for us to have any kind of relationship, you'd need to know that I grew up in an alcoholic family, that I deal with this on a day to day basis. . . . And you'd have to know that - that's all there is to it. . . . So for me, the interesting part of growing up in this town where I grew up, married to someone who has a family here, and I have siblings here, I, it's a fine balancing act, even talking to you. . . . Now for me to sit here and talk to you, I'm not telling you any closet secrets. This is who I am, you can take me or leave me, like me or not, like my family, or not. (Barb)

The privilege that found the deepest hiding place was revealed as a family secret during one of the interviews. Just as there can be a degree of privilege in learning a family secret, having the "privilege" of knowing can also be a heavy burden to carry. The existence of a family secret can take many forms, and the impact on individual family members will be varied. Holding information that is not common knowledge to all includes continual decisions about what to say, who to tell, and how much to share:

Who makes me all powerful and says don't tell? Who gives me the right to have that power to exclude anyone from that knowledge? And it does hurt me that I can't . . . but there's a part of me who's just being extremely protective.

There are many ways that privilege is experienced in families. Much of what is talked about is carefully phrased and rationalized as "appropriate" for a variety of reasons. There is a strong connection between "privilege" and "fairness." A tension exists as individuals strive to demonstrate devotion to their family while at the same time honoring the uniqueness that makes them "all the same, but different."

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Overview

The purpose of this study was to examine privilege in families and uncover the complexities of sibling relationships in adulthood. My goal was to gain a clearer picture of what privilege in families means. I achieved this goal through interviewing 13 adult siblings and 3 mothers from 4 families. *Ambivalence* permeated the participants' attempts to *define* and provide examples of privilege. A commonsense understanding, having privilege versus not having privilege, reveals the dichotomous nature of the term. To engage in research that is emancipatory (Lather, 1991), dichotomies must be addressed. Investigating privilege in families among siblings challenges Cicirelli's (1995) judgment that sibling relationships are relatively egalitarian and provides a nuanced understanding of the complexities of adult sibling relationships.

Understanding privilege presents many contradictions and raises many questions. Is having privilege *good* or *bad*? Is it better to *have* privilege or *not to have* privilege? Are you *born* with privilege or do *earn* it? Can you *have* privilege and then *lose* it? Is privilege seen and felt *intangible* or *intangible* ways? Does privilege provide *freedom* or create *burden*? Is privilege *visible* or *invisible*? Through listening to participants talk about experiences in their families and relationships with siblings and parents, it became clear to me that privilege is *all* of these things and more.

My discoveries echo the findings of McIntosh (1995) that the word privilege is misleading because it "carries the connotation of being something everyone must want" (p. 83). Tensions surfaced as siblings and parents described the meaning of family, relationships among siblings, and the concept of privilege. A dominant narrative about cultural expectations emerged as participants characterized their families as close and talked of being unconditionally supportive of each other. An embedded narrative emanates from a desire for self-definition that simultaneously demonstrates uniqueness and conformity. Siblings' negotiation of the tension between dominant and embedded narratives reveals the complexity of their adult sibling relationships.

The number of individual and family stories that exist among and between the participants in this study opens the door for a variety of interpretations. Privilege can be examined through gender roles and gender consciousness as participants recalled what it was like for them growing up and how they negotiated gender throughout life. There are stories of tangible and intangible ways privilege has been afforded in families. Some of the examples deal with spending money and other illustrations involve spending time. Privilege can also be viewed as a comparison of “our” family to “families” in general. Age differences between siblings had an impact in some families, while birth order was more of an issue in others. The portrayal of privilege in families is complex. In the discussion section, I elaborate on 3 key findings that cut across many examples of privilege in families.

Discussion

Key Findings

Analysis of the data uncovered 3 key findings: Loyalty to Family and Loyalty to Self, Fairness and Favoritism, and Something Gained and Something Lost. The associations between the research questions, the coding categories, and the key findings are depicted in Table 5.5. The complex nature of the relationships among adult siblings and between siblings and their parents presents a challenge to specify clear distinctions in the data. Answering research question 4 encompasses pieces of all of the coding categories and key findings. Following a discussion of the 3 key findings, I will address 2 methodological observations: interviewing multiple family members and my experience of living in the research.

Table 5.5 Research Questions Keyed to Codes and Findings

Research Questions	Coding Categories *	Key Findings **
1. Adult Siblings - Description of Relationships	100s - 300s 500s 600s	1 2 3
2. Gender, Marital Status, Parental Status, Birth Order	100s 200s 500s 600s	2 3
3. Perceptions of Parental Expectations	400s 600s	2
4. Privilege	100s - 700s	1 2 3

* 100s Let Me Tell You About Our Family
 200s Sibling Relationships
 300s Ways we Communicate
 400s Parental Expectations and Success
 500s Changes as we Grow Older
 600s What is Privilege?
 700s The Research Process

** 1 Loyalty to Family and Loyalty to Self
 2 Fairness and Favoritism
 3 Something Gained and Something Lost

Loyalty to family and loyalty to self. The first major theme involves a juxtaposition of family reality and individual reality. As participants talked about their construction of the meaning of family (Gubrium & Holstein, 1990), they engaged in the act of juggling many obligations. Their stories were saturated with a sense of loyalty as they spoke about the importance and priority of family in their lives. There was a desire to articulate a sense of self, though at times articulating a sense of self risks a betrayal of family. Participants described the need to be known as an individual within the context of what family should be as a balancing act.

Participants experienced a decision process in the attempt to discern which reality was allowed to prevail--the family reality or the individual reality. Some gave an idealist account, which is a desire for the two realities to co-exist. Others gave a pragmatist account, underscoring the difficulty of maintaining such a dual loyalty. At times there was a "price to be paid" in choosing a

loyalty to self, as Barb described when she talked about Keith. His individual freedom came at the expense of connection to his family of origin. The “price to be paid” by Barb in her choice of family loyalty over loyalty to self was her feeling of “being trapped in my own skin.”

I am not asserting that the price is an all or nothing proposition, but that it involves some degree of sacrifice. The phenomenological concepts of intersubjectivity and stock of knowledge (Gubrium & Holstein, 1993) influenced the choices that were made. The intersubjective nature of attaching personal meaning to objects caused each family member to see situations in a different way. With the accumulation of a personal understanding of individual and family events, each participant accumulated a stock of knowledge that they used in future encounters.

Participants presented anecdotes that illustrated a number of examples when the loyalty to self is chosen, though many times they returned to a justification of that choice. Cultural expectations of conformity were demonstrated as Barb described Keith as “self-centered” and Neil described Keith as “aloof,” with each statement either prefaced or followed by why that is okay and they don’t mean it as a “bad” thing. In a similar way, Bob described Jeff’s distance from the family as something “he did to himself” due to the fact that he chose to move away.

Fairness and favoritism. As siblings and parents spoke about privilege in families they used words such as fair, favorite, even, guilty, jealousy, competition, resentment, alienated, shunned, spoiled, and babied. As they gave examples of privilege, the themes of fairness and favoritism were common. The prevalence of these themes is not surprising, since a norm in Western culture is fairness (Ihinger, 1975). There is an underlying assumption that if favoritism is shown toward one sibling, then fairness cannot be achieved. Mothers’ talked about trying to be “even” and “treat all their children the same.” Siblings were careful to add rationalizations to justify any perceived favoritism through reasons of birth order, gender, and need, among others. The way siblings were treated as they were growing up could also have an impact on their relationship with their parents in adulthood. Bedford (1992) found that adults who felt they were not favored in childhood perceive less of an emotional connection with their parents.

As siblings gave examples of privilege, they were more likely to begin with examples of privilege their siblings experienced by being the “one who got more.” Peg talked of a situation where her parents gave to her in order to “even things out.” Gerry talked about Jack being spoiled because he is the baby. Neil talked about Barb being given special considerations because she was the only female. It was also mentioned that the concern over being fair was from their parents’ perspective, not a sibling perspective. Many siblings talked about one sibling getting more or being treated differently in terms of it being “no big deal” or that it was something that “they never even thought about.” The contradictions in the explicit statements about feeling like it’s no big deal and the implicit meaning that is unstated emphasize the ambivalence that exists.

The complexity around the issues of fairness and favoritism is highlighted by a feminist perspective that analysis of families must be done in a sociocultural and historical context (Osmond & Thorne, 1993). Especially as it pertains to the issue of naming an executor, the desire to be asked even if you do not really want the responsibility demonstrates a trap that is rooted in the issue of fairness. Participants’ indicated a feeling that “to be named” was accompanied by a level of importance and was connected with being, in some way, deserving of that “honor.”

Many times siblings spoke of an “assumption” that they were being treated fairly. Bob talked about his parents’ paying for Carol’s education but never making the same offer to him. His next statements were about an “assumption” that the amount of money his parents loaned Bruce for a downpayment on a house was probably comparable to what they loaned him.

Something gained and something lost. Another theme addresses the realization that as siblings move into adulthood and gain independence from their family of origin, they also lose parts of the connection that existed with their siblings. The life course perspective demonstrates links between family, individual, and historical time (Hareven, 1987). Carol and Barb experienced loss and grieving, lamenting over the realization that relationships with siblings “will never be the same again” as they were in childhood.

Participants spoke of having the desire to maintain their relationships with their siblings, but also spoke of circumstances getting in the way. Joe talked extensively during the interview about

“wanting” to spend time with his siblings, but having to “accept” not being able to do that because “there’s just nothing I can do to change it.” A focus on the heterogeneity and diversity in changes throughout development (Bengtson & Allen, 1993) brings with it the realization that growth and transformation also include a degree of sacrifice and loss. Siblings’ dialogue about planning for their parents’ future, attempts to spend time together, and “fussing and fighting” are ways to remain connected on some level.

There is also a feeling of guilt siblings experience over not spending as much time together due to the demands of day-to-day obligations. The statements about everything changing when you get married and having less opportunity to be together because of family demands emphasize the theme of loss. Carol expressed feeling jealous and sad that she will never be as close to Bob and Jeff again as their partners Pam and Jean are.

Methodological Observations

Interviewing multiple family members. Through the use of the methodological approach of interviewing multiple family members, I struggled with a number of issues. Throughout the process of conducting this study, I sought to clarify the unit of analysis. As I coded the data and began to see the major themes emerge, I realized that I was experiencing a tension that felt similar to the tension expressed by the participants. While the loyalty to family and loyalty to self was a theme in the study, differentiating between conducting my analysis utilizing a within-family approach or a between-family approach (Deal, 1995) was an issue that I continually addressed. The complexity of the data led me to use both approaches. At times, there was more salience in comparing and contrasting individuals. In other cases, comparisons between families provided the most substantiation for the theme I was illustrating.

I sometimes worried that extent of anonymity the participants experienced may have been altered by interviewing multiple family members. Obviously, participants had the knowledge that the sample was partially comprised of the other members of their family who agreed to the interview. I did not experience that this knowledge compromised the study in terms of the comfort level of the participants.

It seemed to feel like more an issue of confidentiality among family members. Would the knowledge that I would be interviewing, or had interviewed, other family members influence the amount of information participants were willing to talk about? Would it make a difference as to the type of information they shared? How would I determine the potential and/or actual impact?

One of the reasons I chose this methodological approach was to hear multiple perspectives about sibling relationships from the same family. Although I assured them as I reviewed the consent form that I would not share any of the information we talked about with anyone else in their family, I was still unsure about the influence that information may have.

The differences in participants' comments gave me an indication of 3 types of potential influence. I heard the first type of influence through comments made in the context of an awareness on the part of the participant that they were only reporting their perceptions, such as "this is the way I see it." A statement such as this sounded more like a disclaimer that could be present in any conversation or interview.

The second type of potential influence included comments indicative of not wanting to bother with information they were not sure of (on the demographic form) because it would be easier to "get all that stuff from them," meaning other family members who had not yet been interviewed. Some participants also prefaced a response with "I'm sure they told you this," or "I don't know if Barb recalled this." It is evident these comments are being made due to their knowledge that I am talking to other members of their family in the interview process. Still, it is unclear how this may influence their response. Did they give less information because they were "sure" I have already heard that story?

The third type of potential influence creates an atmosphere of hesitancy that goes beyond general conversation or knowledge. Remarks such as "certainly don't talk about this" and "don't you ever repeat this to anybody" left questions in my mind. I did not have the feeling that they were saying that because they thought I would share the information with one of their family members. It did serve as a reminder, though, of their awareness that the opportunity would arise. In addition, there were a few people who made comments such as "I would love to know what Peg

said about that” or “I would be curious to know if any other sibling brings this up.” This was sometimes framed in a “simply curious” tone and other times with a hint of self-conscious nervousness about what might be revealed.

Another aspect of interviewing multiple family members is the added emphasis that can be given to what is left unsaid. In one family I was picking up on the way each member talked about “having our problems, but it’s just part of life.” The first family members I interviewed made no specific references to the fact that one of the siblings is a recovering alcoholic. When I talked to the sibling who is a recovering alcoholic, he spent a great deal of time talking about the tremendous impact his “getting sober” had on the “entire” family.

After having that knowledge, the omission of any reference by other family members made me wonder why they chose not to talk about it. It created more distance between the said and the unsaid because although my knowledge about the family was raised a level with each interview, the subsequent family members were at the same “starting point.” In many cases, I would have interpreted events and relationships differently if my analysis was based on only 1 or 2 family members.

Living in the research. Being a researcher interviewing multiple family members raised an additional set of issues. As I conducted the interviews, I was aware of the potential to formulate preconceived notions about family members I had not yet interviewed. It was important to me to let each person’s perspective be heard in his or her own voice. This desire led me to listen carefully to what each participant said and add each reply to my own stock of knowledge. At the same time, I remained aware of the feminist notion that research that is not value-free (Baber & Allen, 1992), and I simply proceeded with a more reflexive posture of caution.

Carrying an ever-increasing family data base over the course of the study at times left me with a feeling of uneasiness. The weight of holding a collective knowledge that included protected family secrets not yet revealed to some participants was an added level of responsibility. Throughout the interview Barb talked about her mother’s “unacknowledged” alcoholism and the huge role it played in their family. She mentioned as she was leaving that she did not think either of

her brothers would mention anything about it. I felt it was important to utilize the information I had acquired to gain entry into another layer of complexity, while stepping carefully to honor the family lore. I asked different probes as I collected more information. In some ways I was trying to open a door for conversation to occur, yet with an awareness that there was a degree of sensitivity to certain topics.

As I conducted this study, a number of events occurred that deepened my connection to understanding the lived experience of interviewing multiple family members. Just as participants wondered how their siblings or mother might answer a question, I discovered the same musings as I discussed my study with friends and colleagues. A common response to the explanation of my research topic was “I’d love to hear how my sibling/children/mother would answer those questions.”

The development of my research topic originated with my own curiosity about my family story. I was, of course, wondering about the same thing as I listened to participants explore their perceptions and weave their own family tapestry.

With each interview, I developed a more astute awareness that I was curious and interested in how *my* family would respond. I decided it would deepen my understanding of my study to “interview myself” by recording my own responses to the questions on the interview guide. I also asked my 2 sisters and my parents to answer the interview guide questions. They all agreed to “participate.” I was cognizant of the reality that I would possess a degree of double-consciousness (Baber & Allen, 1992) because I was aware of some of the nuances and had listened to a variety of responses. Reading the transcripts as I continued my analysis, I was struck by the fear that engulfed me.

I found that I had shifted my level of consciousness and was living with a fear as I read my words in the transcripts. I was trying to comprehend how I would feel if my sisters and parents read these transcripts. As I conducted the interviews I felt safe in the comfort and protection of the confidentiality of the process. I was now allowing myself to imagine what it would feel like to have to “protect” my words and filter my responses. I was effortlessly living in the feminist

practice of sharing my own stories and vulnerabilities to develop a richer connection with the participants (Belenky et al., 1986).

My sense of uncertainty, fear, and betrayal surfaced as I read my words and wondered how they would be interpreted by my family members. I wanted to add further explanation and disclaimers along the lines of “what I meant by that statement was . . .” In my process notes from my dissertation journal, I wrote:

It gave me the feeling of the ‘multiple family members’ dilemma. As I was talking to the participants, I didn’t care what I told them about *my* family - but as I reread what I shared with them, I had a real feeling of not wanting my sisters or parents to read it because I was afraid they would interpret it in a way other than how I meant it. That experience also made me think that the ‘most real’ way for me to answer the questions would probably be to excerpt all of the stories I told about my family as I was prompting the participant or simply trying to increase the level of rapport. If I put the statements I made without thinking about my family reading them together with my intentional answers to the questions, I would see and feel the tension more clearly.

I understood in a more personal way the last two lines in the acknowledgments section of Katherine Allen’s first book, Single women/family ties: “It is your story I have set out to tell. I hope this book is careful with your lives” (p.12). I have not received the “interviews” from my family, and I have not recorded my own. Perhaps my experience with these data is another glimpse of the tension between “loyalty to family and loyalty to self.”

Conclusions

The exploration of the meaning of privilege in families and the complexities of adult sibling relationships reveals some of the subtleties of what is said and what is meant. Within descriptions of adult sibling relationships, the language that accompanies an enduring search for understanding is indicative of the hidden and sometimes invisible aspects of privilege.

Based upon the data analysis, the 3 key findings, and my observations about methods and reflexivity, I draw 5 conclusions from this study. First, there is a sense of devotion to family that

is both expected and fulfilled by simply spending time together, being there for each other in times of need, and at times compromising personal needs or wants. Second, there is also an overarching sense of justice that is discussed in everyday language, but at the same time referred to as “something we don’t ever think about.” Third, descriptions of having a continuous bond among siblings is verbalized as “being the same but different ” or just feeling “something in the air,” while at the same time mourning the absence of something that is “gone forever.” Fourth, interviewing multiple family members extends the understanding of the difficulty of taking different stories heard by each family member and fitting them together into a “family photo.” Finally, maintaining an awareness of what it is like to try to “speak for your family” has a different meaning when you also hold the knowledge that everyone else is doing the same thing - but different.

Limitations

One of the strengths of this study can also be seen as a limitation. The methodological approach of interviewing multiple family members affords an excellent opportunity to explore and examine the complexities of adult sibling relationships. The ability to reveal the intricacies found in this study may not be possible through interviewing only one participant per family. The use of this method accentuates the contrasts and contradictions present in families.

It is difficult to discern the impact of a participant's knowledge that multiple family members will have the opportunity to give voice to shared family stories and secrets. Participants may be more hesitant to talk about "problems" that involve other family members. A potential solution would be to conduct a number of follow-up interviews with the same participants. This would enable the researcher to build additional trust and access information about more sensitive topics.

Another possible limitation is the geographic location of the majority of the participants in this study. One family member brought up the fact that her brother is gay. The mother in this family denied my request to participate in the study, and called her son who is gay and asked him not to participate. When this issue was discussed during the interview, the participant indicated that she believed the reason her mother would not participate involved a combination her brother's sexual orientation and residing in a small, fairly conservative town. Conducting interviews with participants living in larger, urban settings may increase the level of anonymity and potentially alleviate complications such as the one experienced with the family in this study.

Recommendations for Future Research

There is a great deal of potential for future research in the area of adult sibling relationships and privilege in families. The issue of finding ways to provide a greater level of anonymity for participants surfaced in this study. To gain a deeper understanding of privilege in families, the potential for richer data exists if the study is designed to allow for an increased level of familiarity between the participants and the researcher. As suggested above, follow-up interviews would be one recommendation. Another alternative would be to begin by conducting a focus group interview with the entire family. This would provide the opportunity for all family members to be aware of

the issues that are discussed. It would also allow the researcher to observe the interaction between family members. Follow-up interviews could be conducted with individual family members to further explore topics and relationship issues that surfaced during the family focus group.

Another recommendation would be to conduct focus groups with adult siblings from different families. Focus groups would allow for different points of view to spur additional conversation (Krueger, 1994). Conducting focus group research with multiple groups would also be an approach to add participants to the study in a systematic way. Investigating a number of sibling characteristics in greater depth would provide a wealth of information. Examining the potential influence of birth order, gender, race, class, and sexual orientation would assist in uncovering additional layers of hidden privilege.

Conducting interviews or focus groups with adult siblings who have experienced the death of a parent would provide another avenue to investigate the issue of privilege. Introducing the topic in this study revealed a variety of dynamics. The preliminary discussions among siblings in this study demonstrated a lack of shared conversation among all siblings. Members of the family who had experienced the death of their father talked of the hierarchy that existed before, during, and after their father's death.

Summary

Exploring adult sibling relationships and privilege in families provided informative insights about relationships, individual growth, and family meaning. Asking about privilege accentuates the difficulty in talking about issues of fairness and the absence of a "language" that enables individuals to express notions of "difference." This study also demonstrated the complexity of gathering information from multiple perspectives and the potential to examine in greater detail specific aspects of privilege and adult sibling relationships.

REFERENCES

- Aldous, J. (1990). Family development and the life course: Two perspectives on family change. Journal of Marriage and the Family, *52*, 571-583.
- Allan, G. (1977). Sibling solidarity. Journal of Marriage and the Family, *39*, 177-184.
- Allen, K. R. (1989). Single women/Family ties: Life histories of older women. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Allen, K. R., & Baber, K. M. (1992). Ethical and epistemological tensions in applying a postmodern perspective to feminist research. Psychology of Women Quarterly, *16*, 1-15.
- Allen, K. R., & Farnsworth, E. B. (1993). Reflexivity in teaching about families. Family Relations, *42*, 351-356.
- Allen, K. R., & Wilcox, K. L. (1996, November). Becoming an activist: Older parents of adult gay children. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Gerontological Society of America, Washington, D.C.
- Aquilino, W. S. (1996). The returning adult child and parental experience at midlife. In C. D. Ryff & M. M. Seltzer (Eds.), The parental experience in midlife (pp. 423-458). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Arling, G. (1976). The elderly widow and her family, neighbors, and friends. Journal of Marriage and the Family, *38*, 756-768.
- Avioli, P. S. (1989). The social support functions of sibling in later life. American Behavioral Scientist, *33*, 45-57.
- Baber, K. M., & Allen, K. R. (1992). Women and families: Feminist reconstructions. New York: Guilford.
- Bank, S. P., & Kahn, M. D. (1975). Sisterhood-brotherhood is powerful: Sibling subsystems and family therapy. Family Process, *14*, 311-337.
- Bank, S. P., & Kahn, M. D. (1982). The sibling bond. New York: Basic Books.
- Bedford, V. H. (1989a). Sibling research in historical perspective. American Behavioral Scientist, *33*, 6-18.

Bedford, V. H. (1989b). A comparison of thematic apperceptions of sibling affiliation, conflict, and separation at two periods of adulthood. International Journal of Aging and Human Development, 28, 53-66.

Bedford, V. H. (1989c). Ambivalence in adult sibling relationships. Journal of Family Issues, 10, 211-224.

Bedford, V. H. (1992). Memories of parental favoritism and the quality of parent-child ties in adulthood. Journal of Gerontology, 47, S149-S155.

Bedford, V. H. (1995). Sibling relationships in middle and old age. In R. Blieszner & V. H. Bedford (Eds.), Handbook of aging and the family (pp. 201-222). Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

Belenky, M. F., Clinchy, B. M., Goldberger, N. R., & Tarule, J. M. (1986). Women's ways of knowing: The development of self, voice, and mind. New York: Basic.

Bengtson, V. L., & Allen, K. R. (1993). The life course perspective applied to families over time. In P. G. Boss, W. J. Doherty, R. LaRossa, W. R. Schumm, & S. K. Steinmetz (Eds.), Sourcebook of family theories and methods: A contextual approach (pp. 469-499). New York: Plenum.

Bogdan, R. C. & Biklen, S. K. (1992). Qualitative research for education (2nd ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Bowerman, C. E., & Dobash, R. M. (1974). Structural variations in inter-sibling affect. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 36, 48-54.

Brock, L. J., & Jennings, G. H. (1993). Sexuality education: What daughters in their 30s wish their mothers had told them. Family Relations, 42, 61-65.

Brubaker, T. H. (Ed.). (1985). Later life families. Beverly Hills: Sage.

Cicirelli, V. G. (1980). Sibling influence in adulthood: A life span perspective. In L. W. Poon (Ed.), Aging in the 1980s (pp. 455-462). Washington, D. C.: American Psychological Association.

Cicirelli, V. G. (1982). Sibling influence throughout the lifespan. In M. E. Lamb & B. Sutton-Smith (Eds.), Sibling relationships: Their nature and significance across the lifespan (pp. 267-284). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Cicirelli, V. G. (1985). The role of siblings as family caregivers. In W. J. Sauer & R. T. Coward (Eds.), Social support networks and the care of the elderly: Theory, research, practice and policy (pp. 93-107). New York: Springer.

Cicirelli, V. G. (1988). Interpersonal relationships among elderly sibling: Implications for clinical practice. In M. D. Kahn & K. G. Lewis (Eds.), Siblings in therapy (pp. 435-456). New York: W. W. Norton.

Cicirelli, V. G. (1989). Feelings of attachment to siblings and well being in later life. Psychology and Aging, 4, 211-216.

Cicirelli, V. G. (1991) Sibling relationships in adulthood. In S. P. Pfeifer & M. B. Sussman (Eds.), Families: Intergenerational and generational connections (pp. 291-310). New York: Haworth Press.

Cicirelli, V. G. (1995). Sibling relationships across the life span. New York: Plenum Press.

Connidis, I. A. (1989). Sibling ties. In I. A. Connidis (Ed.), Family ties and aging (pp. 71-86). Toronto: Butterworths Canada.

Connidis, I. A. (1992). Life transitions and the adult sibling tie: A qualitative study. Journal of Marriage and Family Relations, 54, 972-982.

Connidis, I. A., & Campbell, L. D. (1995). Closeness, confiding, and contact among siblings in middle and late adulthood. Journal of Family Issues, 16, 722-745.

Daly, K. (1992). The fit between qualitative research and characteristics of families. In J. Gilgun, K. Daly, & G. Handel (Eds.), Qualitative methods in family research (3-21). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Deal, J. E. (1995). Utilizing data from multiple family members: A within-family approach. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 57, 1109-1121.

Du Bois, B. (1983). Passionate scholarship: Notes on values, knowing and method in feminist social science. In G. Bowles & R. D. Klein (Eds.), Theories of women's studies (pp. 105-116). London: Routledge.

Elder, G. H., Jr. (1978). Family history and the life course. In T. K. Hareven (Ed.), Transitions: The family and the life course in historical perspective (pp. 17-64). New York: Academic Press.

Elder, G. H., Jr. (1991). Life course. In E. F. Borgatta & M. L. Borgatta (Eds.), The encyclopedia of sociology (pp. 1120-1130). New York: MacMillan.

Finch, J. (1989). Family obligations and social change. Cambridge, MA: Basic Blackwell (Polity).

Fonow, M. M., & Cook, J. A. (1991). Back to the future: A look at the second wave of feminist epistemology and methodology. In M. M. Fonow & J. A. Cook (Eds.), Beyond methodology: Feminist scholarship as lived research (pp. 1-15). Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Goetting, A. (1986). The developmental tasks of siblingship over the life cycle. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 48, 703-714.

Gold, D. T. (1989). Generational solidarity. American Behavioral Scientist, 33, 19-32.

Gubrium, J. F., & Holstein, J. A. (1990). What is family? Mountain View, CA: Mayfield.

Gubrium, J. F., & Holstein, J. A. (1993). Phenomenology, ethnomethodology, and family discourse. In P. Boss, W. J. Doherty, R. LaRossa, W. Schumm, & S. K. Steinmetz (Eds.) Sourcebook of family theories and methods: A contextual approach (pp. 651-675). New York: Plenum.

Gubrium, J. F. (1987). Organizational embeddedness and family life. In T. Brubaker (Ed.) Aging, health and family: Long-term care. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Hagestad, G. O. (1984). The continuous bond: A dynamic, multigenerational perspective on parent-child relations between adults. In M. Perlmutter (Ed.), Parent-child interaction and parent-child relations in child development (pp. 129-158). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

- Hareven, T. K. (1987). Historical analysis of the family. In M. B. Sussman & S. K. Steinmetz (Eds.), Handbook of marriage and the family (pp. 37-57). New York: Plenum.
- hooks, b. (1990). Yearning: Race, gender, and cultural politics. Boston: South End Press.
- Ihinger, M. (1975). The referee role and norms of equity: A contribution toward a theory of sibling conflict. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 37, 515-524.
- Irish, D. P. (1964). Sibling interaction: A neglected aspect in family life research. Social Forces, 42, 279-288.
- Kaufman, S. R. (1994). In-depth interviewing. In J. F. Gubrium & A. Sankar (Eds.), Qualitative methods in aging research (pp. 123-136). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Krieger, S. (1985). Beyond "subjectivity": The use of self in social science. Qualitative Sociology, 8, 309-324.
- Krueger, R. A. (1994). Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Lamb, M. E. (1982). Sibling relationships across the lifespan: An overview and introduction. In M. E. Lamb & B. Sutton-Smith (Eds.), Sibling relationships: Their nature and significance across the lifespan (pp. 1-11). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Lather, P. (1991). Getting smart: Feminist research and pedagogy with/in the postmodern. New York: Routledge.
- Lee, T. R., Mancini, J. S., & Maxwell, J. W. (1990). Sibling relationships in adulthood: Contact patterns and motivations. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 52, 431-440.
- Leslie, L. A., & Sollie, D. L. (1994). Why a book on feminist relationship research? In D. L. Sollie & L. A. Leslie (Eds.), Gender, families, and close relationships (pp. 1-15). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Levin, I. (1993). Family as mapped realities. Journal of Family Issues, 14, 82-91.
- Longino, C. F., Jr., & Lipman, A. (1981). Married and spouseless men and women in planned retirement communities: Support network differentials. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 43, 58-69.

Mancini, J. A., & Blieszner, R. (1989). Aging parent and adult children: Research themes in intergenerational relations. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 51, 275-290.

McIntosh, P. (1995). White privilege and male privilege: A personal account of coming to see correspondences through work in women's studies. In M. L. Andersen & P. H. Collins (Eds.), Race, class, and gender: An anthology (2nd ed., pp. 76-87). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Modell, J., Furstenberg, F., & Hershberg, T. (1976). Social change and transition to adulthood in historical perspective. Journal of Family History, 1, 7-32.

Mott, P. E. (1965). The organization of society. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Osmond, M. W., & Thorne, B. (1993). Feminist theories: The social construction of gender in society. In W. J. Doherty, P. G. Boss, R. LaRossa, W. R. Schumm, & S. K. Steinmetz (Eds.), Sourcebook of family theories and methods: A contextual approach (pp. 591-623). New York: Plenum.

Pollack, O. (1967). The outlook for the American family. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 29, 193-205.

Rosenblatt, P. C., & Fischer, L. R. (1993). Qualitative Family Research. In W. J. Doherty, P. G. Boss, R. LaRossa, W. R. Schumm, & S. K. Steinmetz (Eds.), Sourcebook of family theories and methods: A contextual approach (pp. 167-177). New York: Plenum.

Ross, H. G., & Milgram, J. I. (1982). Important variables in adult sibling relationships: A qualitative study. In M. E. Lamb & B. Sutton-Smith (Eds.), Sibling relationships: Their nature and significance across the lifespan (pp. 225-249). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Rossi, A. S., & Rossi, P. H. (1990) Of human bonding: Parent-child relations across the life course. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.

Ryff, C. D., & Seltzer, M. M. (1995). Family relations and individual development in adulthood and aging. In R. Blieszner & V. H. Bedford (Eds.), Handbook of aging and the family (pp. 95-113). Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

Ryff, C. D., Schmutte, P. S., & Lee, Y. H. (1996). How children turn out: implications for parental self-evaluation. In C. D. Ryff & M. M. Seltzer (Eds.), The parental experience in midlife (pp.383-422). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Schvaneveldt, J. D., & Ihinger, M. (1979). Sibling relationships in the family. In W. R. Burr, R. Hill, F. I. Nye, & I. R. Reiss (Eds.) Contemporary theories about the family. Vol. I. Research-based theories (pp. 453-467). New York: Free Press.

Seltzer, M. M. (1989). The three R's of life cycle sibships. American Behavioral Scientist, 33, 107-115.

Shanas, E. (1979). Social myth as hypothesis: The case of the family relations of old people. The Gerontologist, 19, 3-9.

Simon, B. L. (1987). Never married women. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Spitze, G., & Logan, J. R. (1991). Sibling structure and intergenerational relations. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 53, 871-884.

Stack, C. B., & Burton, L. M. (1993). Kinscripts. Journal of Comparative Family Studies, 24, 157-170.

Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1990). Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques. Newbury Park: Sage.

Suitor, J. J., Pillemer, K., Keeton, S., & Robison, J. (1995). Aged parents and aging children: Determinants of relationship quality. In R. Blieszner & V. H. Bedford (Eds.), Handbook of aging and the family (pp. 223-242). Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

Sutton-Smith, B., & Rosenberg, B. (1970). The sibling. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

Taylor, S. J., & Bogdan, R. (1984). Introduction to qualitative research methods: The search for meaning (2nd ed.). New York: John Wiley and Sons.

Thompson, L. (1992). Feminist methodology for family studies. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 54, 3-18.

Umberson, D. (1992). Relationships between adult children and their parents: Psychological consequences for both generations. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 54, 664-674.

Westkott, M. (1979). Feminist methodology for family studies. Harvard Educational Review, 49, 422-430.

Weston, K. (1992). The politics of gay families. In B. Thorne, with M. Yalom, (Eds.), Rethinking the family: Some feminist questions (rev. ed.) (pp. 119-139). Boston: Northeastern University Press.

APPENDIX A

Original Interview Guide

Sibling Interviews

The following questions will be asked of each participant during the in-depth interview. Variation in the order of the questions asked will be permitted in order to facilitate a conversational flow of questioning and promote rapport between the participant and the interviewer. Probes will be utilized to encourage elaboration of responses and to clarify the interviewer's understanding of the responses.

Introductory comments:

To begin, can you tell me a little bit about yourself?
(probe: occupation, interests)

Tell me about your family.

What is a typical day like for you?

Siblings

Tell me a little bit about each of your siblings.
(probe: age, gender, birth order, race, cultural/ethnic background, education, occupation)

Tell me about your relationships with your siblings.

Can you tell me about some of the ways you spend time with your siblings?

What are some of the ways that you feel you are the same as your siblings?

What are some of the ways that you feel you are different from your siblings?

Gender awareness

Do you feel that gender has played a part in your life choices? If so, how?

Can you tell me about some of the ways you feel gender has played a part in the relationships with your siblings? (probe: are there certain tasks that were done by sisters or brothers?)

Parental expectations

What is your perception of how your mother would describe "success" for you as an adult?

What is your perception of how your father would describe "success" for you as an adult?

Which members of your family do you feel have met your parent's description of "success?"

In what ways do you feel your parent's expectations are the same for their children?

In what ways do you feel your parent's expectations are different for their children?

Family Interaction

Can you tell me about the last holiday gathering shared by your family?
(probe: who attended, who did not attend, what occurred)

What are some of the traditions and rituals in your family?
(probe: how were they established, who maintains them, have they been altered over time)

Original Interview Guide

Parent Interviews

The following questions will be asked of each participant during the in-depth interview. Variation in the order of the questions asked will be permitted in order to facilitate a conversational flow of questioning and promote rapport between the participant and the interviewer. Probes will be utilized to encourage elaboration of responses and to clarify the interviewer's understanding of the responses.

Introductory comments:

To begin, can you tell me a little bit about yourself?
(probe: occupation, interests)

Tell me about your family.

What is a typical day like for you?

Siblings

Can you tell me about a unique characteristic of your relationship with each of your children?
(probe: different ways you spend time together, types of support given and received)

Tell me about the ways in which your adult children spend time with each other.

Gender awareness

Do you feel that gender has played a part in your life choices? If so, how?

How has gender been dealt with in your family?
(probe: certain tasks assigned to male or female children, have life skills such as cooking, cleaning, lawnwork, etc. been taught to both female and male children, are "traditional" gender roles followed or have you attempted to raise your children in a "gender neutral" environment)

Parental expectations

In general, what is your definition of "success" for your children?

Are your expectations the same for each of your children?
(probe: differences due to age, abilities, past experiences)

Tell me about the roles you have seen your children play at different points throughout their lives.
(probe: has there been a certain child that is the organizer, the leader, the follower, the quiet one, the loud one, the rebel, the conformist - and have those roles changed over time?)

Family Interaction

Can you tell me about the last holiday gathering shared by your family?
(probe: who attended, who did not attend, what occurred)

What are some of the traditions and rituals in your family?
(probe: how were they established, who maintains them, have they been altered over time)

Revised Interview Guide

Sibling Interviews

Introductory comments:

To begin, can you tell me a little bit about yourself?

(probe: occupation, interests)

Tell me about your family.

What is a typical day like for you?

Siblings

Tell me a little bit about each of your siblings.

(probe: age, gender, birth order, race, cultural/ethnic background, education, occupation)

Tell me about your relationship with each of your siblings.

Can you tell me about some of the ways you spend time with your siblings?

What are some of the ways that you feel you are the same as your siblings?

What are some of the ways that you feel you are different from your siblings?

Have you had a discussion with your siblings about matters such as caregiving for your parents, power of attorney, executor? If not, what assumptions do you have about how it would be?

(probes: what was it like, what was discussed, were decisions made, what was catalyst)

Gender awareness

Do you feel that gender has played a part in your life choices? If so, how?

Can you tell me about some of the ways you feel gender has played a part in the relationships with your siblings? (probe: are there certain tasks that were done by sisters or brothers?)

Parental expectations

Tell me about some things you think it was important for your parents to instill in you as you were growing up. What did they feel it was important as you grew up and became adults?

What is your perception of how your mother would describe “success” for you as an adult?

What is your perception of how your father would describe “success” for you as an adult?

Which members of your family do you feel have met your parent’s description of “success?”

In what ways do you feel your parent’s expectations are the same for their children?

In what ways do you feel your parent’s expectations are different for their children?

Family Interaction

What are the times your family gets together?

Can you tell me about the last gathering shared by your family?

(probe: who attended, who did not attend, what occurred)

What are some of the traditions and rituals in your family?
(probe: how were they established, who maintains them, have they been altered over time)

Can you tell me about an event that pulled your family closer together?

Can you tell me about an event that pulled your family apart?

Privilege

Can you describe your understanding or definition of privilege in families?

Tell me about ways that certain siblings had or have privilege in your family.
(probe - ways that a certain person is in or out of family fold, has advantage, disadvantage)

Revised Interview Guide
Parent Interviews

Introductory comments:

To begin, can you tell me a little bit about yourself?
(probe: occupation, interests)

Tell me about your family.

What is a typical day like for you?

Siblings

Can you tell me about a unique characteristic of your relationship with each of your children?
(probe: different ways you spend time together, types of support given and received)

Tell me about the ways in which your adult children spend time with each other.

Are there times when you have been closer to one of your children in particular?

Gender awareness

Do you feel that gender has played a part in your life choices? If so, how?

How has gender been dealt with in your family?

(probe: certain tasks assigned to male or female children, have life skills such as cooking, cleaning, lawnwork, etc. been taught to both female and male children, are “traditional” gender roles followed or have you attempted to raise your children in a “gender neutral” environment)

Parental expectations

In general, what is your definition of “success” for your children?

Are your expectations the same for each of your children?
(probe: differences due to age, abilities, past experiences)

Tell me about the roles you have seen your children play at different points throughout their lives.
(probe: has there been a certain child that is the organizer, the leader, the follower, the quiet one, the loud one, the rebel, the conformist - and have those roles changed over time?)

Family Interaction

Can you tell me about the last holiday gathering shared by your family?
(probe: who attended, who did not attend, what occurred)

What are some of the traditions and rituals in your family?
(probe: how were they established, who maintains them, have they been altered over time)

Can you tell me about an event that pulled your family closer together?

Can you tell me about an event that pulled your family apart?

Privilege

Can you describe your understanding or definition of privilege in families?

Tell me about ways that certain siblings had or have privilege in your family.
(probe - ways that a certain person is in or out of family fold, has advantage, disadvantage)

APPENDIX B

Demographic Worksheet

Name of Sibling:

Date of Birth:

Birthplace:

Race:

Marital Status:

Education:

Current Residence:

Cultural/Ethnic background:

Parental Status:

Occupational Status:

Name of Sibling:

Date of Birth:

Birthplace:

Race:

Marital Status:

Education:

Current Residence:

Cultural/Ethnic background:

Parental Status:

Occupational Status:

Name of Sibling:

Date of Birth:

Birthplace:

Race:

Marital Status:

Education:

Current Residence:

Cultural/Ethnic background:

Parental Status:

Occupational Status:

Parent Information

Name of Mother:

Date of Birth:

Birthplace:

Current Residence:

Race:

Cultural/Ethnic background:

Marital Status:

Education:

Occupational Status:

Name of Father:

Date of Birth:

Birthplace:

Current Residence:

Race:

Cultural/Ethnic background:

Marital Status:

Education:

Occupational Status:

APPENDIX C

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY**APPLICATION FOR APPROVAL OF RESEARCH INVOLVING
HUMAN SUBJECTS****Project Title:**

Understanding Complexity in Adult Sibling Relationships

Investigator:

Karen L. Wilcox, M.S.

Doctoral Candidate

Department of Family and Child Development
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

Research Protocol**Justification of Project**

The purpose of this research is to explore adult sibling relationships. Particular attention will be given to individual and collective experiences within the sibling subsystem and how adult siblings relate to each other over time. I will also investigate adult sibling's perceptions of their parent's expectations about their personal and professional activities and accomplishments. Few research studies have linked individual sibling relationships to the broader issue of family relationships. The unit of analysis used in much of the research on adult sibling relationships has focused on the investigation of individual perceptions or dyads. The knowledge gained by the inclusion of each adult sibling in the subsystem will contribute to a more informed understanding of family relationships in adulthood.

Procedures

In-depth interviews will be conducted by the investigator with four to six families consisting of at least three adult siblings in each family, and at least one parent from each family. A pilot study was conducted to refine the interview questions and gain insight into adult sibling relationships. Face-to-face interviews will be conducted with participants within a reasonable driving distance (up to approximately 3 hours). Telephone interviews will be conducted with participants who do not live within a reasonable driving distance. Follow-up interviews may be conducted with some or all of the participants as needed. One example would be to obtain comparable information on all participants. For instance, it may be necessary to request follow-up data from a previous participant if all other respondents provided information on a particular topic or family member. The sample will be recruited through making personal contact with a number of organizations at local colleges and universities, churches, schools, and community organizations. Participants in the sample will include families in which all adult siblings are at least 30 and were raised by the parents who will be interviewed. Recruitment will also be done by personal contact with colleagues of the investigator. A demographic worksheet will be filled out on each family to aid in data collection and analysis (see Appendix A).

An initial contact with each respondent will be made to introduce the study, to confirm eligibility to participate, and to obtain potential days, times, and locations for the interview. Interviews will require from one to two hours to complete. Respondents will be interviewed at a mutually agreed upon time and location. Interviews will be audio tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The interview guide is included in Appendix B.

Risks and Benefits

Volunteers for this project will be assured of their right to withdraw from the research at any time, before or during the time of the interview. Interview questions are not intended to cause risk.

Although no guarantee of benefits will be offered for participation in this project, several potential benefits can be identified. First, this study will provide information about the unique characteristics of the relationship between adult siblings across different times of their lives. Second, the study will provide the opportunity for participants to make contributions from their experiences and to be valued as experts in constructing accurate knowledge about their family circumstances from their point of view. Third, through the collection of this information about adult siblings and their perceptions of parental expectations, the obtained knowledge will inform the direction of future research on sibling relationships and parent-adult child relationships.

Confidentiality/Anonymity

The interviews will be conducted by the investigator. The list of names and telephone numbers of the participants, as well as audiotapes, will be kept by the investigator in a locked file cabinet and will be erased after the tapes have been transcribed. The investigator will have access to the audiotapes and transcripts in order to collaborate with her advisor and committee on conducting data analysis throughout the research project. Audiotapes and transcripts will be coded with numbers to replace identifying information. The tapes will be transcribed by the researcher. In the event that the researcher is able to hire additional professional transcriptionists, they will be informed and reminded of the importance of the confidentiality of the interview content. Reports and presentations of the results and conclusions of this study will use pseudonyms only.

Informed Consent

An Informed Consent for Participation of Investigative Projects is attached. Each participant will receive a copy.

Biographical Sketch

Karen L. Wilcox, M.S.

The investigator is a doctoral candidate in Family Studies in the Department of Family and Child Development. She successfully completed the following coursework pertaining to research statistics, methodology, and family studies:

EDRE 6604	Behavioral Science Methodology in Education
EDRE 6634	Advanced Statistics for Education
FCD 5974	Independent Study in Applied Statistical Techniques
FCD 5514	Research Methods
FCD 6514	Advanced Research Methods
FCD 5314	Development of Marriage and Family Research and Theory
FCD 5324	Marriage and Family Relationships
FCD 5334	Theories of Marriage and the Family
FCD 6324	Process in Relationships

The investigator's experience in conducting qualitative research includes:

Research specialist with her advisor, Dr. Katherine R. Allen, during the summer of 1995 on the research project entitled "Older Parents of Gay or Lesbian Children: Strategies for Dealing with

Non-Normative Life Course Transitions.” She transcribed interview tapes and assisted with the organization and initial analysis of the data.

Conducted interviews of college-aged women during the fall of 1995 for the research project entitled “Close Relationships Between Nieces and Aunts: An Exploration of the Intersections of Gender and Sexual Orientation.”

Conducted focus group interviews (one with older women and one with college-aged women) during the spring of 1996 for the research project entitled “Relationships Between Sisters: An Exploration of the Sister Bond from a Feminist Perspective,” which served as a pilot project for this study.

Research specialist during the summer and fall of 1996 with one of her committee members, Dr. Victoria R. Fu, to analyze previously collected and transcribed qualitative data from a study on “Reflective Teaching.”

Katherine R. Allen, Ph.D., Dissertation Advisor

Dr. Allen is the faculty advisor for the first investigator. She has considerable experience conducting qualitative research projects, e.g., life history interviews with working-class White women from the 1910 birth cohort (Allen, 1989); in-depth interviews of older African American women from a rural, impoverished community (Allen & Chin-Sang, 1990); in-depth interviews with caregiving daughters and their aging mothers (Walker & Allen, 1991); and a meta analysis documenting the lack of social science research on families with lesbian and gay members (Allen & Demo, 1995). Dr. Allen also teaches FCD 6514, Advanced Research Methods, a required graduate course on qualitative methodologies.

APPENDIX D

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY**Informed Consent for Participants
of Investigative Projects**

Title of Project: Understanding Complexity in Adult Sibling Relationships

Investigator: Karen L. Wilcox, M.S.

I. THE PURPOSE OF THIS RESEARCH/PROJECT

You are invited to participate in a study about the experiences of adult siblings in families. I will explore the relationships among adult siblings. I will also collect information on the adult sibling's perceptions of their parent's expectations about their personal and professional activities and accomplishments. Four to six families with at least three adult siblings over the age of 30 who were raised by the parents who will be interviewed will be included in the study. The knowledge gained by including each adult sibling will contribute to a better understanding of family relationships in adulthood.

II. PROCEDURES

I will be asking you some general questions about your background (for example age, education, and occupation). I will also talk to you about adult sibling relationships in your family and the relationships between adult children and parents. The interviews will take place in a location and at a time convenient to both of us and will require approximately one to two hours of your time. There is a possibility that follow-up interviews will be requested from some participants.

III. RISKS

The interview questions are not intended to cause risk.

IV. BENEFITS OF THIS PROJECT

Your participation in the project will provide information that may be helpful to other family members and to family professionals. This study will provide information about the characteristics of adult sibling relationships. The study will provide the opportunity for participants to tell their own stories and provide information about their family from their point of view. The information will add a new source of understanding about adult sibling relationships and parent-adult child relationships in families to the existing knowledge in the field of family studies.

No guarantee of benefits has been made to encourage you to participate.

V. EXTENT OF ANONYMITY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

The responses of individuals who participate in this study will be kept strictly confidential. At no time will I release the results of the study to anyone other than the individuals working on the project without your written consent. The information you provide will have your name removed and only a subject number or pseudonym will identify you during analyses and any written reports of the research.

The interview will be audio tape-recorded. The tapes will be transcribed by the investigator or a professional transcriptionist who will be apprised of the confidentiality of the interview information. The investigator, transcriptionist, and the investigator's faculty advisor will be the only

people who will have access to the tapes. The list of names and telephone numbers of the participants, as well as audiotapes, will be kept by the investigator in a locked file cabinet and will be erased after the tapes have been transcribed.

VI. COMPENSATION

Other than sincere appreciation, there is no compensation for participation in this project.

VII. FREEDOM TO WITHDRAW

You are free to withdraw from this study at any time without penalty. You are free not to answer any question(s) that you choose without penalty.

VIII. APPROVAL OF RESEARCH

This research project has been approved, as required, by the Institutional Review Board for Research Involving Human Subjects at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, and by the Department of Family and Child Development.

IX. SUBJECT'S RESPONSIBILITIES

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

X. SUBJECT'S PERMISSION

I have read and understand the Informed Consent and conditions of this project. I have had all my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent for participation in this project.

If I participate, I may withdraw at any time without penalty. I agree to abide by the rules of this project.

Signature

Date

Should I have any questions about this research or its conduct, I may contact:

Karen L. Wilcox, M.S.
Investigator

Phone: 540-231-2537

Katherine R. Allen, Ph.D.
Faculty Advisor

Phone: 540-231-6526

H. Thomas Hurd, Ph.D.
Chair, Institutional Review Board
Research Division

Phone: 540-231-5281

APPENDIX E

CODING SCHEME

“FLOATING ON THE SURFACE, THEN WADING IN”

100 Let me tell you about our family

- 101 how I perceive our family
- 102 how our family spends time together
- 103 gender roles as we were growing up

200 Sibling relationships

- 204 sibling relationship characteristics
- 205 similarities and differences among siblings
- 206 closeness between certain siblings

300 Ways we communicate

- 307 the said, the unsaid, the assumed
- 308 avoiding conflict, maintaining harmony
- 309 giving and receiving advice and insights

400 Parental expectations and success

- 410 perceptions of what our parents expected, values they instilled
- 411 mother’s descriptions of parental expectations
- 412 perceptions of how our parents viewed success for us
- 413 mother’s descriptions of success for their children

“DIVING DEEPER - INTO MURKY WATER”

500 Changes as we grow older

- 514 spending time together in adulthood
- 515 how my life impacts my relationship with my family of origin
- 516 planning for our parent’s future
- 517 times we have pulled together
- 518 times that have pushed us apart

600 What is privilege?

- 619 elements of privilege as described by participants
- 620 how various siblings were (and are) treated
- 621 impacts of gender
- 622 birth order issues
- 623 justifying privilege

“CREATING RIPPLES AND WAVES”

700 The research process

- 724 interviewing multiple family members
- 725 impact of being the researcher - my questions and cautions
- 726 impact of being a participant - process and content

KAREN L. WILCOX
355 Academy Street
Salem, Virginia 24153
(540)389-5358
e-mail: kwilcox@vt.edu

EDUCATION:

- Ph.D. 1997 Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University
 Department of Family and Child Development
 Major area: Family Studies
 Certificate in Gerontology
- M.S. 1984 Radford University
 Department of Counseling and Student Development
 Major area: Counseling and Student Development
 Emphasis in College Student Personnel
- B.S. 1982 State University of New York - College at Fredonia
 Department of Education
 Major area: Elementary Education
 Emphasis in Early Childhood Education

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

- 1996 - Research Associate, Army School Age and Teen Project
 Program Evaluation Research Grant - USDA/Department of the Army
 Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University
- 1996 Adjunct Faculty
 Taught undergraduate course during summer session
 Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University
- 1994 - 1996 Graduate Teaching Assistant
 Full responsibility for preparation and teaching of undergraduate course in
 the Department of Family and Child Development
 Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University
- 1995 Research Assistant
 Research Project - Faculty Advisor
 Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University
- 1984 - 1994 Assistant Dean of Students
 Roanoke College, Salem, VA

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS:

National Council on Family Relations

Southeast Council on Family Relations

Southern Gerontological Society

Sigma Phi Omega - Gerontological Honor Society

Omicron Delta Kappa - Leadership Honor Society

Phi Kappa Phi - Academic Honor Society

ELECTED / APPOINTED SERVICE POSITIONS:

1995 - 1997 Student/New Professional Representative
Feminism and Family Studies Section
National Council on Family Relations

1996 - 1997 Student Representative
Department Head Search Committee
College of Human Resources and Education
Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University

1996 - 1997 Journal Club Coordinator
Sigma Phi Omega
Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University

1994 - 1997 Family and Child Development Representative
College of Human Resources and Education Advisory Board
Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University

GRANTS

1997 Graduate Research Development Project Grant
Graduate Student Association
Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University

PRESENTATIONS

Wilcox, K. L. (1997, April). Privilege in families: Complexity in adult sibling relationships. Brainstorming session presented at the Southeastern Symposium on Child and Family Studies, Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University, Blacksburg, Virginia.

Greenberg, P., Schubert, E., Shome, S., Stone, T., Usita, P., & Wilcox, K. (1997, March). Doing feminist research: Experiences from a dissertation support group. Panelist for seminar presentation for Women's Month at Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University, Blacksburg, Virginia.

Allen, K. R., & Wilcox, K. L. (1996, November). Becoming an activist: Older parents of adult gay children. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Gerontological Society of America, Washington, D. C.

Greenberg, P. A., Teaster, P. B., Usita, P. M., & Wilcox, K. L. (1996, November). The telling is in the asking: The use of qualitative methodologies in aging research. Roundtable conducted at the annual meeting of the Gerontological Society of America, Washington, D. C.

Ewing, J. A., & Wilcox, K. L. (1995, November). Maximizing your graduate school experience. Roundtable conducted at the annual meeting of the National Council on Family Relations, Portland, OR.

Greenberg, P. A., & Wilcox, K. L. (1995, November). The tapestry of pedagogy: Weaving feminism through introductory courses in family studies. Roundtable conducted at the annual meeting of the National Council on Family Relations, Portland, OR.