

PRIVILEGE IN FAMILIES:
COMPLEXITY IN ADULT SIBLING RELATIONSHIPS

By

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(ABSTRACT)

The purpose of this study was to examine privilege in families and uncover the complexities of sibling relationships in adulthood. Through interviewing 13 adult siblings and 3 mothers from 4 families my goal was to gain a clearer picture of what privilege in families means. The sample consisted of a family with 3 sisters, a family with 3 brothers and sister, a family with 4 brothers, and a family with 2 brothers and sister. The adult siblings ranged in age from 30 to 60, with an average age of 42. The mothers ranged in age from 62 to 70, with an average age of 67.

The study was guided by three theoretical frameworks: a life course, a phenomenological, and a feminist perspective. I conducted this study utilizing an integration of qualitative and feminist methodologies. I used a snowball sampling technique to recruit participants. Data were collected through the use of qualitative in-depth interviews. The interview guides were developed based on the research questions, the review of literature, and the theories guiding the study.

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 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.

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