

A family stress approach to understanding  
sibling relationships following parental divorce

by

Renée Elizabeth Wilkins-Clark

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Major Professor  
Dr. Duane Crawford

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## **Abstract**

This study utilized a family stress theory perspective to examine differences between young adults with married parents and those who experienced parental divorce and whether or not levels of perceived sibling support and perceptions of experiential discrepancy influence sibling relationship closeness following parental divorce. The sample was recruited using Amazon Mechanical Turk and consisted of young adults who experienced parental divorce, had continuously married parents, and had at least one, living, biological sibling. Participants who experienced parental divorce (N=107) were asked to report on the biological sibling that they felt closest to before their parents' divorce, while participants with married parents (N=197) were asked to report on the sibling that they felt closest to. The data were examined using paired-sample t-tests, independent samples t-tests, and multiple linear regression analysis. Significant differences were found for sibling relationship closeness and the affect dimension of relationship closeness for those with married parents. Significant differences were also found for the dimension of behavior, for those who experienced parental divorce. Experiential discrepancy was found to be a significant indicator of sibling relationship closeness before the inclusion of the support variables and success of support seeking was found to be a significant predictor of sibling relationship closeness following parental divorce. The implications of the results will be discussed along with future directions.

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## **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to Isaac and Quinn. Thank you for providing me with the motivation to continue.

## **Chapter 1 - Introduction**

More people grow up with at least one sibling than with a residential father (McHale, Updegraff, & Tucker, 2012); however, sibling relationships continue to be an understudied family relationship, despite being one of the most enduring. A review of the literature on sibling relationships reveals that siblings are influential to development across the lifespan and during major life events. In early childhood, sibling relationships provide opportunities to practice skills such as conflict resolution and how and when to exert power (Abuhatum, Howe, Della Porta, & DeHart, 2018; Abuhatum & Howe, 2013; Downey & Condon, 2004). Adolescent sibling relationships become more egalitarian (Lindell & Campione-Barr, 2017; Tucker, Updegraff, & Baril, 2010) while siblings undergo the process of renegotiating previous roles and power dynamics within their relationships. During this time, siblings also gain interpersonal relationship competence through sibling interactions (Doughty, Chum, Stanik, & McHale, 2015; Killoren & Roach, 2014). Hollifield and Conger (2015) found that levels of sibling support during young adulthood still had an impact on perceptions of life satisfaction. In addition to being significant influences on development across the lifespan, siblings are often one of the few supportive networks for children during times of major events or transitions like divorce (Kunz, 2001). Using family stress theory, this study seeks to investigate whether sibling relationship closeness following divorce is influenced by perceptions of support as a result of perceived experiential discrepancy.



## **Chapter 2 - Literature Review**

### **Family Stress Theory**

Reuben Hill's (1949) family stress theory is a theoretical framework used to assess adaptations to both normative and non-normative stressful events and has previously been used to understand child adjustment to parental divorce (Plunkett, Sanchez, Henry, & Robinson, 1997). In this theory, Hill (1949) identified three factors that determine how individuals react to stress: (a) the situation or event, (b) their resources, and (c) their definition of the situation or event; these factors are visually represented in the ABCX model (McCubbin & Patterson, 1983). In this study, parental divorce, sibling support, and perceptions of experiential similarity serve as the a, b, and c factors respectively. The nature of the sibling relationship warrants the use of sibling relationship closeness as an indicator that can influence post-divorce adjustment (Schwartz, 1992).

### **Divorce: A Factor**

A crisis can be classified as a situation or event that can be either extra-familial or intra-familial, involve the loss or addition of a family member, or create change in status or conflict among family members (Hill, 1949). Parental divorce is an intra-familial event with the potential to create negative effects on child adjustment through the loss or addition of family members (Lansford, 2009). Although high levels of parental conflict within the predivorce environment have the potential to create negative adjustment in children post-divorce (Booth & Amato, 2001), reports of further declines in academic performance and increased levels of anxiety and depression were found for children following parental divorce (Sun & Li, 2009; Strohschein, 2005). Following parental divorce, children not only exhibit internal and external adjustment patterns, but changes in interpersonal relationships as well. Children often have to

transition from living with both parents to primarily living with only one parent, typically the mother (Grall, 2016). Although children can experience declines in well-being from one parent leaving the home, a recent study revealed that children may also experience declines in well-being when going to live with a parent who was not the primary caregiver before the divorce (Poortman, 2018). Parental re-partnering, for the residential and non-residential parent, was also found to influence perceptions of well-being following divorce, such that declines in well-being were reported when mothers were in less stable relationships and when fathers were in more stable relationships (Bastaitis, Pasteels, & Mortelmans, 2018). Such differences may be influenced by a decline in financial resources in single-mother households (Thomson & McLanahan, 2012) and changes in interpersonal relationships with the introduction of additional family members, even stable ones (Bastaitis et al., 2018).

According to the family systems perspective (Bowen, 1974), internal family dynamics are best understood by viewing the family system as a whole. Because siblings are embedded into the larger family system, it is necessary to consider how changes within the family, such as parental divorce, impact the sibling dynamic. Empirically, changes in family relationships, like those with grandparents and siblings have been seen (Greene, Anderson, Forgatch, DeGarmo, & Hetherington, 2012). Child contact with grandparents is influenced by a variety of factors such as, proximity, custody arrangement, grandparent gender (grandmother or grandfather), and the relationship status of the parent following divorce (Hilton, 1998). Because children's custody arrangement plays a large role in mediating parental separation and grandparents' relationships with their grandchildren, grandchildren tend to have less contact and close relationships when their grandchildren do not reside with their child (Jappens, 2018). The loss of contact and

relationship closeness represent the loss of another potential supportive network (Doyle, O'Dywer, & Timonen, 2010).

Increased levels of conflict have been reported even among sibling relationships, which are often one of children's only stable supportive networks following parental divorce (Kunz, 2001). Keeping in line with family systems perspective (Bowen, 1974), it is important to consider what is happening within the larger family system to truly understand how and why negative adjustment could occur within this relationship following parental divorce. The changes that occur within the various family relationships, undoubtedly have the potential to influence the sibling relationship. For example, parental divorce can contribute to decreased interactions between one sibling and a close, non-residential parent but not for the other sibling. Therefore, the repartnering of a residential parent may have negative effects for one sibling and may lead to changes within the sibling dyad when the other sibling becomes closer to the new partner. In the event of financial decline, parents may have to choose which activities to continue or discontinue leading to differential treatment between the siblings. The end of one activity for one sibling and the continuation of another activity for another sibling can also influence sibling relationship closeness.

### **Perceptions of Sibling Support: B Factor**

The b factor is defined as the available crisis meeting resources, which includes supportive networks (McCubbin & Patterson, 1983). Support seems to be a common component of the sibling relationship (Floyd, 1997). Some studies have found that sibling support can become even more important following a variety of events such as peer bullying, exposure to intimate partner violence and substance abuse, and high family stress (Åkerlund, 2017; Coyle, Demaray, Malecki, Tennant, & Klossing, 2017; Lockwood, Gaylord, Kitzmann, & Cohen,

2012). Divorce has the potential to be a stressful event (Lansford, 2009). Among parents who displayed higher levels of conflict, lower life satisfaction was reported along with more inconsistent parenting (Lamela, Figueiredo, Bastos, & Feinberg, 2016). Not only do children experience a transition from the divorce, but they often experience family reformation, which has been shown to be associated with depressive symptomology even among an emerging adult population (Shafer, Jensen, & Holmes, 2017). Post-event adjustment is influenced by the child's available resources (Amato, 2010), which include sibling relationships.

Although family stress theory has been applied to children's adaptation to parental divorce, only peers from divorced families were mentioned as crisis meeting resources (Plunkett et al., 1997). Jennings and Howe (2001) found that many siblings did not offer support by explicitly discussing the divorce. Post-divorce support was shown to be provided through the understanding that the sibling was someone who was going through the same experience; however, siblings occasionally employed more extensive forms of support such as help with homework, meal preparation, and transportation when needed (Jacobs & Sillars, 2012). Often siblings reported that older siblings provided support in the form of care-taking tasks (Bush & Ehrenberg, 2003; Roth, Harkins, & Eng, 2014; Sheehan, Darlington, & Feeney, 2004). Such support seemed to compensate for a lack of parental support and help with coping. There is some debate about whether or not close sibling relationships can completely compensate or buffer against negative post-divorce outcomes or when conflict from parental relationships spills over to the sibling dyad (Greenwood, 2014; Milevsky, 2004; Riggio, 2001; Sheehan et al., 2004). Nonetheless, there are positives to receiving sibling support following parental divorce.

To the best of my knowledge, no study has been found to specifically address support seeking in sibling relationships, namely viewing siblings as active participants in seeking support

and their success in doing so. Despite being closely related to relationship closeness regardless of relationship type (parental, friend, and romantic), support seeking is not assessed as often as the amount and type of received support (Chow & Glaman, 2013). Individuals have a greater likelihood of receiving support in close relationships, which can also lead to greater feelings of closeness, particularly when the helper explicitly seeks out support (Barbee & Cunningham, 1995). Support seeking strategies have been identified as important in understanding received support; those who employ more direct support seeking strategies (openly providing the necessary information to successfully receive support) usually do so in close relationships when they believe that their behaviors will achieve desired results (Don, Mickelson & Barbee, 2013). On the other hand, indirect support seeking behaviors (passive behaviors with little information, e.g. sighing, demonstrating sadness, etc.) have the potential to backfire depending on the stressor and may be less effective than direct support seeking behaviors (Don et al., 2013). Given the information that direct support seeking leads to both closer relationships (Barbee & Cunningham, 1995) and greater success in the provision of support (Don et al., 2013), it can be expected that both can serve to more fully understand the concept of support and serve as a crisis meeting resource. Siblings may be more likely to directly seek support in relationships with their closest sibling, which also leads to greater feelings of closeness, and siblings would also be more successful in their attempts to receive support by utilizing direct support-seeking strategies rather than indirect support seeking strategies. Based on the literature, it was considered necessary to include two variables for perceived sibling support: support seeking and success of support seeking. Additionally, dyad constellation, or the difference or similarity between genders can also influence the sibling relationship, such that, same-sex siblings receive more support from

each (Tucker, Barber, & Eccles, 1997), and sisters offer more support than brothers (Tucker, McHale, & Crouter, 2001). Therefore, dyad constellation was used as a covariate for this study.

### **Perceived Experiential Discrepancy: C Factor**

In family stress theory, the c factor is the subjective definition and the perceived effects of the stressor (McCubbin & Patterson, 1983). Siblings are often seen as a valuable source of support in part because they are developing together and experiencing similar events. On the other hand, perceptions of experiential discrepancy in sibling relationships are understudied. Much of the literature on experiential discrepancy in sibling relationships focuses on perceived parental differential treatment, which involves a series of experiences overtime (Brody, Stoneman, & McCoy, 1992; Jensen, Whiteman, Fingerman, & Birditt, 2013). Prior research has shown that an event can become less salient over time (Gilligan, Sutor, & Nam, 2015); conversely, for ongoing situations like parental differential treatment, the salience of childhood experiential similarity in parental treatment were found to still be important for emerging adults (Siennick, 2013).

Schwartz (1992) identified the following factors as influential to children's perceptions of divorce: level of pre- and post-divorce parental conflict exposure, age, cognitive developmental level, gender, caretaking arrangements, and supportive networks like siblings. Previous research on children's post-divorce adjustment has focused on the effects of pre- and post-divorce conflict exposure, caretaking arrangements, and the role of extended family (Bauserman, 2012; Neilsen, 2017). Few studies have specifically addressed how siblings can influence perceptions of an individual's experience of divorce, which in turn contributes to sibling relationship closeness.

Rather than being a one-time event, divorce is an ongoing process for the entire family (Clarke-Stewart & Brentino, 2006; Greene et al., 2012). The divorce literature has shown that

ex-spouses can experience the same divorce in different ways (Rollie, 2010). Likewise, it should be understood that experiencing parental divorce does not guarantee that the experience is the same for each sibling. Differences in perceptions and the experience of divorce have been reported among siblings, with older siblings more likely to report higher levels of exposure to parental conflict and the negative impact of increased caretaking duties for their younger siblings (Roth et al., 2014). Younger siblings reported mixed feelings around the idea of having older siblings fill parental roles (Bush & Ehrenberg, 2003; Sheehan et al., 2004). Jennings and Howe (2001) attempted to investigate how sibling experiential differences influenced sibling relationship closeness but found it difficult to match sibling responses using open-ended interviews. For this study, it may be more important to investigate one sibling's perceived experiential similarity of parental divorce, as this process will be more influential in the creation of their overall meaning of divorce than actual experiential discrepancy. Sibling closeness behavior, or normative interactions between individuals within a dyad is a dimension of relationship closeness and is based on perceptions of multiple interactions within the dyad, such that numerous, shared interactions can lead to increased feelings of closeness (Kelley et al., 2002). Therefore, perceived experiential similarity and support influence each other, which is visually represented in the ABCX model through the bidirectional nature of the b and c factors (McCubbin & Patterson, 1983). To the best of my knowledge, no study has investigated this process and its effect on sibling relationships following divorce. For this study, changes in family relationships and post-divorce conflict were used to assess perceptions of experiential discrepancy for the current study based on previous findings of experiential discrepancy in exposure to parental conflict and responsibility following divorce (Roth et al., 2014).

Additionally, because siblings have reported differences in experiences of parental divorce and the kinds of support that they provide to siblings based on birth order status (Bush & Ehrenberg, 2003; Roth, Harkins, & Eng, 2014; Sheehan et al., 2004), birth order status was used as a covariate. Similarly, custody arrangement and time since divorce were also used as covariates, due to their influence on perceptions. Because of the role that custody has on child well-being (Bastaitis et al., 2018) and the influence that perceptions of well-being have on sibling relationship closeness (Milevsky, 2018), custody arrangement was viewed as a valid covariate. While no study has been found that specifically looked at the influence of the salience of parental divorce on sibling relationship closeness, studies have found that highly salient events can have an impact on the sibling relationship even into adulthood (Milevsky & Heerwagen, 2013; Siennick, 2013). Participants were not asked about their feelings of the salience of their parents' divorce, but participants were asked to report on an item that assessed the time since parental divorce.

### **The Sibling Relationship Closeness Following Divorce: X Factor**

Individuals in close relationships typically employ overt support seeking behaviors when they believe that they are able to do so without negative consequences and believe they are receiving support (Don et al., 2013). The idea of depending on someone who is going through the same experience is a key feature of sibling relationships in general, but more so for siblings who have experienced parental divorce (Jacobs & Sillars, 2012). Therefore, it can be expected that perceived experiential discrepancy, together with support, can influence sibling relationship closeness.



## **Present Study**

The purpose of this study was to address the current gaps in the literature surrounding sibling relationships following divorce. The literature on sibling relationships for young adults following divorce is limited, and this study serves as an additional study for this topic. Once siblings leave their families of origin, these relationships become more voluntary and less dependent on parental influence. Therefore, more studies are needed which capture sibling relationships during this time of the lifespan. Insight can also be gained as to whether or not divorce can continue to influence sibling relationship closeness after siblings no longer live with parents. Most of the current literature on sibling support following divorce investigates support provision and considers the shared experience as a form of support. To the best of my knowledge, no studies have been able to measure experiential discrepancy or examined the success of support seeking strategies for this population. This study addresses both of these gaps by targeting perceptions of support, both support seeking and success of support seeking, rather than types and provisions of support alone and measuring experiential discrepancy. Additionally, no other studies have addressed whether the combination of perceived support and experiential discrepancy influence utilizing a family stress theory perspective. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to investigate: (a) whether perceptions of sibling support and experiential discrepancy were predictors of sibling relationship closeness and (b) what, if any, differences exist between those who experienced parental divorce and those with continuously married parents.

Some hypotheses were not able to be made using previous literature and based on the limitations of the current study but were worth exploring. Therefore, the following research questions are posed:

**Research Question 1 (RQ1) :** Does parental divorce contribute to statistically significant changes in levels of closeness in sibling relationships before and after parental divorce?

**Research Question 2 (RQ2) :** Are levels of closeness significantly different for those who experienced parental divorce versus those who did not experience parental divorce?

Such questions may speak to the salience of the divorce for the individuals, which was not assessed in this study, and the time since parental divorce occurred, which was not limited.

The previously mentioned research, and family stress theory, suggest the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 1 (H1) :** Sibling support and experiential similarity will be significant predictors of current sibling relationship closeness for individuals who experienced parental divorce. It can be expected that those who receive support from their siblings and report similar experiences of parental divorce with their sibling will show increased levels of sibling relationship closeness.

## Chapter 3 - Methods

### Participants

The sample for this study was drawn from a larger study that assessed young adults' relationships with their siblings and grandparents. Of the 437 eligible participants from the larger study, 304 participants met the eligibility criteria for this study which included: (a) having a living, biological sibling and (b) having married or divorced parents. Participants with married parents were asked to report on the sibling that they were closest to, while participants with divorced parents were asked to report on the sibling they felt closest to before their parents' divorce. The sample of participants with married parents ( $N=197$ ) was larger than the sample with divorced parents ( $N= 107$ ). Participants with married parents were slightly older on average ( $M= 25.24$ ;  $SD= 3.09$ ) than that those whose parents had divorced ( $M= 23.85$ ;  $SD= 6.65$ ), and the age of the participants' closest siblings were relatively similar for both groups. For the divorced sample, the mean age at the time of parental divorce was 13.61 ( $SD= 7.04$ ). As represented in Table 1, participants identifying as men were slightly overrepresented in the sample with married parents compared to the sample with divorced parents. Employment status was relatively similar between both groups, but the sample with divorced parents was slightly more educated than participants with married parents. Both groups were overrepresented by Non-Hispanic Whites. Within the divorced parent sample, more participants had parents who were cohabiting with or remarried to a new partner.

**Table 1***Demographics of Study Sample for Participants with Married and Divorced Parents (N=304)*

| Variable  | Married (N=197) |      | Divorced (N=107) |      |
|---|-----------------|------|------------------|------|
|   | n               | %    | n                | %    |
| Gender  |                 |      |                  |      |
| Men   | 108             | 54.8 | 52               | 48.6 |
| Women   | 89              | 45.8 | 54               | 50.5 |
| Non-binary  | -               | -    | 1                | .9   |
| Race/ Ethnicity   |                 |      |                  |      |
| American Indian or Alaska Native  | 6               | 3.0  | 2                | 1.9  |
| Asian or Pacific Islander   | 10              | 5.1  | 5                | 4.7  |
| Black or African American   | 18              | 9.1  | 12               | 11.2 |
| Hispanic or Latino  | 10              | 5.1  | 7                | 6.5  |
| Non-Hispanic White  | 149             | 75.6 | 78               | 72.2 |
| Other   | 4               | 2.0  | 3                | 2.8  |
| Education   |                 |      |                  |      |
| Graduated high school or passed high school equivalency test              | 19              | 9.6  | 6                | 5.6  |
| Some college  | 25              | 12.7 | 25               | 23.4 |
| Graduated from college with an associate degree                           | 28              | 14.2 | 12               | 11.2 |
| Graduated from college with a B.S., B.A., or equivalent                   | 87              | 44.2 | 41               | 38.3 |
| Postgraduate professional degree (such as M.A., M.S., Ph.D., M.D.)        | 37              | 18.8 | 23               | 21.5 |
| Missing   | 1               | 0.5  | -                | -    |
| Employment status   |                 |      |                  |      |
| Employed full-time  | 159             | 80.7 | 81               | 75.7 |
| Employed part-time  | 23              | 11.7 | 14               | 13.1 |
| Out of work and looking for work  | 2               | 1.0  | 2                | 1.9  |
| Stay at home parent/person  | 3               | 1.5  | 4                | 3.7  |
| Student   | 10              | 5.1  | 6                | 5.6  |
| Parents' Relationship Status  |                 |      |                  |      |
| Married   | 197             | 100  | -                | -    |
| Divorced and neither parent is cohabiting or remarried to a new partner   | -               | -    | 43               | 40.2 |
| Divorced and one parent is cohabiting with or remarried to a new partner  | -               | -    | 44               | 41.1 |
| Divorced and both parents are cohabiting with or remarried to new partner | -               | -    | 20               | 18.7 |

## Procedure

Amazon Mechanical Turk was utilized to collect data for this study. Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) is a website that allows workers to take surveys for a set fee. Data were collected over a combined total period of 3 months. Workers were provided \$0.75 to \$1.00 to complete the survey. Through MTurk, workers completed the survey, which was created utilizing Qualtrics. Informed consent was obtained by having participants read and agree to an informed consent question before completing the survey.

## Measures

*Sibling relationship closeness.* Sibling relationship closeness was measured using the Lifespan Sibling Relationship Scale (LSRS), which includes six subscales that capture three dimensions (affect, behaviors, and cognition) of sibling relationships across the lifespan (Riggio, 2000). The three adult subscales of the LSRS were used to assess current perceptions of sibling relationship closeness, and the items were reworded to assess childhood and predivorce sibling relationship closeness. Sample items for the subscales included “My sibling makes me happy” for the affect subscale; “My sibling and I share secrets” for the behavior subscale; and “My sibling is a good friend” for the cognition subscale. Each item was assessed using a 5-point scale (1= strongly disagree, 5= strongly agree). Participant responses for each of the subscales were averaged for both subscale scores and a total score of sibling relationship closeness. Cronbach’s alpha for the current sibling relationship total scale was 0.92. Alphas for current affect, behavior, and cognition subscales were 0.80, 0.75, and 0.82 respectively. Cronbach’s alpha for the predivorce total subscale, predivorce affect subscale, predivorce behavior subscale, and predivorce cognition subscale were 0.92, 0.75, 0.77, and 0.83 respectively. Participant responses

for each of the subscales were averaged for both subscale scores and a total score of sibling relationship closeness.

***Sibling support.*** Participants rated perceptions of sibling support seeking using two subscales from the Network of Relationships Inventory- Behavioral Systems Version (NRI-BSV; Furman & Buhrmester, 2009). The two subscales that were used for this study were the seeks safe haven subscale (e.g., “How much do you seek out this person when you’re upset?”) and the seeks secure base subscale (e.g., “How much does this person encourage you to try new things that you’d like to do but are nervous about?”). Additionally, based on the literature surrounding the importance of the inclusion of direct support seeking in success of support provision (Don et al., 2013), six follow up questions were created for each subscale item to assess perceived success in support seeking for each of the items (e.g., “How often are you successful in receiving support from this person when you’re upset?”). Items were rated by participants using a 5-point scale (1= never; 5= always). Cronbach’s alpha for support seeking, the original seeks safe haven and seeks secure base subscales, were 0.88. The alpha the follow up questions for the seeks safe haven and seeks secure base subscales, was 0.90. Responses for the 6 items of the seeks safe haven and seeks secure base subscales were averaged to obtain a total score for sibling support seeking. Responses for the 6 follow up questions were averaged to obtain a total score for perceptions of success in sibling support seeking.

***Experiential discrepancy.*** Participants with divorced parents were asked to rate their perceptions of their experience and their sibling’s experience of parental divorce using a modified version of the Structured Divorce Questionnaire (SDQ; Reinhard, 1977). Participants were asked to first rate their experience of their parents’ divorce using a 5-point scale (1= not true at all; 5= really true). Examples of the subscale items include, “I (my sibling) took on new

responsibilities following the divorce” for the changes in family relationship subscale and “My parents expected me (my sibling) to carry messages back and forth between them” for the post-divorce conflict subscale. Cronbach’s alphas for the participant’s experience of divorce for both subscales separately, the changes in family relationship subscale and post-divorce conflict subscales, and the combined subscales were 0.94, 0.87, and 0.89. Alphas for the participant’s perception of their sibling’s experience of divorce for both subscales, the changes in family relationship subscale and post-divorce conflict subscales, and the combined subscales were 0.96, 0.93, and 0.92. The absolute value was obtained for the difference between the participant and sibling divorce experience at an item level. Absolute values were then averaged to arrive at a total score of experiential discrepancy of parental divorce.

***Covariates.*** Participants were asked for their current age as well as the current age of the sibling they were reporting on. A separate variable, birth order status, was created based on whether or not the target participant was the same age (0), older (1), or younger (2) than the sibling who they reported on. Dyad constellation was assessed by creating a variable calculating the absolute value of the difference between the two genders: female (1) and male (2), with a value of 0 representing similarity within the dyad and a value of 1 representing dissimilarity in sibling dyad. To assess custody arrangement, participants were asked to select one of the following custody arrangements: (1) I lived with both of my parents my entire childhood; (2) I lived always with my mother; (3) I lived mostly with my mother; (4) I lived equally with my mother and my father; (5) I lived mostly with my father; (6) I lived always with my father; and (7) Other (please specify). If their parents were divorced, participants were asked to list their living arrangements following their parents’ divorce. The three participants who selected “other” wrote in that they lived with their grandparents. For time since parental divorce,

participants were allowed to input the amount of time (in years) since parental divorce.

Descriptive statistics are located in Table 2.

## **Analysis**

Descriptive analyses (i.e. bivariate correlations, missing data, and tests of normality) were conducted. A missing values analysis (MVA) was used to determine the nature and mechanisms of missing data. The results of the MVA determined that data were missing completely at random (MCAR). Tests of normality included skewness and kurtosis, with cutoff scores of 2 and 7 respectively (Curran, West, & Finch, 1996). Three statistical tests were run using IBM SPSS based on the research questions for the current study. Independent-samples t-tests were performed to determine whether or not there were statistically significant differences in levels of sibling relationship closeness between participants who experienced parental divorce and those with married parents. Next, paired-samples t-tests were conducted to assess whether or not there were statistically significant differences in pre and post-divorce sibling relationship closeness for those with divorced parents and for those with married parents. A three-step, (a) covariates; (b) experiential similarity; and (c) sibling support seeking and success of support, hierarchal regression analysis was used to assess H1: Are levels of sibling support and experiential similarity predictors of sibling relationship closeness following parental divorce?



## Chapter 4 - Results

### Preliminary Results

Results for skewness and kurtosis were acceptable and are included in Table 2. Missing data for any of the items were no more than 1.9%. Bivariate correlations are also provided in Table 2. Birth status was related to time since parental divorce ( $r = .37$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). Experiential similarity was related to support seeking ( $r = -.33$ ;  $p < .001$ ), success of support seeking ( $r = -.33$ ;  $p < .001$ ), and sibling closeness ( $r = -.34$ ;  $p < .001$ ). Sibling relationship closeness was associated with support seeking ( $r = .68$ ;  $p < .001$ ) and success of support seeking ( $r = .69$ ;  $p < .001$ ).

**Table 2**

*Bivariate Correlations and Descriptive Statistics for the Variables of Interest (N=107)*

|                               | 1     | 2    | 3    | 4    | 5      | 6     | 7     | 8    |
|-------------------------------|-------|------|------|------|--------|-------|-------|------|
| 1. Time since divorce         | 1     |      |      |      |        |       |       |      |
| 2. Custody arrangement        | .12   | 1    |      |      |        |       |       |      |
| 3. Birth Status               | .37** | .06  | 1    |      |        |       |       |      |
| 4. Dyad constellation         | .08   | .01  | .08  | 1    |        |       |       |      |
| 5. Experiential discrepancy   | .14   | .16  | .12  | .15  | 1      |       |       |      |
| 6. Support seeking            | -.15  | -.06 | -.11 | -.14 | -.33** | 1     |       |      |
| 7. Success of support seeking | -.13  | -.02 | -.16 | -.12 | -.33** | .88** | 1     |      |
| 8. Sibling closeness          | -.04  | -.11 | -.07 | -.08 | -.34** | .67** | .69** | 1    |
| <i>M</i>                      | 9.44  | 2.51 | 1.04 | .43  | .84    | 3.37  | 3.40  | 3.64 |
| <i>SD</i>                     | 6.45  | 1.36 | .66  | .59  | .37    | .95   | 1.01  | .65  |
| $\alpha$                      | -     | -    | -    | -    | -      | .88   | .90   | .92  |
| Skewness                      | .74   | 1.05 | -.04 | 1.29 | .54    | -.74  | -.68  | -.85 |
| Kurtosis                      | .23   | 1.60 | -.64 | 2.22 | .47    | .18   | .07   | 1.30 |

Note: \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .001$

## Paired-Samples T-Tests

For the first research question, a paired-samples t-test was conducted to assess whether current levels of sibling relationship closeness differed from pre-divorce levels of sibling relationship closeness for participants. No statistically significant difference was found between levels of pre-divorce sibling relationship closeness ( $M = 3.68$ ,  $SD = .61$ ) and current levels of sibling relationship closeness ( $M = 3.64$ ,  $SD = .65$ ) conditions;  $t(105) = -.71$ ,  $p = .47$ . To determine whether or not significant differences existed at a subscale level, paired-samples t-tests were conducted for each of the subscales. Statistically significant differences were only found between pre-divorce levels of sibling relationship behavior ( $M = 3.18$ ,  $SD = .55$ ) and current sibling relationship behavior ( $M = 3.50$ ,  $SD = .73$ ) conditions;  $t(106) = 4.54$ ,  $p < .001$ . The results showed that there was a statistically significant increase in sibling behavior for those who experienced parental divorce, indicating siblings were more likely to participate in behaviors such as spending time together and talk to one another. Paired-samples t-tests were also run for childhood and current sibling relationship closeness for participants with married parents as a comparison. There was a statistically significant difference between childhood sibling relationship closeness ( $M = 3.60$ ,  $SD = .63$ ) and current levels of sibling relationship closeness ( $M = 3.69$ ,  $SD = .64$ ) conditions;  $t(192) = -2.55$ ,  $p = .01$  and for childhood sibling affect ( $M = 3.62$ ,  $SD = .67$ ) and current sibling affect ( $M = 3.78$ ,  $SD = .66$ ) conditions;  $t(194) = -4.20$ ,  $p < .001$ . The results indicate that there was a statistically significant increase in sibling relationship closeness and sibling relationship affect for those whose parents remained married, indicating that siblings were more likely to report increases in positive feelings associated with their sibling such as admiration and pride.

## **Independent-Samples T-Tests**

To address the second research question, two independent-samples t-test were conducted to compare the mean levels of sibling relationship closeness for participants who experienced parental divorce and those whose parents remained married. Since the mean age at divorce was 13.61 (SD= 7.04), levels of pre-divorce sibling relationship closeness for participants who experienced parental divorce were compared to levels of childhood sibling relationship closeness for participants whose parents were still married. The results of the test determined that there were no statistically significant differences in levels of pre-divorce sibling relationship closeness ( $M = 3.68$ ;  $SD = .60$ ) and levels of childhood sibling relationship closeness for participants whose parents were still married ( $M = 3.60$ ;  $SD = .63$ ) conditions;  $t(298) = -.96, p = .91$ . Levels of current closeness for both groups were compared and the results indicated that there were no statistically significant differences between those who experienced parental divorce ( $M = 3.63$ ;  $SD = .65$ ) and those whose parents were still married ( $M = 3.69$ ;  $SD = .69$ ) conditions;  $t(301) = .66, p = .82$ . The results of the study suggest that siblings who experience parental divorce do not differ significantly in closeness from their peers who did experience parental divorce.

## **Hierarchical Regression Analysis**

For hypothesis 1: “Are levels of sibling support and experiential similarity predictors of sibling relationship closeness following parental divorce” a hierarchical regression analysis was conducted with three steps: (a) covariates, (b) sibling support, and (c) experiential similarity.

The results of the hierarchical regression (Table 3) revealed that the control variables did not significantly contribute to the regression model,  $F_{4,102} = .55, p = .70$ . The introduction of the discrepancy variable explained 8% of the variation in current sibling relationship closeness and was statistically significant,  $F_{5,101} = 2.78, p = 0.02$ . The addition of the support variables,

support seeking and success of support seeking, explained an additional 48% of the variation in the model,  $F_{7,99} = 14.98$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , which was also statistically significant. When all predictor variables were included in step 3, experiential discrepancy, particularly dissimilarity of experience based on how the variable was calculated, was no longer statistically significant, support seeking was only marginally significant, and success of support seeking was statistically significant. The results suggest that sibling relationship closeness decreases when siblings have discrepancies in their experiences of parental divorce and increases when siblings receive support from their siblings; however, the most important variable was success of support seeking.

**Table 3***Hierarchical Regression Analysis Summary for Predicting Post-divorce Sibling Closeness (N= 107)*

| Step and predictor variables | R <sup>2</sup> | ΔR <sup>2</sup> | B    | SE B | 95% CI       | β    | t     | p      |
|------------------------------|----------------|-----------------|------|------|--------------|------|-------|--------|
| Step 1                       | .02            | .02             |      |      |              |      |       |        |
| Time since divorce           |                |                 | <.01 | 0.01 | [-.02, .02]  | <.01 | .01   | .989   |
| Custody arrangement          |                |                 | -.05 | .05  | [-.15, .04]  | -.11 | -1.09 | .280   |
| Birth status                 |                |                 | -.05 | .11  | [-.26, .15]  | -.06 | -.52  | .603   |
| Dyad constellation           |                |                 | -.08 | .11  | [-.30, .14]  | -.07 | -.74  | .461   |
| Step 2                       | .12            | .10             |      |      |              |      |       |        |
| Time since divorce           |                |                 | <.01 | .01  | [-.02, .02]  | .03  | .27   | .789   |
| Custody arrangement          |                |                 | -.03 | .05  | [-.12, .06]  | -.06 | -.62  | .540   |
| Birth status                 |                |                 | -.03 | .10  | [-.23, .17]  | -.03 | -.30  | .762   |
| Dyad constellation           |                |                 | -.03 | .11  | [-.24, .18]  | -.03 | -.30  | .765   |
| Experiential discrepancy     |                |                 | -.58 | .17  | [-.91, -.24] | -.33 | -3.39 | .001** |
| Step 3                       | .51            | .39             |      |      |              |      |       |        |
| Time since divorce           |                |                 | .01  | .01  | [-.01, .02]  | .07  | .93   | .353   |
| Custody arrangement          |                |                 | -.04 | .03  | [-.11, .03]  | -.08 | -1.07 | .286   |
| Birth status                 |                |                 | .02  | .08  | [-.13, .17]  | .02  | .28   | .779   |
| Dyad constellation           |                |                 | .02  | .08  | [-.14, .18]  | .02  | .26   | .798   |
| Experiential discrepancy     |                |                 | -.20 | .14  | [-.47, .07]  | -.11 | -1.47 | .145   |
| Support seeking              |                |                 | .19  | .10  | [-.02, .39]  | .27  | 1.81  | .074   |
| Success of support seeking   |                |                 | .28  | .10  | [.08, .47]   | .43  | 2.86  | .005*  |

*Note: \*p < .01, \*\*p < .001*

## **Chapter 5 - Discussion**

Although, the larger focus of the current study was to examine predictors of sibling relationship closeness, potential differences and similarities in sibling relationship closeness between those who experienced parental divorce and those whose parents remained married were explored. The current study was framed by family stress theory to examine the influence of sibling support and experiential discrepancy on sibling relationship closeness following parental divorce among young adults. Even though statistically significant differences were not found in levels of sibling relationship closeness between the two subsamples, the lack of significant changes for total relationship closeness for the subsample with divorced parents and the significant changes in relationship closeness for the subsample with married parents, suggested that it was still important to investigate whether these factors could be significant predictors of relationship closeness following parental divorce, particularly at a dimensional level.

### **Influence of Divorce**

According to family stress theory (Hill, 1949), divorce has the potential to be a crisis and influence adjustment for families as an intra-familial event which results in the change in status of family members and increased levels of conflict. Following divorce, children often must transition from living with both parents to living with only one or one at a time (Grall, 2016). Additionally, children experience variations in divorce, such as coparenting conflict and communication (Beckmeyer, Coleman, & Ganong, 2014), which have the potential to influence relationships (Yu, Pettit, Lansford, Dodge, & Bates, 2010). In this study, those whose parents remained married experienced statistically significant increases in sibling relationship closeness. This finding does not seem to support the assumption made by family stress theory because the participants who did not experience the event had statistically significant increases, while those

who did experience the event did not have statistically significant increases or decreases in total relationship closeness. The findings also suggest that parental divorce does not have a significant influence on pre-divorce and post-divorce total sibling relationship closeness. It is not clear why statistically significant differences in closeness were not seen among the subsample of those who experience parental divorce. One possible reason could be explained by the smaller subsample of participants who experienced parental divorce. Another possible explanation for this may have been not assessing current feelings of salience of parental divorce. Even though time since divorce was controlled for, there could have been a large variance in the salience of divorce among participants which could influence the results of perceived sibling relationship closeness. The time since divorce may not have been equivalent to salience of divorce. Perceptions of events play a large role in family stress theory as the c factor in the model. It was believed that time since divorce could serve as a suitable variable for salience of divorce. For example perceptions of the sibling relationship may depend on the salience of parental divorce, such that recent divorces may be more salient as family members are still adjusting to the event. For older divorces, siblings may have had enough time to adjust to divorce and perceive more balance and stability in the relationship. However, this implies that more recent divorces always have more associations that influence the salience of the divorce compared to less recent divorces, which may not be the case. Future studies should explore whether the salience of divorce has an impact on sibling relationship closeness and decide how to appropriately assess this construct. Another potential reason for the null findings for the divorced subsample could be due to not including a variable to account for the number of stressors related to the divorce. According to the family systems perspective (Bowen, 1974), it would have been useful to account for common divorce related intrafamilial changes like

parental repartnering status and financial decline. In a way this may also speak to the importance of the salience of the divorce as mentioned previously. There could have been fewer divorce related stressors for some participants, particularly since leaving their family of origin, which no longer influence perceptions of closeness. While, some less recent divorces could have had more negative associated stressors that continue to impact the sibling relationship. A variable could have been created to determine what can be best described as pileup of divorce related changes, which may have provided a better interpretation to the effects of divorce rather than only utilizing the variable of parental divorce. This would have allowed for the interpretation of divorce as a process, which is more in line with family stress process (McCubbin & Patterson, 1983) rather than a one-time event like in family stress theory (Hill, 1949).

An examination of closeness at a subscale level adds more complexity to the interpretation of changes in closeness and seem to partially support family stress theory. The results from the tests conducted on the subscales indicate that sibling relationship behavior increased significantly for those who experienced parental divorce, while affect increased significantly for those whose parents remained married. In other words, changes in the behavior dimension of sibling relationship closeness, which indicated changes in time spent together, increased for those who experienced the event. On the other hand, those who did not experience parental divorce also reported statistically significant changes in one dimension of sibling relationship closeness. In a qualitative study (Myers, 2011), siblings reported that they continued their relationships with each other into adulthood based on reasons such as familial relationships, provision of support, similar interests and experiences, friendship, love, closeness, and proximity, which captures each of the three dimensions of relationship closeness. This implies that continued relationships for siblings are not solely dependent on one particular factor and is



dependent on each of the three dimensions of relationship closeness. In previous literature, young adult siblings report increased feelings of closeness (Milevsky, Smoot, Ley, & Ruppe, 2005), which was seen in the participants whose parents remained married who showed significant increases in both overall closeness and affect, or emotions toward the sibling. Causal statements cannot be made about why increases in affect did not occur amongst the population with divorced parents. One possible explanation could potentially be caused by the reported increased behaviors of participants that experienced parental divorce, who were typically older than their reported sibling (N=61). Older siblings are more likely to have increased responsibility for younger siblings and report negative feelings as a result of these increased responsibilities (Roth et al., 2014). Although siblings could be spending more time together, which would result in increases in the behavior dimension, older siblings could have ambivalence regarding their new role, which could impact the positive feelings that they associate with their sibling. Such experiences and perceptions would show little change in overall sibling relationship closeness but could be seen at the dimension level.

The amount of support from the target participant to their sibling and the target participant's feelings of support provision were not assessed in this current study and neither were perceptions of support provided. Even though support seems to be an inherent part of the sibling relationship (Floyd, 1997), further research should investigate how and why this does not always lead to increases in total relationship closeness. Support should not be viewed as a process that is always welcomed or freely given as seen in the differences between the provision of support when indirect support seeking strategies are utilized versus direct support seeking strategies. This is especially important to consider among siblings who continue to live with their family of origin. Future studies should examine feelings associated with the provision of

support among siblings and the perceptions of roles towards siblings for those who experience parental divorce and for those who do not. The results could provide additional information as to why differences are found among those who experience parental divorce and those who do not.

### **Predictors of Sibling Relationship Closeness Following Parental Divorce**

In this study, the results of the hierarchical regression analysis indicated that the covariates, time since divorce, custody arrangement, birth order, and dyad constellation did not significantly contribute to the regression model. One possible reason for this may have been due to the fact that the salience of divorce was not assessed. Additionally, the number of siblings available to the participant at the time of divorce was also not assessed. This could have created a discrepancy in the pool of siblings available to participants. Some participants could have had two or more siblings to choose from, while others were forced to report on their only sibling regardless of perceived closeness. Another possible reason for the lack of significance of the covariates is that participants were already reporting on the sibling that they felt closest to. This influence of self-selection seems to be evident because only a small number of participants (N=23) believed that their sibling was not supportive of them during their parents' divorce. If most participants felt that their sibling was generally supportive and were already close to their sibling, it is possible that these covariates were less impactful. Perceptions play a large role in both Hill's (1949) theory and the design of the current study. For example, siblings may self-select into close dyads for a number of reasons before parental divorce. When combined with the possibility of having only one sibling available, it can be reasoned that time since parental divorce, custody arrangement, birth order, and dyad constellation simply do not matter. With a larger sample and asking participants about number of siblings available to them at the time of parental divorce, future researchers may be able to take a more nuanced approach in

understanding whether or not these variables make a difference in sibling relationship closeness for those who experience parental divorce.

The results from the hierarchical regression analysis confirmed that both experiential discrepancy and sibling support were predictors of sibling relationship closeness following parental divorce. Experiential discrepancy did not remain statistically significant with the inclusion of the sibling support variables, and support seeking was only marginally significant, whereas success of support seeking remained statistically significant. According to family stress theory, a bidirectional relationship exists between perceptions of an event and the crisis meeting available resources. This seems to be partially supported in results from the study. People are more successful when using direct support seeking strategies in close relationships when they believe that such strategies will be more effective (Don et al., 2013). Although the following statements cannot be made definitively from the results of this study, experiential discrepancy, as measured in this study, may play a role in success of support seeking since it does not continue to be statistically significant following its inclusion in the model. Siblings may be more successful in their support seeking attempts when there is less discrepancy in their experiences, which could then lead to increases in sibling relationship closeness. Additionally, experiential discrepancy simply may not have been a unique enough variable in general or in the way that it was measured in this study. It is important to note that experiential discrepancy has not yet been successfully examined and the variable for this study was created by having participants report on their perception of their parents' divorce and their perception of their sibling's experience. It may take time to determine what all should be included in first, understanding what contributes to the entirety of parental divorce experience, and second, how to examine discrepancies within the sibling experience of parental divorce.

It is not clear why support seeking was not a statistically significant predictor of sibling relationship closeness. It may be that actual success in support seeking attempts are more important to sibling relationship closeness than simply seeking support from a close sibling or that seeking support is not significant enough when included with success of support seeking. In order to be successful in support seeking, one would have to seek support in the first place and support seeking seems to be more common in close relationships. It would be important to investigate whether or not this hypothesis holds true and why experiential discrepancy would be closely linked to success of direct support seeking. It may also be useful to examine whether or not the same applies to indirect forms of support seeking as well. The results of this study seem to suggest that success of direct support seeking has a significant influence on sibling relationship closeness, but without the inclusion of indirect support seeking variables, it is impossible to make comparisons.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

This study has several limitations that are worth noting. The subsample of participants whose parents remained married was almost twice as large as the subsample of participants who experienced parental divorce. The smaller subsample of participants who experienced parental divorce placed limitations on some of the statistical tests that could be performed and made it impossible to determine whether levels of support and experiential similarity influence changes in sibling relationship closeness. A larger sample would have also allowed for a further breakdown of the samples based on levels of support to investigate whether this could have created statistically significant differences in closeness as well. Future research could explore these interactions. The subsample of participants with married parents were asked to report on the sibling that they were closest to, while the subsample with divorced parents were asked to

report on siblings who they were closest to before their parents' divorce. While this allowed for a better analysis of changes within the latter subsample, it means that the comparisons between the two groups were not exactly similar. It is possible that participants with married parents could have experienced events that led to changes in their closest sibling from childhood. This study was part of a larger study, and future research could account for this through the limitation of time since parental divorce and asking all participants to report on the sibling they were closest to at the same point in childhood. Additionally, this study focused on the event of parental divorce; however, future research could extend the literature by exploring how support and experiential similarity influence adjustment to other events, thus expanding the application and knowledge of family stress theory. Furthermore, it would be interesting to investigate the variations in sibling relationships between those who experience parental divorce compared to those who do not. Rather than viewing sibling relationship closeness as a whole, to obtain a fuller understanding it may be important to take a more nuanced approach and review differences across various dimensions of sibling relationship closeness (affect, behaviors, and cognitions). A longitudinal approach utilizing both total relationship closeness and the dimensions of relationship closeness may be the best approach for a better understanding of these changes overtime and to confirm or deny the importance of taking a more dimensional approach to understanding close sibling relationships.

One potential future direction from this study could be the expansion of Hill's (1949) family stress theory to that of McCubbin and Patterson's (1983) family stress process. Given the lack of statistically significant findings for those who experienced parental divorce at a sibling relationship level and the significance of experiential discrepancy and perceived success of support seeking, it may be important to take a more nuanced approach to examine differences

which may arise due to the salience of parental divorce which can lead to variance in coping and perceptions of parental divorce. To achieve this, it may be more important to view it as a process that unfolds overtime through and along with pileup, rather than viewing divorce as one event. Some potential pileup stressors for siblings throughout the divorce process that may be worth investigating include, but are not limited to: (a) parent-child relationships before divorce, (b) exposure to conflict, and (c) role ambiguity, particularly since older children of divorce may experience feelings of ambivalence due to parentification and younger children may have mixed feelings about this process as well. These variables may impact how siblings cope, which may then influence the definition and meaning that siblings attribute to the entire divorce through the discrepancy between their experience and their sibling's experience. A greater understanding of this process may help to further explain how and why sibling relationships are able to achieve either bonadaptation or maladaptation, or positive or negative changes in the sibling relationship following divorce.

Additionally, the findings from this study could advance our understanding of family stress theory by leading to more research utilizing this framework. It may be important to understand sibling relationships across several contexts and following different kinds of events to investigate how this influences sibling relationships. Although additional research is necessary to disentangle experiential discrepancy as it relates to parental divorce, researchers should review experiential discrepancy for other events that fit the description of a crisis based on Hill's (1949) definition. From the literature on parental differential treatment, another type of experiential discrepancy that exists for sibling relationships, has been shown that effects of discrepancies in parental treatment can influence sibling relationship closeness even among emerging adults (Siennick, 2013). It is possible to investigate what other resources are provided by siblings and

how perceptions influence the sibling relationship. Siblings, like people in any close relationship, do not experience the same event in the same way, and most of the research on experiential discrepancy in sibling relationships deals with parental differential treatment. Therefore, it is important to assess how different perceptions of the same event influence not only the sibling relationship, but close relationships in general. One potential area may be how support and experiential similarity influence coparenting relationships following divorce. By taking a more nuanced approach to understanding relationships in this way and how events shape relationships, researchers may be able to help provide potential ways to offer support for those in close relationships following various events.

### **Implications for Practice**

The findings from this study may have important implications for families. Based on the findings, it can be assumed that perceptions of the divorce experience and success of support seeking influence closeness in the sibling relationship, which has been found to be one of the most stable relationships that children have following divorce. The literature suggests that although tangible forms of support are provided, a large component of sibling relationship support is provided based on the shared understanding that siblings are going through the same event. Based on the results of the current study, divorce has the potential to cause changes in dimensions of sibling relationship closeness following parental divorce. This does not mean that this has to be the case or will always happen. Theoretically, resources and perceptions have the ability to cause either positive, stable, or negative changes following an event (Hill, 1949). The utilization of Certified Family Life Educators to provide parents with information about the differences that siblings can face in divorce, may allow parents to be more cognizant of their interactions with their children and expectations of their children, which may lead to larger

discrepancies in their children's experience of divorce, which may also impact provision of support. This can be true for not only divorce, but other experiences such as parental death or parental differential treatment. There is typically an expectation that sibling relationships will endure for a lifetime; however, there can be a number of reasons why these relationships maintain, increase, or decrease in closeness over time as the continuance of a relationship does not always imply a close relationship. Providing parents with information that may negatively affect this relationship provides families with the ability to sustain the types of relationships that they wish for their children to have.

## **Conclusion**

Rather than being viewed as a negative life experience, divorce should be treated like any other family transition. The findings from this study offer some insight into what may contribute to sibling relationship closeness, but the results also led to additional questions and future directions. In this study, those who experienced parental divorce did not experience significant changes in total relationship closeness and did not report increases in either the affect or cognition dimension of relationship closeness. These participants did, however, show increases in sibling relationship closeness behavior. This may offer insight as to how siblings, currently, maintain relationship closeness throughout the process of parental divorce, but additional research is necessary to confirm this. Experiential discrepancy was also found to be a significant predictor before the inclusion of the support variables, and only success of support seeking remained significant. This suggests either a close relationship between experiential discrepancy and support or that additional research is necessary to find the best way to measure experiential discrepancy. It is also worth noting that direct forms of support seeking were assessed in this study. Although comparisons cannot be made due to the fact that indirect forms of support



seeking were not assessed in this study, the statistical significance of success of support seeking offers support for the importance of this particular form of support seeking in close relationships. There are questions that still findings of the current study offer some insight into this relationship dynamic and time period. More research is needed in regard to sibling relationships following parental divorce, but the current study serves as step toward this goal.

## Chapter 6 - References

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# Appendix A - IRB Approval



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## **Appendix B - Demographic Questions**

1. How old are you?
2. What is your gender identity?
3. What is your sexual orientation?
4. What is your relationship status? (Select all that apply)
5. What is your ethnic and racial background? (Select all that apply)
6. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
7. What is your current employment status?
8. What is your parents' relationship status?
9. How old were you when your parents divorced?
10. How long ago did your parents' divorce?
11. How long were your parents married prior to getting divorced? (If unsure, please estimate)
12. As a child, with whom did you live? If your parents are divorced, please indicate your living arrangement following your parents' divorce.
13. Which of your grandparents are living? (select all that apply)
14. Do you have any living, biological siblings?
15. If yes, please list the sex and age of each of your siblings and also include their relationship to you (e.g., brother, stepsister, half-brother).
16. Please identify the sex and age of the biological sibling to whom who will be answering these questions.
17. How far do you live from this sibling?
18. Prior to your parents' divorce, how frequently did you communicate with your sibling?

19. After your parents' divorce, how frequently do you communicate with your sibling?

## **Appendix C - Amended Lifespan Sibling Relationship Scale Items**

1. My sibling makes me happy.
2. My sibling's feelings are very important to me.
3. I enjoy me relationship with my sibling.
4. I am proud of my sibling.
5. My sibling and I have a lot of fun together.
6. My sibling frequently makes me angry. \*
7. I admire my sibling.
8. I like to spend time with my sibling.
9. I presently spend time with my sibling.
10. My sibling and I share secrets.
11. My sibling and I do a lot of things together.
12. I never talk about my problems with my sibling. \*
13. My sibling and I borrow things from each other.
14. My sibling and I 'hang out' together.
15. My sibling talks to me about personal problems.
16. My sibling is a good friend.
17. My sibling is very important in my life.
18. My sibling and I are not very close. \*
19. My sibling is one of my best friends.
20. My sibling and I have a lot in common.
21. I believe I am very important to my sibling.
22. I know that I am one of my sibling's best friends.

23. My sibling is proud of me.
24. My sibling made me happy.
25. My sibling's feelings were very important to me.
26. I enjoyed my relationship with my sibling.
27. I was proud of my sibling.
28. My sibling and I had a lot of fun together.
29. My sibling frequently made me angry. \*
30. I admired my sibling.
31. My sibling and I had a lot of fun together.
32. I liked to spend time with my sibling.
33. I spent time with my sibling.
34. I called my sibling on the telephone frequently.
35. My sibling and I shared secrets.
36. My sibling and I did a lot of things together.
37. I never talked about my problems with my sibling. \*
38. My sibling and I borrowed things from each other.
39. My sibling and I 'hung out' together.
40. My sibling talked to me about personal problems.
41. My sibling was a good friend.
42. My sibling was very important in my life.
43. My sibling and I were not very close. \*
44. My sibling was one of my best friends.
45. My sibling and I had a lot in common.

- 46. I believed that I was very important to my sibling.
- 47. I knew that I was one of my sibling's best friends.
- 48. My sibling was proud of me.

*Note:* \*Reversed scored item. Items 1-8 reflect adult affect; 9-15 reflect adult behavior; 16-23 reflect adult cognition; 24-32 reflect pre-divorce and child affect; 33-40 reflect pre-divorce and child behavior; 41-48 reflect pre-divorce and child cognition

## **Appendix D - The Network of Relationships Inventory- Behavioral Systems Version**

1. How much do you seek out this person when you're upset?
2. How much do you turn to this person for comfort and support when you are troubled about something?
3. How much do you turn to this person when you're worried about something?
4. How much does this person encourage you to try new things that you'd like to do but are nervous about?
5. How much does this person encourage you to pursue your goals and future plans?
6. How much does this person show support for your activities?



## **Appendix E - Success of Support Seeking Items**

1. How often are you successful in receiving support from this person when you're upset?
2. How often are you successful in receiving support from this person when you are troubled about something?
3. How often are you successful in receiving support from this person when you are worried about something?
4. How often do you seek out this person for encouragement to try new things that you were nervous about?
5. How often do you seek out this person for encouragement to pursue your goals and future plans?
6. How often do you seek out this person for support in your activities?

## **Appendix F - Amended Structured Divorce Questionnaire**

1. I worried about my mother following the divorce.
2. Following the divorce our family began to “pull together.”
3. I took on new responsibilities following the divorce.
4. I felt that I had a lot of additional pressures since the divorce.
5. Since the divorce everything has turned out for the best.
6. I felt that after the divorce the parent with whom I lived was getting too close to me.
7. The oldest child at home took over as second in command.
8. I felt that I no longer needed a father (mother).
9. I felt that I had to hold our family together.
10. The parent with whom I lived expected more from me following the divorce.
11. The parent with whom I lived worried about me more following the divorce.
12. My mother was overly affectionate with me.
13. My father was overly affectionate with me.
14. I felt that I had to grow up faster than following my parents’ divorce.
15. My parents expected me to carry messages back and forth between them.
16. My father tried to get information about my mother from me.
17. My mother tried to get information about my father from me.
18. I would have resented it if my mother got married again.
19. I would have resented it if my father got married again.
20. I resented that one of my mother’s (father’s) friends tried to treat me like his (her) son (daughter).
21. I was glad that the parent with whom I lived dated as often as she (he) did.

22. I sometimes felt that my mother (father) and I were in competition with each other.

*Note:* Items 1-14 reflect changes in family; 15-22 reflect conflict.