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**Canada**

**Constructive and Destructive Conflict Strategies  
in Sibling Relationships: A Family Systems Approach**

**Christina M. Rinaldi**

**A Thesis**

**in**

**The Department**

**of**

**Education**

**Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Master of Arts at  
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Montreal, Quebec, Canada**

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**ABSTRACT****Constructive and Destructive Conflict Strategies in Sibling Relationships:  
A Family Systems Approach**

Christina M. Rinaldi

Employing a family systems theory approach that an interdependence of systems exists within the family (Minuchin, 1988), the present study investigated different family members' perceptions of their own and each others' use of conflict strategies. Sixty target and nontarget siblings ranging in age from 8.9 to 13.3 and 5.4 to 15.8 years, and their parents participated in the study. Data were collected through various types of self-report measures (e.g., interviews, questionnaires), and both parents and children rated conflict within and across parent-child, marital, and sibling subsystems. Except for parents' and siblings' reports of parent-child and sibling interactions, findings indicated that family members perceive conflict within subsystems similarly. Across family subsystem reports however, were not as consistent. Specifically, type of marital conflict did not correspond with type of sibling conflict. Yet, parent-child conflict strategies were partially linked to both types of sibling and parent-parent conflicts. As predicted it was found that siblings who engaged in more destructive types of conflicts reported higher levels of negativism in their relationships than siblings who employed constructive conflict techniques. The results of this study make distinctions between positive conflict techniques that are beneficial to family dynamics, and negative strategies that may be detrimental to the functioning of the family unit.

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## Introduction

"He's happy, he's funny, he's quite nice, he's sharing and caring to me ... good in sports, kind, not rude, doesn't fight ... she's likes to get on people's nerves ... he likes to get his own way, he's nice when you're nice to him, he's bossy ... he's a walking time bomb" (quotes from sibling interviews). Children's perceptions of their siblings vary. Since sibling relationships usually span a lifetime, it is with great curiosity and the need to develop practical solutions for parents' concerns of sibling conflict, that researchers probe the factors that influence sibling relationship qualities.

Although once thought of as a purely negative and competitive relationship (Adler, 1927), more recent studies have shown the positive aspects of sibling relations (e.g., Abramovitch, Corter, Pepler, & Stanhope, 1986; Azmitia & Hesser, 1993; Dunn & Munn, 1986a). The nature of the sibling relationship is paradoxical, because not only is it ranked as being the most conflictual relationship in a child's life, but at the same time, siblings are viewed as providers of companionship, intimacy, and nurturance (Brody, Stoneman, McCoy, & Forehand, 1992; Lempers & Clark-Lempers, 1992). Sibling interactions may be symmetrical or asymmetrical, close and harmonious or distant and cold (Furman & Buhrmester, 1985b). The sibling relationship is as unique as the children themselves, and may provide social scientists with clues as to what contributes to an individual's development (Daniels, 1986). Moreover, sibling interaction gives us a first look at how children acquire social knowledge in their environments. In fact, the socialization effects of sibling ties may be long-term since sibling childhood relations have been linked to later well-

adjustment in adulthood (Cicirelli, 1989). Determining what makes sibling relationships work has important implications for both parents and researchers.

The stability of the sibling relationship, that is, the length of duration and persistence of feelings about the relationship, make the dyadic phenomenon worth investigating. Trying to understand a relationship that is, for most individuals, the longest lasting in their lives (Stocker, Dunn, & Plomin, 1989) may shed some light on other relationships, such as peer relations in childhood and adolescence, and intimate relations in adulthood. Sibling research has serious implications for an understanding of the relation between social and emotional experience, as well as developmental change (Dunn & Kendrick, 1982). Furthermore, the sibling literature stresses the importance of the child's understanding and categorization of self (e.g., Dunn & Slomkowski, 1992; Howe, 1991). Sibling studies also allow inferences to be made about a child's social adaptability, for example, siblings show a significant pragmatic understanding of how to annoy and to console one another (Dunn & Munn, 1986a; 1986b).

The studies that have examined sibling interaction stress how young children spend a large part of their time with their siblings (Dunn & Kendrick, 1981). Since interaction with siblings is frequent, it has been argued that this relationship outlines the first steps of reciprocal social and communicative development (Abramovitch, Corter, & Lando, 1979). The sibling relationship is one in which opposite facets of socialization are explored such as sharing, compromising, negotiating, conflict, and aggression. Because siblings have great accessibility to one another, the dyad is an

ideal system within which to examine the development of social conflict (Katz, Kramer, & Gottman, 1992) or other aspects of socialization such as emotional expression and self-control. Since social conflict is an inevitable part of life, it automatically becomes part of a child's developmental process. Unfortunately, conflict is often inaccurately depicted as being a purely negative entity when, in fact, social conflict is an essential component of social well-being (Vandell & Bailey, 1992).

However, children develop within a network of social relationships, and the sibling relationship does not evolve in an isolated context, rather it grows within a family context which facilitates and allows children to encounter different facets of interaction. The family is a system of interacting individuals and it is composed of various subsystems, such as the parent-child, parent-parent, and sibling-sibling subsystems (Radke-Yarrow, Richters, & Wilson, 1988). Of these subsystems, the sibling relationship has been studied the least, and in isolation from other familial relationships. Examining social conflicts such as those experienced by siblings allows researchers to probe how conflicts contribute to children's social understanding of others' points of view (Dunn & Munn, 1987). Furthermore, if one wishes to examine and gain a better understanding of one of the subsystems within this complex family socialization unit, then the entire system must be considered.

The present study will include a review of the major sibling conflict theories which provide a solid basis for the discussion of relevant empirical research conducted in this area of social development. This thesis will then address issues beyond the sibling-sibling subsystem by investigating the influence of other family substructures

on the development of destructive and constructive sibling conflict strategies.

Emphasis shall be placed on obtaining siblings' own perceptions of their relationship and that of their parents, since perception has been hypothesized to foster specific types of conflict strategies. In contrast to existing research, parental relationships will be examined to see how they influence sibling interactions through perceptions of their relationship. Sibling reports about their own relationship appear to be connected to family climate (Aquan-Assee, Bukowski, Howe, & Gauze, 1993). In particular, this paper will compare destructive and constructive types of conflict in the sibling dyad by using a family systems perspective. Is one type of sibling conflict enhanced by other social systems in the family, and if it is, to what extent are perceptions maintaining these positive or negative strategies?

### **Overview of Sibling Conflict Literature**

It is within the family system that children experience their first social conflicts and the majority of these social conflicts are with siblings. In this thesis, social conflict will be defined as "the incompatibility ... expressed when one person overtly opposes another person's actions" (Shantz, 1987, p 284). Many sibling dyad interactions seem to fit this description. Conflict is often denoted by negative actions such as, quarrelling, fighting, resisting, opposing, refusing, denying, objecting, protesting (Vandell & Bailey, 1992), and rivalrous actions. Although some recent research on sibling conflict focuses on negative sibling interactions of the rivalrous nature (Lempers & Clark-Lempers, 1992), there are advantages to mastering social conflict. Conflict that is experienced within the sibling or family context may also be



instrumental in the development of coping and handling styles (Grych & Finchman, 1993) which can carry over to other social settings, relationships, and interactions. As Brody, Stoneman, and Burke (1987), point out, sibling conflict is a personal phenomenon, unique to each dyad because of individual child characteristics, yet these authors also emphasize the simultaneous importance of environmental context.

Environmental factors such as family cohesiveness have been found to be linked with lower levels of sibling conflict (Brody, Stoneman, McCoy, & Forehand, 1992; Aquan-Assee et al., 1993). Competition between siblings appears to grow as children develop (Dunn & Munn, 1986a). Yet, as siblings mature and move away from home, they tend to mend their differences (Cicirelli, 1989). These trends could be linked to the decrease of parental presence, decrease in time spent with siblings, as well as to cognitive maturation.

It is interesting to see how sibling conflicts evolve throughout a) early childhood, b) middle childhood, and c) adolescence. In early childhood, sibling conflicts exist as early as the birth of a sibling. The eldest child may react with tantrums, sleep and eating disturbances (Vandell & Bailey, 1992). These types of conflicts are intrapsychic and can not qualify as instances of social conflict according to Shantz's (1987) definition, yet they do mark the beginning of unique types of social conflicts that siblings may encounter. Once the youngest sibling reciprocates and asserts his/her rights which may block a sibling's goal, social conflict emerges and increases in frequency. Early sibling conflicts usually pertain to toy ownership and territory (Abramovitch et al., 1979). Many preschool sibling conflicts remain

unresolved (Vandell & Bailey, 1992), and may be carried over into later childhood.

Middle childhood sibling conflicts decrease in frequency, but the quality of exchanges shifts to a more verbal nature. In the school years, a considerable amount of surface conflict emerges, for example, children argue about what television show to watch, when in reality the argument may have some deeper underlying meaning (Bank & Kahn, 1982). School-aged children reported experiencing more conflict with their siblings than any other social network (Furman & Buhrmester, 1985a).

Adolescent sibling conflicts are similar to the middle childhood conflicts and at this stage sibling conflict is a means of self-expression. Conflicts are intense and usually remain unresolved (Vandell & Bailey, 1992). The resolution of conflictual sibling relationships presents possible implications for risk of depression later on in life (Cicirelli, 1989). Recollection and perception of close sibling ties was linked to less depression in elderly male and female interviewees, whereas perceptions of conflict (presumably unresolved) and indifferent sibling relationships were correlated with higher levels of depression only for females. Based on Cicirelli's (1989) study, there does appear to be a link between resolution of sibling conflicts and later well-adjustment in adulthood.

Sibling conflict is also studied because of its link to the development of social understanding (Dunn & Munn, 1987). For example, the findings of Vandell and Wilson (1987) allow for distinctions between infants' interactions with their siblings and mothers. Sibling relations are more realistic predictors of how disputes will be dealt with than other social networks, because siblings engage in more reciprocal

rather than complementary interactions than they experience with their parents. Reciprocal exchanges involve acts of one sibling responding to similar acts by the other sibling (e.g., hitting, hugging) whereas, exchanges between a mother and child take on a complementary nature in which mothers use prompts and scaffolding techniques to work through a dispute (Abramovitch et al., 1986). The main difference between reciprocal and complementary exchanges is that reciprocal exchanges are of a more egalitarian nature since most actions are returned, whereas complementary exchanges depend on a power/status relationship - where interactions are more asymmetrical by having a leader and a follower. In her review of the sibling relationship literature, Dunn (1983) noted that reciprocity (having a pragmatic understanding of the person one is interacting with) provides siblings with the privilege of knowing how to tease, annoy, and compete. Dunn also pointed out that siblings do exhibit complementary behavior such as caregiving, attachment, and teaching, but not to the same extent as reciprocity is exhibited. Also, she attached more importance to reciprocal interactions because these types of exchanges challenge and motivate a child more than the accommodating complementary approach.

Conflict has its merits as Dunn and Munn (1987) reveal, for example, learning how to interact during a conflict situation by developing justifications and strategies can help preschool children as well as adults learn how to deal with and resolve conflict. Children know how to provoke and upset their sibling in a conflict situation (Dunn & Munn, 1986a; 1986b). Whether this strategy is learned from other family subsystems has not been formally examined, although logically it would seem to have

a connection. Parental influence may dictate how willingly a child helps or comforts their sibling.

It is an acceptable social norm to fight with your sibling. If tensions escalate within the family macrostructure then the sibling subunit may be detrimentally affected by process of osmosis. Since friendly patterns of sibling interactions have been associated with perspective-taking skills of siblings (Howe & Ross, 1990; Slomkowski & Dunn, 1992), positive as well as negative social interactions are taught, imitated and learned from parents.

The general assumption that conflict is bad, and should be avoided altogether is probably faulty. Shantz's (1987) review of conflicts between children stresses an important point - that a distinction between different types of social conflicts should be made. Deutsch (1973) however, was one of the first researchers to introduce the concept of two kinds of conflicts, constructive and destructive. He posits that constructive conflicts are usually conflicts that end up being resolved, or if not entirely resolved, then at least the participants are satisfied with the end result. In contrast, destructive conflicts may terminate with both parties being dissatisfied with the disagreement's outcome; and this is usually due to the use of coercion, physical or verbal threats that may go beyond the conflict at hand by delving into other nonrelated issues.

Except for some recent literature (Emery, 1992; Furman & McQuaid, 1992; Vandell & Bailey, 1992), the majority of sibling conflict literature discussed (e.g., Dunn & Munn, 1985; Furman & Buhrmester, 1985a; 1985b) has not attempted to

make any distinctions between these two types of conflicts defined by Deutsch (1973). Rather, they have qualified sibling interaction behaviors as either prosocial or negative, with negative behaviors being synonymous with conflict. Most of these studies have examined conflict solely based on the frequency of its occurrence and not the type of conflict that was occurring. Other studies that have explored the social and cognitive advantages associated with social conflict (Dunn & Munn, 1986a; 1986b; 1987) unfortunately did not distinguish between constructive and destructive conflict behaviors. The need to be clear with these definitions is essential because these two types of conflicts may be associated with different outcomes in social development since one may foster interpersonal growth, while the other may inhibit it.

There are three ways in which conflict should be analyzed in order to detect whether it is of a destructive or constructive nature (Furman & McQuaid, 1992). First, frequency of conflict is important. Second, it is essential to go beyond just level of conflict and assess the nature of the conflict and the extent of its escalation. Third, conflict terminations (e.g., disengagement, avoidance, collaboration) should be explored as well. The majority of the sibling conflict literature has not investigated sibling conflict in the aforementioned manner, but has only preliminarily explored conflict by looking at one aspect at a time.

For the most part, the research (e.g., Dunn & Kendrick, 1981; Abramovitch, Corter, & Pepler, 1980; Minnett, Vandell, & Santrock, 1983) has focused on investigating sibling relationships through the examination of constellation variables such as age-spacing, birth order and sex of siblings. Others, have attempted to

describe the sibling relationship by concentrating on individual child differences such as temperament (e.g., Brody, Stoneman, & Burke, 1987; Schachter & Stone, 1985). Alternatively, some research has focused on maternal influence on the sibling relationship and found that maternal presence, in addition to maternal interaction with sibling pairs has been linked to more negative sibling interactions (Brown & Dunn, 1992; Dunn & Munn, 1986b; Kendrick & Dunn, 1983; Howe & Ross, 1990). It appears that apart from a few selective groups of authors (i.e., Buhrmester & Furman, 1990; Furman & Buhrmester, 1985a; 1985b; 1992; Prochaska & Prochaska, 1985; Stocker & McHale, 1992), the literature lacks the child's perspective on sibling interaction. Ignoring siblings' own perceptions of their relationship is a serious omission when studying interpersonal interactions, because it may be that perception influences positive and negative outcomes alike. Both outcomes are important, and that is why in this report, the focus will be on both types of conflictual outcomes.

Apart from the studies mentioned above, sibling relationship qualities have been mainly assessed in naturalistic settings or through a laboratory methodology (Abramovitch et al., 1979; 1986; Brody et al., 1987; Dunn & Munn; 1986a; 1986b; 1987), and although these techniques provide us with some rich information, they do not leave us with any insight into siblings' own perception of their relationship. This thesis proposes that siblings themselves should be probed about their relationship. What siblings perceive their relationship to be is equally important as researchers' interpretations, especially when the topic of interest is conflict. Deutsch (1973) listed the process of misperception and biased perception as contributing to the development

of destructive conflicts. Misperception or distortion of a situation can lead to hostile attitudes, oversensitivity, and poor communication in both parties. In most cases this results in unresolved conflicts and disengagement. When two individuals interpret the same conflict event differently misunderstandings develop and prohibit problem-solving. It is not unusual for people to hold biased perceptions in favor of themselves, that is, both adults and children perceive their position as being correct and just. Similarly, Furman and Buhrmester (1985b) argue that studies which ask children to report on sibling relationship quality are invaluable because the children's perception of their sibling relationship may be dictating reality. If a certain child is perceiving his/her relationship to be highly conflictual, then this perception becomes a reality for them - a self-fulfilling prophecy. The following section will review the theories pertinent to this study.

### **Sibling Conflict Theories**

Conflict is an integral part of most human development theories (Shantz, 1987). These theories provide researchers with a basis to investigate why sibling conflict continues to be a topic of concern for parents. With regard to sibling conflict, the theories that provide a foundation for current conflict studies are psychoanalytic, equity, social learning, social cognitive, biological, and family systems theories. Each theory will be described in the following section, with special emphasis placed on the family systems theory.

**Psychoanalytic theory.** The most commonly cited source of sibling conflict is parental behavior. Parents contribute to sibling conflict by exhibiting differential

treatment or by failing to meet the attention needs of their children (Vandell & Bailey, 1992). The premise for both sources of conflict is competition. When concepts such as sibling rivalry, competition, and conflict are addressed, the theoretical underpinnings are of the psychodynamic nature. This school of thought stresses that the childhood years are guided by instinctual unconscious motivation (Wenar, 1990). Siblings pose a threat to one another, because they have to compete for the attention, love, and time of the primary caregiver (Freud, 1916-1917). Whenever the tension caused by these instinctual urges escalates to a critical level, then defense mechanisms take over (Miller, 1989). Defense mechanisms help an individual deal with personal fears and anxieties in a number of ways. For instance, a child with strong feelings of jealousy for his/her sibling might act the opposite of the way he/she feels by being overly friendly, while hugging their sibling too tightly; this defense mechanism is called reaction formation. It is a way of dealing with high anxiety and fear of losing parental love and attention. Conflict can be overt and directed to the sibling as in the case of the projection defense mechanism, where a child will attribute one's unacceptable feelings to his/her sibling (Miller, 1989). In this case, sibling A might conceive that sibling B hates them, because in reality that is how sibling A feels about sibling B. The psychoanalytic view suggests that denying conflictual feelings is not healthy. Unfortunately, children are socialized to suppress their negative feelings. That is why some children exhibit sublimation in engaging in aggressive, but socially appropriate contact, through rough and tumble play.

Other psychoanalytic theorists such as Adler (1927), believed sibling conflict to



be the result of sibling rivalry for parental love and attention. Adler particularly viewed the oldest child as protesting the most, since s/he would have to share resources that were once hers/his alone (Phares, 1991). The oldest child loses many privileges with the birth of a sibling and this could be the start of sibling resentment. Adler appeared to use the terms rivalry and conflict interchangeably, but more recent empirical research indicates they are in fact distinct terms. Furman and Buhrmester (1985a; 1985b; 1992) conceptualized rivalry and conflict as two separate sibling relationship qualities. Rivalry is the competition for the same resources, which may lead to conflict, but not all conflicts are necessarily rivalrous. For instance, siblings may disagree on what movie to rent, or what they want for dinner. These types of disagreements may not be the result of competition, but rather, differing tastes.

Recent research demonstrates that differential treatment by parents leads to more agonistic exchanges between siblings (Brody et al., 1987; Brody, Stoneman, McCoy, 1992; Furman & Buhrmester, 1985b; Stocker, Dunn, & Plomin, 1989). This finding is consistent with the psychodynamic perspective that children fear the loss of maternal love and favoritism. If a child perceives his/her sibling to be treated more favorably, then automatically the instinctual reaction would be to reduce one's aggressive tensions. This is usually done by directing negative feelings towards the sibling instead of the parent. The conflict in this case is displaced and children aggress towards a substitute or socially acceptable target - their sibling.

Equity theory. Conflict inspired by differential parental treatment may also be the result of social inequity (Adams, 1965). A common source of sibling conflict is

each sibling's varying perceptions of what is fair. Unlike the psychoanalytic approach, equity theory advocates that conflict is the result of a conscious revolt against a perceived injustice. The relative amounts of attention and love one receives from one's parents contribute to sibling conflict as well. Children are very aware of "the relative amounts of parental and social rewards (they perceive to be) receiving vis-a-vis a sibling" (Brody et al., 1987, p. 355). Psychoanalytic and equity theories place the blame for sibling conflict on parents. Thus, if sibling conflict were to diminish it would be because of some restructuring of parental behavior. Parents may be unaware of what they are doing when they make distinctions between their children. Contrary to what some researchers (Brody, Stoneman, & McCoy, 1992; McHale & Pawletko, 1992) have found, Dunn, Plomin, and Nettles (1985), discovered that mothers treat their two children similarly at the same age in infancy based on a longitudinal study, but make allowances for different stages of development. This finding suggests that children perceive they are being treated differently because they are being treated differently due to age discrepancy. However, when both siblings were the same exact age (based on longitudinal comparisons) the authors did not find any differences in parental treatment towards either sibling. So, the problem may not be actual differential behavior, but perception of differential treatment. The importance of sibling perception of maternal behavior becomes more evident.

In sum, sibling conflict as interpreted by psychoanalytic and equity theories is a negative phenomenon. It is the result of some imbalance that is either perceived or actual, and that needs to obtain some equilibrium. Sibling conflict is fostered and

perpetuated by parental behaviors - especially differential parental treatment of siblings. The importance of parental attention, love, and affection is pronounced in psychoanalytic and equity theories.

**Social learning theory.** Social learning theory can also describe how sibling conflicts develop. The underpinnings of socialization via the social learning perspective is based on the concept of operant conditioning (where a child's action - the stimulus - produces a response from his/her environment). Obtaining parental attention may be the goal of children who have been negatively reinforced. Kendrick and Dunn (1983) found that when mothers reacted to hostile sibling behavior with punishment or restriction, aggression was exhibited towards siblings more often. After all, negative parental attention appears to be better than no attention. In fact, siblings themselves listed "getting parents' attention" as one of the reasons why they fight with each other (Prochaska & Prochaska, 1985). The fact that these children know that their behavior can get parental attention suggests that they have learned a reinforcement strategy. The modern social learning theory (Bandura, 1986) takes the study of developmental socialization even further by including social context in its examination of human behavior. Social learning theory supports the notion of parental modelling and reinforcement of conflict through direct rewards or observational learning. Unfortunately, destructive reinforcement patterns can sometimes lead to coercive cycles of social exchanges within the family unit (Patterson, 1986).

The literature suggests that a great deal of modelling occurs within the family system. Bandura (1965) outlined how a child could learn patterns of interactions just

by observing and modelling the behavior of others - especially those in positions of authority, such as parents. From the social learning theory perspective it is not surprising to find that sibling relationships in discordant or divorced homes were more negative than sibling relationships in intact homes (Emery, 1982; MacKinnon, 1989). This suggests that siblings may pick up on negative parental interaction and use it in their other social relations. For example, children from discordant homes also exhibit negative behaviors with peers (Gottman & Katz, 1989), thus parental discord does appear to influence other social systems. Similarly, the reverse applies, since children who had healthy peer ties before the birth of a sibling were rated as having more positive relationships with their siblings in the preschool years (Kramer & Gottman, 1992).

Positive sibling relationships may be reinforced by positive parental conflict resolution strategies. A warm family climate was more commonly associated with friendlier sibling interactions (Pulakos, 1990). Following from this premise, if children do not see other family members engaging in negotiation, perspective-taking, or problem-solving skills, they may not engage in such prosocial behaviors themselves. That is, those families and parents who engage in more discussions and perspective-taking types of social interactions are more likely to expose their children to these types of strategies during conflict situations. It is important to note however, that children who engage in such cognitive processing have reached a certain cognitive maturational level and do not necessarily demonstrate these strategies based on solely parental facilitatory behaviors.

Another problem that is transmitted via social learning is negative parent-child interactions. If children witness their sibling arguing with their parents, they may imitate this fighting behavior (Patterson, 1986). If a child witnesses family conflict regularly, then they may perceive this as normal. Patterson's findings confirm the social learning prediction that coercive styles of interaction will be modelled by children. Coercion seemingly spreads from one family social system to another.

Social cognitive theory. Some researchers argue that modern social learning theory is indistinguishable from a newer stream of research called social cognition (Miller, 1989). This is in part due to Bandura's (1986) work on vicarious reinforcement. Bandura expanded the concept of modelling by adding a cognitive dimension to this aspect of social learning theory. He developed the notion of triadic reciprocity by incorporating environmental influences on an individual's development with behavior and person variables. Bandura argued that these three variables contribute in reciprocal influences on a person's life, but by no means does reciprocity imply equal bidirectional effects - the strength of each variable's influences changes for each person. Simply, triadic reciprocity can occur in the following manner: If a child's physical environment (E) dictates that s/he has to share his/her toys with his/her sibling, but this child's thoughts, feelings, and perceptions (Person Variables) prohibit him/her from engaging in perspective-taking or empathizing; this may result in the child's acting negatively towards their sibling by refusing to share.

Social cognitive theory distinguishes between the two types of existing conflicts - positive and destructive. Destructive conflict results when the conflict itself

is an obstacle to change (Emery, 1992) When conflict is not resolved, and coercive, destructive strategies are being used by both parties (Shantz, 1987; Vandell & Bailey, 1992), cognitive growth does not take place. Positive conflict, in contrast, allows children to learn about social rules (Dunn & Munn, 1986a) and how to master social problem-solving strategies that can be applied to other areas of life (Shantz, 1987). In addition, positive conflicts encourage the emergence of individuation within the family structure, that is, it allows children to develop an identity (Vandell & Bailey, 1992).

Even though sociocognitive conflict is a fairly new direction of research, there have been a number of studies conducted examining children's abilities to problem solve, communicate, perspective-take, anticipate future events, and make situational evaluations. Cognitive theorists posit conflict as a positive occurrence. Piaget was one of the first theorists to advocate conflict as a positive and natural developmental occurrence. Chapman and McBride (1992) cite communicative conflict, perspective-taking, moral reasoning, and justifications as positive methods of dealing with conflict situations.

Another important contribution to the social cognitive movement is Selman's (1980) developmental model of interpersonal understanding which deals with the decentration of the young child. Selman (1981) examined the types of conflict concepts individuals aged 3 to 34 have based on this developmental model. Based on the interviews Selman conducted with his sample, he categorized conflict concepts and resolution strategies into four separate developmental stages. At the bottom level (level 0) conflicts are resolved physically by children by either stopping the interaction

by leaving or with the use of physical force. At level 1, children start to appreciate and understand conflict, but they still hold a very unilateral perspective. By level 2, bilateral concepts of conflict emerge, but mutual understanding of conflict has not yet been achieved. And in the final stages, levels 3 and 4, Selman found adolescents and adults grasped the importance of mutual resolution. In parallel, the early stages of Selman's analysis are reflective of Deutsch's (1973) definition of destructive conflict. Does this automatically imply that all adults engage in constructive conflict because they have reached levels 3 and 4? No, the distinction is that adults and adolescents who have reached levels 3 and 4 have also reached a certain level of understanding, but this does not necessarily imply that they use this stage knowledge.

Children are also capable of employing constructive types of conflict strategies. By teasing, blaming, justifying, compromising, etc., children learn to explore their understanding of: feelings and intentions of others, social rules, social strategies, and interpersonal relations and personal identity (Dunn & Slomkowski, 1992). Thus, social cognition theory views conflict as an essential part of human development.

Overall, research conducted from the social cognitive perspective demonstrates the positive aspects of sibling conflict. There are many cognitive and social skills that are learned through social conflict. The results of studies advocating a social cognitive approach argue that conflict develops in stages, and that dealing with and experiencing conflict is an inevitable and necessary part of a child's developmental maturation.

**Biological perspective.** The previous theories tend to place the blame of sibling conflict with the child's environment - specifically the parents. A biological

perspective forces us to look at other factors such as individual child characteristics like temperament, age, and gender. It is evident that some children fight more than others, and it cannot be entirely due to parenting styles.

Temperament is an "inborn emotional or behavioral style, including general level of activity, regularity or predictability, approach or withdrawal, adaptability, intensity of reaction, responsiveness, mood, distractibility and persistence" (Kauffman, 1993, p. 506). In a study examining children's views of the causes of sibling rivalry (Prochaska & Prochaska, 1985), children listed being in a bad mood as the number one reason for fighting with a sibling. Mood is part of what makes up temperament according to Kauffman's definition. This connection suggests that children themselves contribute to the amount and types of conflicts they have with their siblings. Although some environmental factors foster and sustain a bad mood, there is some degree of predisposed child characteristics that may contribute to a conflictual situation.

Certain child characteristics have been linked to more negative sibling behavior than others. For instance, sibling pairs that exhibited high activity, high emotional intensity, and low persistence levels in exchanges engaged in more agonistic sibling confrontations (Brody et al., 1987). Temperament scores were strongly correlated with conflict (Munn & Dunn, 1989), specifically children who exhibited more negative mood and distractibility were reported as having more sibling conflicts. Temperament appears to be a causal predictor variable that may be associated with differences in sibling relationships, as demonstrated by Stocker, Dunn, and Plomin (1989). For instance, temperament traits such as shyness were associated with less controlling and



competitive relationships, whereas children who were rated high on emotional intensity and anger dimensions were more likely to have less prosocial relationships with their brothers and sisters. Logically, temperament can influence the types of interactions that can occur between siblings. Two siblings of "difficult" temperament would be expected to have more hostile exchanges. Children with a difficult temperament are categorized by biological irregularities, slow adaptation to new environmental situations, and frequent negative mood, but this definition is by no means inflexible. To label any child as "difficult" however, should be cautioned against because it is a stigmatizing term. A "difficult" temperament is a behavioral style just like any other, and it is malleable, and can change when a child is in contact with different environments.

Examining sibling conflict based solely on the biological factors discussed previously may be an oversimplification. It is important to remember that a child does not grow up in isolation, but rather, s/he comes in contact with a variety of social networks. A difficult temperament child may elicit negative responses from those around him/her, and this sets a vicious cyclical exchange in motion. Schachter and Stone's (1985) work demonstrates that within-family environmental processes may play a role in parents' definitions of a difficult child. So, if a parent labels a child as difficult, then it would be nearly impossible for that child to break out of that prototype. There is obviously some causal factor interdependence, that is, both parents and children exert power of influence on one another.

Other biological or predetermined characteristics that may affect sibling

interactions are birth order, gender, sibling's gender, and the age-spacing between siblings (Minnett, Vandell, & Santrock, 1983). Although most of the studies cited in this literature review focus on sibling dyad pairs, there are many families with several siblings. Family size must have some effect on how sibling relationships develop, yet, this constellation variable effect has not been explored. Families with three siblings presumably will interact differently than families with only two. In a family of three children, for example, the sibling dynamics are different - there is a middle child which does not exist in the dyadic situation. The other constellation variables, gender and age-spacing, also dictate how close the interactions between siblings will be. Rivalry between closely spaced, same-sex siblings is more common than opposite gender and distantly-spaced age siblings (Minnett et al., 1983). This is probably so, because siblings close in age, and of the same gender, may tend to share the same interests and experience sociocognitive developmental milestones at approximately the same time in life, which can lead to confrontations. Additionally, they are more likely to spend more time together, thus increasing the probability of conflict occurrence.

In summary, the biological perspective takes individual characteristics into account that the other theories tend to overlook. Personality traits such as child temperament have been linked to sibling relationship quality; the more temperamental the sibling pair is the more likely they will experience negative affect. Gender and age variables were also found to have an impact on the quality of the sibling relationship.

**Family systems theory.** A major criticism of the theories discussed previously

is that they tend to examine sibling conflict in isolation (Minuchin, 1985). That is, conflict is usually attributed to either parental failure, a poor learning environment, or predisposed personality traits, but to conclude simply that conflict is due to any single process is probably an oversimplification and inaccurate. In reviewing both theoretical work and research, it is apparent that no sibling dyad is the same. Some are more conflictual because of family life stressors, while some differ due to sibling temperament variables. The question that needs to be asked is, what within certain pairs of siblings is contributing to conflict struggles? One way of addressing this inquiry is by going to the source, and asking the children and their families.

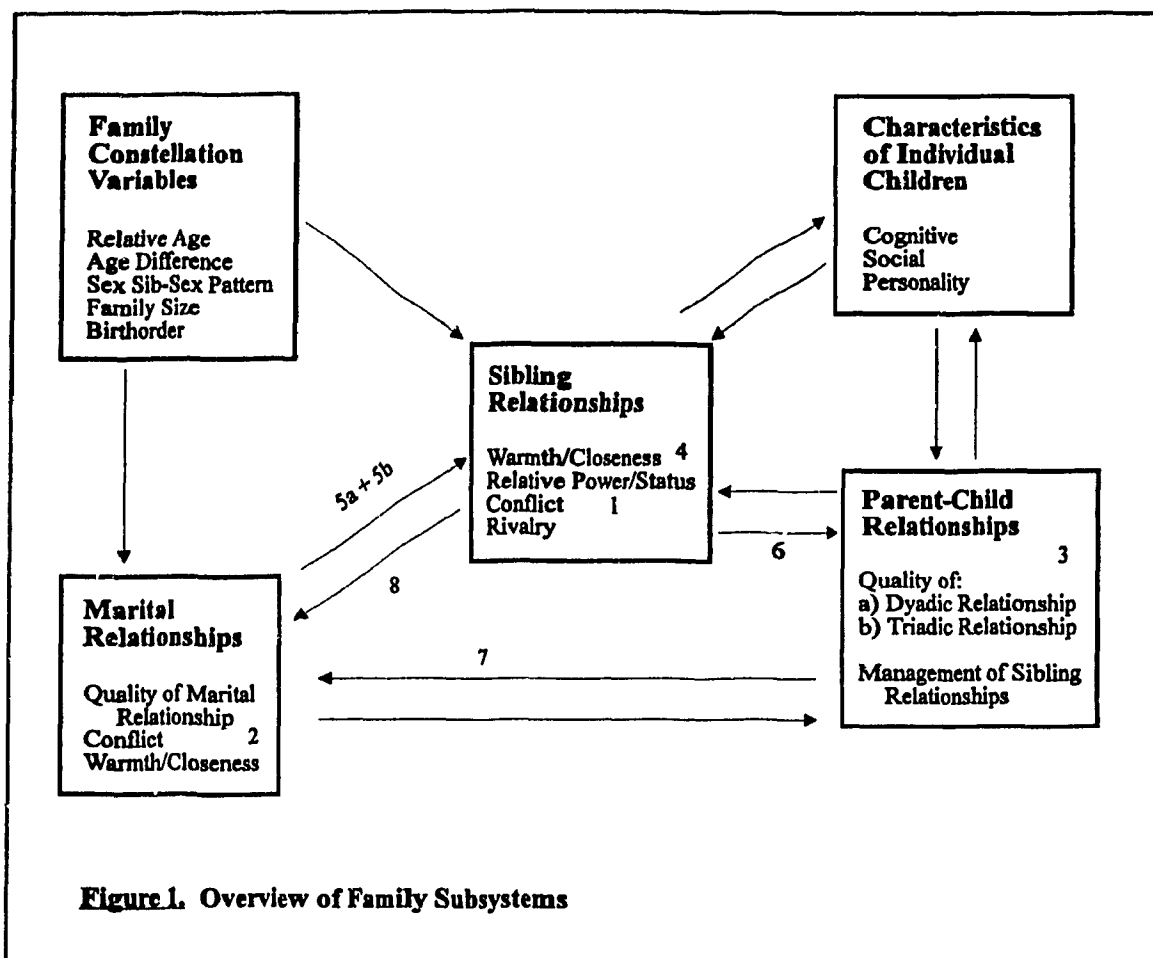
Sibling interactions have often been observed in solely dyadic interchanges, separate from other social systems (e.g., Abramovitch et al., 1979; 1986; Dunn & Munn, 1986a; Munn & Dunn, 1989). Since most relationships do not occur in a vacuum, it is necessary to include subsystem influences when studying the quality of the sibling relationship (Bell, Avery, Jenkins, Feld, & Schoenrock, 1985). According to Minuchin (1988), there is an interdependence of systems within the family. The fact that the child is a part of a network of interpersonal relationships merits a family systems analysis (Hinde & Stevenson-Hinde, 1987). Since it is not unusual for other family members to join in dyadic conflicts (Vuchinich, Emery, & Cassidy, 1988), why should siblings be studied in such a confined manner? To study any family subsystem individually is potentially limiting and may underestimate the direction of effects.

In fact, this thesis will examine the different types of sibling conflict through a family systems approach. This method has been chosen because most sibling-sibling,

parent-child, and parent-parent interactions do not occur in purely dyadic or triadic exchanges. In a systems model, the family is defined as a system composed of several interdependent elements (this includes individuals as well as dyads, triads, and so on). The influence of one subsystem on another is considered to be circular in nature, rather than linear (Minuchin, 1985; Hinde & Stevenson-Hinde, 1987). In terms of the family systems theory there are a number of substructures which may be influencing the sibling dyad. Those subsystems most likely to have an impact on sibling conflict shall be briefly discussed: a) parent-child, b) parent-siblings, and c) parent-parent.

The following flowchart (refer to Figure 1), combines Minuchin's (1988) family systems perspective with Furman and Buhrmester's (1985b) assessment of factors that contribute to the development of the quality of the sibling relationship. Figure 1 differs from Furman and Buhrmester's model in that it includes all of a family's subsystems as possible influences on the sibling relationships. The diagram is in constant metamorphosis because it can change according to a family's dynamics (for example, if there are step-parents and step-siblings, these family relationships may be included as well). A family's constellation variables (family size, birth order of siblings, age difference, and sibling genders) set in motion how various family substructures will influence one another.

**A) The parent-child subsystem.** To gain a more complete understanding of sibling interaction, the parent-child relationship should be examined. Children are extremely interested in the exchanges between their siblings and their parents (Dunn, Brown, Slomkowski, Tesla, & Youngblade, 1991), so it should not be surprising that



**Figure 1. Overview of Family Subsystems**

parent-child conflict may increase the likelihood of both family and sibling conflict (Christensen & Margolin, 1988). Of equal interest is that the reverse was also noted and that sibling conflict was also linked to parent-child conflict. That is why arrows are drawn in both directions, to accentuate the bidirectional influence of subsystems.

As a dyad, parent-child relationships are hypothesized to influence the sibling bond through the development of attachment and security (a relationship quality). The premise stemming from this theory is that securely attached children will engage in more prosocial behaviors with their siblings (Teti & Ablard, 1989). Sibling conflict as a result of the need for parental attention has an attachment theory origin. In order for children to form a secure, positive bond with their parents, parents need to allocate the appropriate amount of attention. Teti and Ablard (1989) found that the highest level of negative behavior was exhibited among sibling pairs in which both siblings were insecurely attached. As predicted, the least amount of antagonism was found among securely attached sibling pairs. When considering the role of children's security of attachment to parents in shaping sibling relationships however, it is important not to overlook the possibility that children who exhibit a particular attachment style may have specific predispositions (characteristics of individual children) that may elicit specific parental styles (child management). Thus, it must be clear whose actions influences whose behavior before analytical conclusions may be drawn.

Other parent-child behaviors that may have an impact on sibling relations are mother and newborn play behaviors. Kendrick and Dunn (1982) found a strong correlation between the frequency with which a mother and her newborn played

together, and the frequency of negative exchanges between sibling A and sibling B. So once again, an interdependence of family systems seems to be unfolding (as depicted in Figure 1). The intensity of the relationship between a mother and her second child appears to have an impact on the development of the relationship between sibling A and sibling B. For instance, when mothers have a playful and affectionate rapport with their second child and spend a long time interacting with this child, a hostile sibling relationship may develop (Dunn, 1988). In contrast, when mothers engaged in frequent prohibitions shortly after the birth of a second child, over time the siblings developed a friendly relationship.

If the parent-child relationship influences the sibling relationship, other substructures within the family system also have a chance of influencing the dyad. These links need to be probed further.

**B) The parent-siblings subsystem.** This subsystem is slightly different than the one previously discussed because it is a triadic system. That is, the interaction between a parent and the sibling pair has implications for the development of the sibling-sibling system. In fact, all subsystem levels (e.g., dyad, triad, etc.) may have the capability of influencing another familial structure (as suggested by Figure 1). Kreppner (1988) is one of the few authors to have examined the tetradic relational system (i.e., the interactions and relationships between and amongst two parents and two siblings equalling in total six dyadic relationships). He did so by monitoring the transition the family system goes through with the arrival of a second child. He found that mothers' interactions with their first child changed the most by decreasing in

frequency. Examinations of parent interactions with more than two siblings appear to be nonexistent, and although interesting, are beyond the scope of this thesis.

Most of the studies following a family systems approach however have examined only the maternal role in sibling interactions (Dunn & Kendrick, 1982; Howe, 1991; Howe, Aquan-Assee, & Bukowski, 1992; Howe & Ross, 1990). One possible reason most investigators have examined the mother-sibling relationship, is that mothers are often the primary caretakers. Mothers often set the stage or pace at which they will interact with their infants. Sibling interaction is often influenced by parental presence or intervention (Kendrick & Dunn, 1983). A major challenge to researchers interested in sibling relations is the task of separating actual sibling traits from maternal or familial influence. Determining which specific parental patterns influence the dyad, as well as what sibling qualities influence family processes, may help social scientists understand the nature of sibling relations.

The frequency of mother-child interactions negatively affects the quality of the sibling interaction (Brody et al., 1987; Dunn & Kendrick, 1981; Kendrick & Dunn, 1983). In fact, some studies showed that the mere presence of the mother has negative repercussions on the sibling interaction (Brody et al., 1987; Corter et al., 1983; Howe et al., 1992), specifically negative sibling behaviors increased during maternal presence. Unfortunately, the direction of effects, that is, the bidirectional influence of siblings on mothers was not addressed in these studies.

It may be that mothers facilitate some behaviors more than others, and limit in some ways, the type of sibling interactions that occur. Thus, parental styles of



childrearing should also be of interest to researchers. For example, intrusive or controlling maternal styles may have been associated with fewer positive behaviors among siblings, while positive maternal behavior may have been associated with child cooperation (Howe, 1992). These findings are consistent with the theory that authoritarian parents employ intrusive and controlling interventions that heighten tension between sibling dyads. The ideal parenting style is considered to be authoritative because these parents are not intrusive and yet permit their children to have considerable freedom (Hetherington & Parke, 1986), as well as encouraging exploration of their environment. Parents who engaged in consistent forms of discipline were also more likely to have less conflictual children. With reference to Figure 1, parental discipline and management of sibling relations play a role in the development of sibling relationship qualities such as conflict. Once again, the reciprocal nature of the family structure makes the direction of effects difficult to control for.

An important aspect of sibling conflict is type and amount of maternal interventions. Kendrick and Dunn (1983) argue that maternal intervention plays a crucial role in assessing how well siblings will get along with one another at the present time and also at a later date. A strong relationship was found between hostile behavior of young boys and a high rate of intervention by prohibiting the boys from engaging in agonistic types of behavior. Parental controlling behaviors were predictive of sibling conflict in boys only, so this gender effect should be examined further. In support of these results Dunn and Munn (1985) confirmed that parental involvement in

sibling conflicts increased the frequency of conflicts. It is important to acknowledge two possible implications from these studies: 1) mothers who intervene in sibling quarrels may force their children to deal with and work through the conflict situation, and 2) mothers who intervene often may prohibit their children from learning how to resolve their conflicts.

With respect to destructive and constructive conflicts, the way in which a parent interacts with either sibling is likely to have an effect on the sibling relationship itself. That is, if children see their parents engaging in destructive conflict situations with their sibling, they may be more likely to do the same. While, if they observe more constructive types of conflict strategies between parent and sibling, they may emulate this approach. Although some sibling literature has examined the frequency of mother-child interactions in the presence of a second child, there has been no detailed investigation of conflict. Does maternal presence and interaction increase constructive or destructive types of conflicts? Past findings have shown that maternal intervention increases negative sibling behaviors, but they did not make the distinction between constructive and destructive conflict behaviors.

**C) Parent-parent subsystem.** Of particular interest for the present report is the spousal influence on the sibling relationship. All subsystems discussed previously are of equal interest, and should be explored in future studies, but will not be in this thesis.

What is of crucial importance for sibling conflicts is that other family members' interactions may have the ability to influence another subsystem's interactions (Emery,

1992). Individuals will be affected by the conflict of other relationships. According to Cummings, Zahn-Waxler, and Radke-Yarrow (1984) children exhibited developmental changes in reactions to family conflict. Toddlers were more likely than school-age children to have emotional responses in anger situations. The authors speculated that school-aged children were better able to cope with their parents' conflicts than their preschool counterparts, but that the consequences of serious conflicts may linger and be disturbing for school-age children.

Another factor that may contribute to sibling conflicts according to a family systems perspective (refer to Figure 1) is marital discord. It seems that emotional distress predisposes children to exhibit aggressive responses towards others (Brody, Stoneman, McCoy, & Forehand, 1992). The expression of anger may be directed toward siblings. Yet, children with fewer siblings have been known to have more problems adjusting to parental conflict or separation (Kline, Johnston, & Tschann, 1991). This could be due to the fact that children from larger families have more social supports and may see other interactions besides the parent-parent dyad. Or, another possibility is that siblings provide each other with the emotional support they need. Not all sibling pairs have conflictual relationships as a result of parents' marital problems. Some children bond and develop stronger relationships during times of family stress (Kempton, Armistead, Wierson, & Forehand, 1991). This inconsistency needs to be investigated.

A family systems perspective brings to our attention the fact that conflict does not have to be a dyadic entity. Conflict does occur in denominations greater than two.

In a study examining mother-sibling triad interactions it was found that conflicts contribute to children's understanding of teasing, supportive and prohibitive actions, and communication about transgressions (Dunn & Munn, 1985). As Vuchinich et al. (1988) observed, one third of dyadic family conflicts are joined by other family members. Children most often are witnesses, if not even participants, in parental conflict. Such being the case, a link between level of parental conflict and sibling prosocial and agonistic behaviors was found (Brody et al., 1987). Low levels of parental conflict were related to more prosocial sibling behaviors, while agonistic behaviors were linked to low marital quality. Indeed, the effects of completely resolved adult conflicts must be probed because as Cummings, Ballard, El-Sheikh, and Lake (1991) suggest, they may be indistinguishable from friendly adult interactions as perceived by children. If this is so, then there should be a difference between children whose parents employ constructive versus destructive conflict strategies in their marital exchanges.

Children are not necessarily going to jump into a conflict situation with a sibling immediately following a parental conflict episode, rather the effects of such a confrontation may be delayed. Or, children may seek contact with a sibling during or after a parental quarrel as a coping mechanism strategy (Jenkins, Smith, & Graham, 1989). Various response strategies such as confiding in someone, offering parents comfort, or self-blaming may be used.

The main point of this section was to review the different family substructures (parent-child, parent-siblings, parent-parent) that play a role in the development of

sibling conflict and resolution. The overlap and interdependence of these three substructures is evident from the literature review, as well as from Figure 1, which depicts a circular path of family influence on siblings and their relationship.

### **The Present Study**

The present report was designed to explore various levels of sibling conflict based on a family systems model in school-aged children (grades 5 and 6). It was structured to probe different family members' perceptions of sibling-sibling, parent-parent, and parent-child conflict strategies through interviews and questionnaires. The research reviewed suggests some connection between levels of conflict in one family system influencing another, but this study was designed to go beyond that and look at what types of conflicts are important. It would be expected that high levels of conflict (destructive and constructive) in a substructure will influence the amount of conflict perceived in other relationships. The present study was aimed at differentiating between these two types of conflict while also testing the family systems theory's impact on sibling conflict. Therefore, the following hypotheses were explored in the following manner (the hypothesis number corresponds to the numbers in Figure 1):

A. Predictions examining the relations within a family subsystem.

(1) A positive relationship between sibling perception of their conflict and parental assessment of sibling conflict was predicted.

(2) It was also expected that there would be a positive relationship between children's ratings of parent conflict and spousal ratings of marital conflict.

(3) It was hypothesized that a positive correlation would be found between

parent and child ratings of parent-child conflict.

(4) Children who reported having more destructive types of conflicts with their siblings in interviews would also report their relationship as being more negative in questionnaires.

B. Predictions examining the relationships across family systems.

(5a) In keeping with a family systems' approach, a positive relationship was hypothesized between child perceptions of conflict in the sibling relationship and level of marital conflict as reported by parents.

(5b) A higher frequency of unresolved (destructive) sibling conflict was expected to be reported by children whose parents report destructive marital conflict, and likewise, a higher frequency of resolved (constructive) sibling conflict was predicted to be reported by children whose parents engage in constructive marital conflict strategies.

(6) In another test of the family systems theory, it was predicted that there would be a positive relationship between parent-child conflict as reported by both parents and children and frequency and type of sibling conflict (e.g., constructive, destructive).

(7) It was also expected that type of conflict strategies parents use in their marital exchanges would be positively correlated to the types of exchanges both parents and children report about in the parent-child subsystem.

(8) Based on parental ratings of marital conflict, two groups were created (a constructive and destructive group). It was predicted that there would be a difference

between the two groups with regard to their assessment of the sibling relationship as determined by the a) Sibling Relationships Questionnaire and b) sibling interview.

## Method

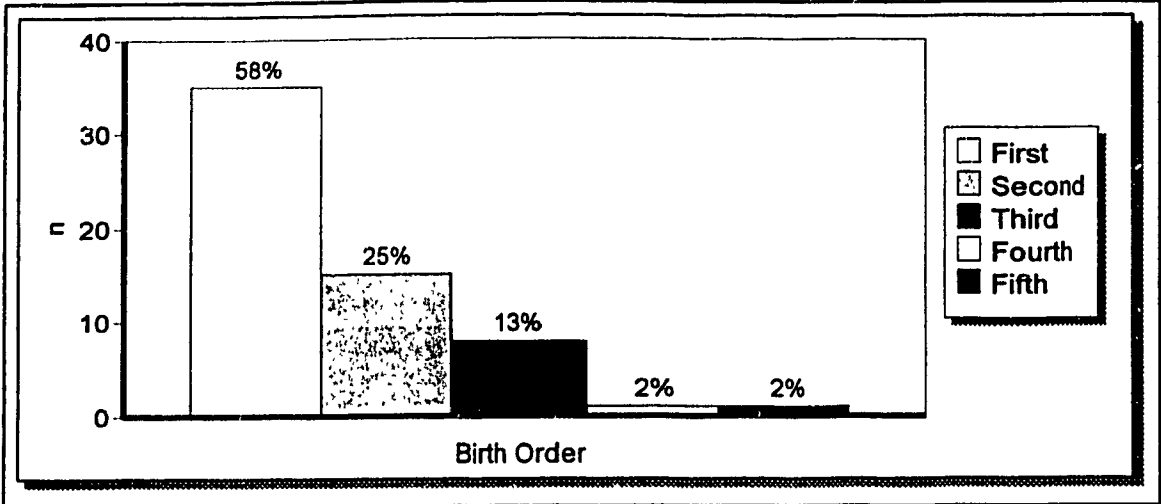
### Subjects

The total sample consisted of 60 families comprised of 60 target siblings with ages ranging between 8.9 and 13.3 years ( $M = 11.5$ ,  $SD = .73$ ), 60 nontarget siblings ranging in age from 5.4 to 15.8 years ( $M = 10.3$ ,  $SD = 3.1$ ), 59 mothers, and 53 fathers (90% of eligible families contacted agreed to participate). The middle to upper class sample was made up of 53 two-parent families and 7 single-parent families. Of the 60 target children, 31 were boys and 29 were girls, and of the 60 nontarget siblings 35 were boys and 25 were girls. Most families were comprised of two siblings (58.3%). In examining birth order characteristics it was found that the majority of target siblings were firstborn, while the majority of nontarget siblings were secondborn (see Figures 2, 3, and 4).

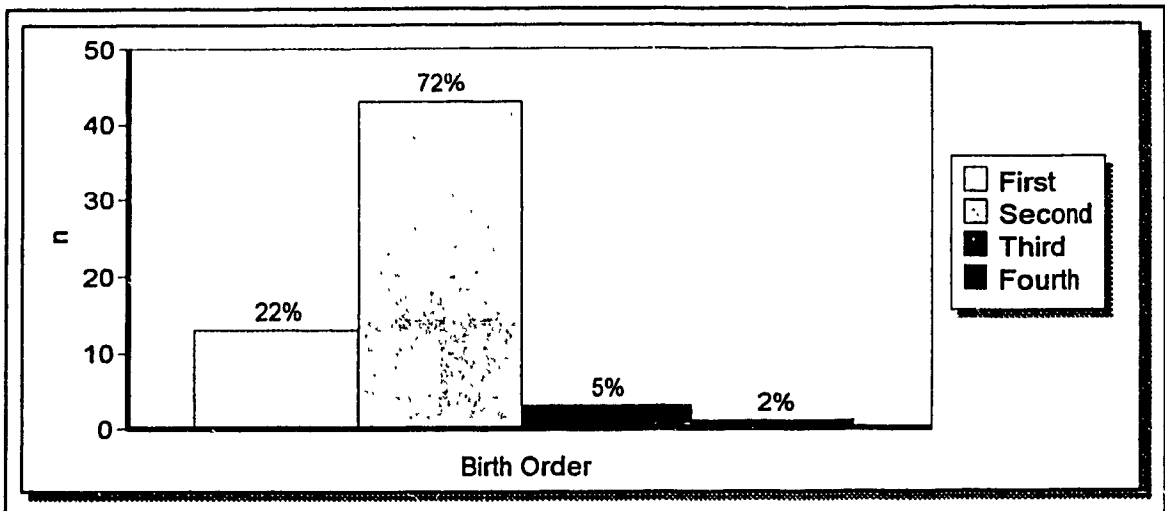
### Procedure

The director of the Montreal Catholic School Commission was contacted in order to obtain permission to conduct the study at schools within the English sector of this schoolboard. After having debriefed the director about the study in a telephone conversation and presenting her with a short summary and copy of the study's materials, she gave the author permission to carry out the present study. Next, four elementary school principals were contacted to obtain permission to conduct the study in their schools. Specifically, teachers were asked for permission for the use of their classroom and some class time (of their choice). The letters of explanation and consent forms were distributed to children with siblings. A copy of the letter of

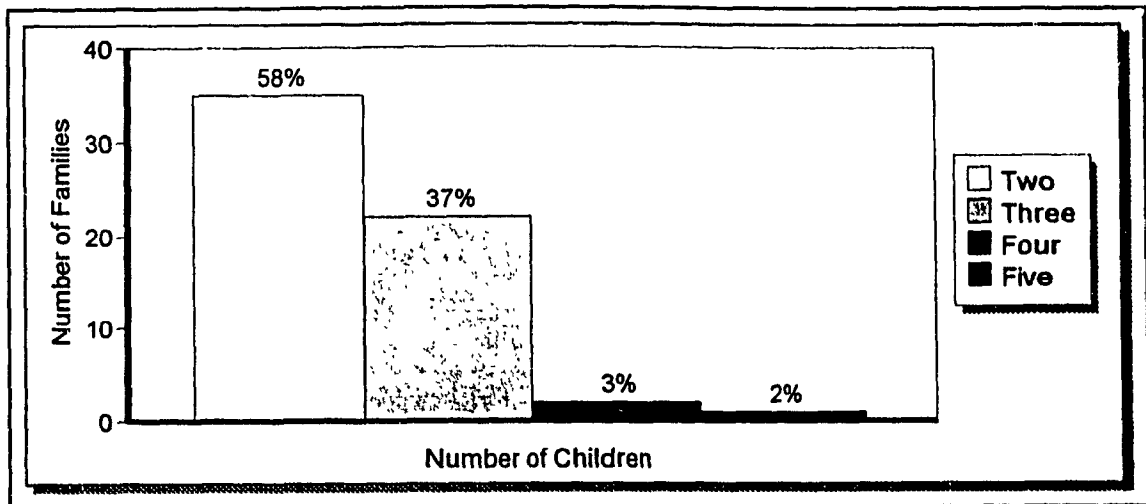




**Figure 2** Target Sibling Birth Order Distribution



**Figure 3** Nontarget Sibling Birth Order Distribution



**Figure 4** Family Demographics

explanation and parent consent forms can be found in Appendix A.

Pending responses from the parent consent forms, three parent questionnaires were sent home to the participating families with the target child. Upon completion parents were requested to send the sealed packages to their child's teacher. The **Parental Expectations and Perceptions of Children's Sibling Relationships Questionnaire (PEPC-SRQ)** was used to assess parents' views of their children's sibling relationships. The second parent questionnaire that was included in the package was the **Conflict Tactics** measure that assessed verbal, reasoning, and physical conflict. The third measure was the **O'Leary-Porter Scale** that examined overt marital conflict.

To investigate sibling perceptions of their own relationship and conflict strategies, both children in each sibling pair were given the **Sibling Relationship Questionnaire** to complete and they were also administered the **Sibling Interview**. These interviews were tape-recorded, transcribed, and later coded. To assess both siblings' perceptions of marital and parent-child conflict and conflict strategies, children were asked to complete the children's version of the **Conflict Tactics Scale**. The self-report questionnaires completed by siblings were administered in a group format both for target children and their closest-in-age siblings in a designated classroom.

### **Measures**

In order to assess the amount and type of conflict experienced by siblings and their parents, several measures were used to obtain this information. These measures are described below.

### Self-Report Questionnaires Examining Sibling Conflict.

#### a.) Sibling Relationship Questionnaire (SRQ, Furman & Buhrmester, 1985b).

Both target children (5th or 6th graders) and their target sibling (closest-in-age sibling within a 5 year range) were separately administered the SRQ to determine their perceptions of the quality of their sibling relationship. The SRQ has four subscales as determined by Furman and Buhrmester (1985b): a) warmth/closeness, b) relative power/status, c) conflict, and d) rivalry (see Appendix B). The questions use a five-point Likert format (1 = hardly at all to 5 = extremely much) to determine the siblings' perception of the rate of frequency of these behaviors and qualities of the relationship. The Furman and Buhrmester (1985b) Sibling Relationship Questionnaire has a test-retest reliability ranging from .58 to .86, with a mean  $r = .71$ . All internal consistency coefficients (Cronbach's alpha) for subscales exceeded .70.

#### b.) Parental Expectations and Perceptions of Children's Sibling Relationships Questionnaire (PEPC-SRQ, Kramer & Baron, 1993).

This questionnaire is divided into two sections. First, this measure was designed to assess how often parents expected certain behaviors (e.g., sharing, aggression) to occur in a "good" sibling relationship; parents used a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Never to 5 = Always) to answer the questions. Second, it assessed parents' perceptions of how often the same behaviors actually occurred in their children's relationship. Third, parents were asked to report on how the actual behaviors listed above were: 1) problematic (1 = Not a problem to 4 = A very big problem), 2) easy to improve (1 = Very difficult to 5 = Very easy), and 3) whether they want help to improve this aspect of their children's

relationship (1 = No help to 3 = A lot of help). Fourth, parents rated the overall quality of their children's sibling relationship on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = Very poor to 7 = Extremely good).

In a factor analysis conducted by Kramer and Baron (1993), three subscales were isolated: 1) a warmth subscale ( $\alpha = .86$  for parental standards and  $.86$  for perceived behavior), 2) an agonism subscale ( $\alpha = .88$  for parental standards and  $.73$  for perceived behavior), and 3) a rivalry/competition subscale ( $\alpha = .81$  for parental expectations and  $.76$  for actual behavior). Test-retest reliability correlations were also conducted: correlations for parental standards were  $.74$  for warmth,  $.86$  for agonism, and  $.77$  for rivalry/competition. The scores for parental perceptions of children's actual behavior were lower at  $.71$  for warmth,  $.47$  for agonism, and  $.31$  for rivalry/competition. Nevertheless, all correlations were significant.

#### Self-Report Questionnaires Examining Marital Conflict and Parent-Child

##### Conflict.

##### a.) Conflict Tactics Scale (Adult and Children's Version) (CTS, Straus, 1979).

The Conflict Tactics Scale measures three distinct approaches to dealing with conflict: 1) the use of rational discussion, argument, and reasoning, 2) the use of verbal and nonverbal acts which are harmful or threatening to another person, and 3) the use of physical force to get one's point across. Three extreme questions (e.g., threatened with a knife or gun, used a knife or gun) of dimension three that focus on physical abuse were excluded since they delved into another serious issue not under investigation for this study, which may have alienated parents answering the questionnaire. The three

tactic strategies included in this scale are theoretically based. The CTS is a composite of possible actions a family member may engage in when in conflict with another family member. For instance, subjects were asked how often they, their spouse, and their child "discussed the issue calmly" or "cried" when engaged in a dispute. Responses to these questions could range from "never" to "more than 20 times" a year (see Appendix D). The strength of the CTS is that it allows data on behavior in different family subsystems to be obtained. Straus (1979) also adapted the CTS for use with children.

Reliability was established by first running an item analysis to determine the correlation of items making up the CTS scale. For husbands the item total correlations were  $r = .74$  for the reasoning scale,  $r = .73$  for the verbal aggression scale, and  $r = .87$  for the physical aggression scale. For wives the results were  $r = .70$  for the reasoning scale,  $r = .70$  for the verbal aggression scale, and  $r = .88$  for the physical aggression scale. The 8-level factor embedded within the CTS corresponds to the family role structure of: husband-to-wife, wife-to-husband, father-to-child, child-to-father, mother-to-child, child-to-mother, child-to-sibling, and sibling-to-child. CTS has moderate to high reliability coefficients; for example, the mean internal consistency reliability for husbands was  $\alpha = .71$ , for wives  $\alpha = .71$ , and for children  $\alpha = .73$ . In addition, Straus ran concurrent, content, and construct validity tests with the scale. To assess concurrent validity Straus ran correlations of spouse report CTS scores with student report CTS scores and found that  $r = .45$  for husbands, while  $r = .21$  for wives. The low correlations are due to the low reasoning scale scores which

bring the mean down. In sum, the CTS has strong psychometric properties.

b.) O'Leary-Porter Scale (OPS, Porter & O'Leary, 1980). This scale assessed the frequency of overt parental conflict in the children's presence. This instrument was used to determine if indeed parental conflict took place in front of the children, and if so, how often certain types of conflicts arose. Twenty items were rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale of 1 = very often and 5 = never. Test-retest reliability of the scored items was found to be .96. The O'Leary-Porter Scale may be found in Appendix E.

Sibling Interview A subsample of thirty sibling pairs were individually administered a semi-structured interview that was approximately 15 minutes long (see Appendix F). Previous investigators such as Furman and Buhrmester (1985b) have probed children about their sibling relationship qualities using a questionnaire format. In the present study, however, children were asked more specific questions about sibling conflict and the types of resolution strategies they employ during conflicts. Moreover, the interview employed a new approach (i.e., distinguishing between constructive and destructive types of conflict). The coding system was based on Deutsch (1973), Selman (1980), and Furman and McQuaid's (1992) definitions of constructive and destructive conflict strategies (refer to Appendix G). Furthermore, the coding scheme was derived from an examination of the children's responses; a pilot sample of five interviews was transcribed and a coding manual was developed based on perceived similarity of responses (see Furman & Buhrmester, 1985b).

### Reliability

To obtain inter-rater reliability on the sibling interview an assistant was trained

over a three month period. At random, 25% of the total sample of transcribed interviews were independently coded by both the author and assistant. Reliability was assessed by calculating Cohen's Kappa.

Four separate Kappas were computed: (1) prosocial behavior = .85; (2) equity = .84; (3) destructive conflict strategies = .82; and (4) constructive conflict strategies = .89.



## Results

The following section is divided into three parts: (1) preliminary analyses and presentation of reliability coefficients for the different measures, (2) descriptive statistics for the entire sample on the different measures, and (3) the results pertaining to the research questions addressed in this study along with some exploratory analyses.

### Preliminary analyses

In order to test the reliability of the subcategories within each of the scales used, consistency coefficients (Cronbach's alpha) were computed. For the PEPC-SRQ, factor structures were grouped to form three scales described by Kramer and Baron (1994). In the present sample, Cronbach's alphas revealed high internal consistency on the warmth, conflict, and rivalry subscales for mothers (alpha = .96, .94, .85, respectively) and for fathers (alpha = .99, .98, .97, respectively).

Items on the CTS were also categorized to form four subscales based on those described by Straus (1979). Factor structures were assessed in the present sample for mothers' perceptions of the use of family conflict strategies such as reasoning (alpha = .93), verbal aggression (alpha = .97), physical aggression (alpha = .99), and avoidance tendencies (alpha = .95). Similarly, Cronbach alphas were computed for fathers on reasoning (alpha = .94), verbal aggression (alpha = .96), physical aggression (alpha = .99), and avoidance (alpha = .96) subscales. Then, the internal consistency of the items on the CTS measure for siblings was assessed and the following Cronbach alphas were computed: (1) reasoning (alpha = .94), (2) verbal aggression (alpha = .97), (3) physical aggression (alpha = .99), and (4) avoidance (alpha = .96).

The reliability of each of the scales on the SRQ described by Furman and Buhrmester (1985b) was assessed in the present sample with Cronbach alphas: (1) warmth/closeness (alpha = .96), (2) relative power/status (alpha = .79), (3) conflict (alpha = .93), and (4) rivalry (alpha = .83).

Reliability coefficients for sibling interviews were also calculated. Interview items were collapsed into four strategy subscales: (1) prosocial (alpha = .93), (2) equity (alpha = .89), (3) destructive conflict (alpha = .91), and (4) constructive conflict (alpha = .95) subscales. The prosocial and equity categories were adapted from a coding scheme by Dunn and Munn (1986). Whereas, the constructive and destructive conflict subscales were derived from a combination of existing conflict coding categories (Dunn & Munn, 1986) and new conceptual approach to distinguishing between constructive and destructive conflict (Deutsch, 1972; Furman & McQuaid, 1992).

#### Descriptive data for entire sample

The means and standard deviations for siblings and parents on the various measures can be found in Table 1. The scores on the same measures between subjects are very similar, indicating overall consistent reports of assessments of relationships.

All of the measures had some factors that were associated with siblings' age ( $r$ s = .39 to -.23). Therefore, in the following section all correlational analyses were conducted as partial correlations (controlling for older and younger siblings' age). This was done in order to partial out a possible age effect of the siblings.

Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations for Sibling and Parental Measures

Sibling Relationship Questionnaire				
	<u>n</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>Range</u>
Target Sibling	60	3	.43	2.1-3.9
Nontarget Sibling	57	3	.42	2.0-4.1
Sibling Conflict Tactics Scale				
Target Sibling	60	1	.53	.30-2.5
Nontarget Sibling	56	1.2	.63	.14-3.1
Parental Expectations of Sibling Relationships				
Mothers	59	3.3	.37	2.2-4.4
Fathers	53	3.3	.35	2.0-4.4
Parental Perceptions of Sibling Relationships				
Mothers	59	2.7	.40	2.0-3.8
Fathers	53	2.7	.42	2.1-3.9
Parent Conflict Tactics Scale				
Mothers	59	1.3	.60	.19-2.9
Fathers	53	1.0	.52	.00-2.4
Porter-O'Leary Scale				
Mothers	53	9.5	3.4	1.9-16.9
Fathers	52	9.6	3.5	2.1-18.3

## Research Questions

### 1. Sibling and parental assessment of sibling conflict.

The first question addressed whether there was a link between children's and parents' perceptions of sibling conflict. Partial correlations (see Table 2) indicated that there was no significant relationship between siblings' assessment of sibling conflict and parental perception of sibling conflict. Therefore, the hypothesis that both siblings' and parents' assessments of sibling conflict would be positively correlated was not supported. Instead, the following was revealed: 1) sibling reports of conflict were found to be negatively correlated to parental assessment of warmth in the sibling relationship, 2) sibling assessment and parental assessment of sibling warmth were positively correlated, 3) sibling reports of rivalry were positively linked to parents' assessments of a warm sibling relationship, and 4) sibling reports of rivalry were further linked to parental perception of rivalry in their children's sibling relationships.

Next, the intracorrelations on the SRQ were examined (see Table 3).

Intracorrelations revealed that total amount of conflict reported by siblings was negatively correlated to warmth reported by siblings, but positively correlated to amount of relative power/status siblings reported in their relationships. The level of sibling rivalry reported was positively linked to amount of relative/power status siblings reported.

Further intracorrelations were analyzed to assess target and nontarget children's perceptions of sibling conflict, that is, how children in the dyad viewed their relationship. Results (see Table 4) indicated the following positive correlations

Table 2

Partial Correlations Between Parents' and Siblings' Perceptions of Sibling Conflict

Siblings' Perceptions of	Parents' Assesments of Sibling		
	Conflict	Warmth	Rivalry
Conflict	.12	-.38**	-.05
Warmth	-.19	.53****	-.02
Power/Status	.05	.02	.17
Rivalry	-.01	.26*	.34**

Note. \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$ ; \*\*\*\*  $p < .0001$ .

Table 3

Intracorrelations of Siblings' Reports of Sibling Relationship Qualities

	Conflict	Rivalry	Warmth	Power/Status
Conflict	--	.06	-.57***	.29*
Rivalry		--	.21	.40**
Warmth			--	.18
Power/Status				--

Note. \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .0001$ .

Table 4

Intracorrelations Examining Target and Nontarget Children's Perceptions of Sibling Conflict

	T Conflict	NT Conflict	T Warmth	NT Warmth	T Rivalry	NT Rivalry	T Power	NT Power
T Conflict	--	.41**	-.35**	-.24*	.11	-.11	.24*	.28*
NT Conflict		--	-.46***	-.61***	.01	.13	.01	.21
T Warmth			--	.48**	.04	.19	.19	.03
NT Warmth				--	.05	.18	.01	.24*
T Rivalry					--	-.06	.12	.12
NT Rivalry						--	.17	.39**
T Power							--	.21
NT Power								--

Note. T = target sibling; NT = nontarget sibling.

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .0001$ .

amongst subscale factors: 1) target children's perceptions of conflict in their sibling relationships with nontarget siblings' perceptions of conflict, and 2) target siblings' assessment of warmth with nontarget siblings' perceptions of warmth. For rivalry and relative power/status subscales, siblings' perceptions did not correlate. Results also revealed a distinct pattern between children's assessments of conflict and warmth. Both target and nontarget siblings' accounts of conflict were significantly and negatively correlated with target and nontarget appraisals of sibling warmth. This strong relationship between warmth and conflict subscale factors may be indicative of the incompatibility of experiencing these two factors simultaneously, or perhaps that these are two different dimensions of behavior.

Additional findings indicated that target children's reports of conflict were positively correlated with both target and nontarget siblings' assessment of power/status in the sibling relationship. Nontarget conflict did not however, correlate with either target or nontarget relative power/status. Instead, nontarget siblings' reports of relative power/status was positively linked to both levels of nontarget perceptions of rivalry and warmth.

In brief, the prediction that children's and parents' reports of sibling conflict would be correlated was not confirmed. Additional analyses, however, revealed an association between siblings' perceptions of conflict and warmth.

**2. Children and spousal ratings of marital conflict.** It was predicted that children's ratings of parent conflict and parental ratings of marital conflict would be positively related. This hypothesis was supported since results yielded positive

correlations between children's and parents' perceptions of parent conflict (see table 5 correlations A and D). In addition, siblings' perceptions of mom-to-dad, and dad-to-mom conflict were respectively correlated with parental assessments of mom-to-dad and dad-to-mom conflict (correlations B, C with E, F) In sum, these findings and others reported in Table 5 suggest children had similar views of marital conflict as their parents.

Analyses were broken down further by examining specific conflict strategies. Both parents' and children's perceptions of marital conflict were positively correlated for: 1) physical aggression ( $r = .26, p < .05$ ), 2) verbal aggression ( $r = .36, p < .01$ ), and 3) avoidance tendencies ( $r = .59, p < .0001$ ). However, perceptions of conflict reasoning strategies were not correlated ( $r = .09, n.s.$ ), indicating that parents and children agreed on their perceptions of destructive types of conflict, but not on constructive types (i.e., reasoning). Thus, these findings suggest that there is distinct difference between constructive and destructive conflict strategies and how they are perceived to be used within the family. Nevertheless, children and spousal ratings of marital conflict were associated as hypothesized.

**3. Parent and child ratings of parent-child conflict.** Parents' and children's parent-child ratings were predicted to be positively correlated (refer to Table 6). When parents and children were probed about their perceptions of parent-child conflict strategies, the following was revealed: 1) both parents' and children's views on child-to-parent conflict strategies were positively correlated (correlations A and D), 2) parents' and children's appraisals of parent-to-child conflict strategies did not correlate,



Table 5

Intercorrelations Between Children and Parent Ratings of Marital Conflict

	A	B	C	D	E	F
A	--	.96 <sup>***</sup>	.94 <sup>***</sup>	.39 <sup>**</sup>	.36 <sup>**</sup>	.38 <sup>**</sup>
B		--	.81 <sup>***</sup>	.44 <sup>**</sup>	.41 <sup>**</sup>	.42 <sup>**</sup>
C			--	.29 <sup>*</sup>	.26 <sup>*</sup>	.28 <sup>*</sup>
D				--	.93 <sup>***</sup>	.95 <sup>***</sup>
E					--	.92 <sup>***</sup>
F						--

Note. A = siblings' perceptions of overall parental conflict

B = siblings' perceptions of mom-to-dad conflict

C = siblings' perceptions of dad-to-mom conflict

D = parents' perceptions of overall parental conflict

E = parents' perceptions of mom-to-dad conflict

F = parents' perceptions of dad-to-mom conflict

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .0001$ .

Table 6

Intracorrelations Between Parents' and Children's Parent-Child Ratings

	A	B	C	D
A	--	.03	.77**	.28*
B		--	.06	.90**
C			--	.23
D				--

Note. A = children's assessment of child-to-parent conflict

B = parents' assessment of parent-to-child conflict

C = children's assessment of parent-to-child conflict

D = parents' assessment of child-to-parent conflict

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .0001$ .

3) parents' reports of child-to-parent interaction did not correlate with children's reports of parent-to-child conflict interactions, and 4) parents' reports of parent-to-child and children's perceptions of child-to-parent conflict interactions were not significantly linked. Thus, the hypotheses received only limited support. Analyses also indicated that children's assessments of child-to-parent and parent-to-child interactions were positively correlated. Similarly, parents' perceptions of parent-to-child and child-to-parent interactions were strongly associated. These findings indicate that both parents and children held consistent views of within relationship interactions.

In order to investigate why the association between parent and children's assessments of parent-to-child conflict did not reach significance, analyses were conducted to determine who in parent-child dyads reported the use of more reasoning, verbal aggression, physical aggression, and avoidance strategies. Paired t-tests were conducted for 1) parent-child and 2) child-parent assessments. First, parents reported the use of significantly more reasoning strategies in parent-to-child interactions than children,  $t(47) = 2.98$ ,  $p < .005$ , two-tail. Meanwhile, a trend revealed that children reported the use of more physical aggression in parent-to-child interactions than parents,  $t(49) = -1.94$ ,  $p < .06$ , two-tail. Parents' and children's reports of verbal aggression and avoidance strategies however, did not significantly differ ( $t(47) = .72$ , n.s.;  $t(47) = -.53$ , n.s., respectively). Second, in child-to-parent interactions children and parents did not significantly differ in their assessment of reasoning strategies employed,  $t(47) = 1.43$ , n.s. Instead, a significant difference was found between parents' and children's assessment of the use of verbal aggression in child-to-parent

exchanges, with parents reporting the use of verbal aggression more,  $t(45) = 2.21, p < .03$ , two-tail. There were no significant difference between parent and child perceptions of child-to-parent use of physical aggression,  $t(49) = -1.54$ , n.s. Although, parent and child perceptions of avoidance strategies in child-to-parent interactions were not significantly different, a trend was noted,  $t(49) = 1.92, p < .06$ , two-tail. In sum, these analyses indicate that the opposite findings were significant for the parent-child and child-parent assessments, that is, parents' and children's perceptions of their own and each others' interaction styles vary depending on whose role is being assessed (i.e., parent's or child's).

**4. Sibling interviews and questionnaires.** It was hypothesized that children who engaged in more destructive types of conflict strategies and who rarely employed constructive conflict strategies would be more likely to rate their sibling relationships as negative. A 2 x 2 ANOVA was used to test this hypothesis. Two groups were created, a high destructive group/low constructive group and a low destructive group/high constructive group. The type of conflict strategies employed by siblings was the independent variable, while the amount of conflict reported by siblings was the dependent variable. It was found that as predicted, target siblings who engaged in more destructive types of conflicts reported higher levels of negativism in their relationships versus those siblings who engaged in lower levels of destructive conflict strategies,  $F(1, 54) = 14.05, p < .0001, Ms = 42.89$  vs.  $34.75$ . Similarly, it was found that target siblings who reported more positive rapport in their sibling relationships were more likely to use constructive conflict strategies than those children who

employed destructive conflict strategies,  $F(1, 52) = 9.51, p < .003, M_s = 189.26$  vs. 162.48.

Additional analyses revealed that level of sibling conflict was positively correlated to reports of equity and destructive conflict (see Table 7), but negatively correlated with constructive conflict strategies. Total amount of sibling warmth reported was positively correlated with prosocial behaviors and constructive conflict strategies, but negatively linked with destructive conflict strategies. Furthermore, relative power/status was positively associated with prosocial feelings. To summarize, results indicated that sibling relationships qualities were linked with the types of conflict strategies siblings employ.

Table 7

Intercorrelations Between SRO and Sibling Interview Categories

	Prosocial	Equity	Destructive Conflict	Constructive Conflict
Conflict	-.23	.47***	.71****	-.43**
Warmth	.50***	-.18	-.62****	.50***
Rivalry	-.04	-.06	.15	-.24
Power/Status	.32*	.05	.14	.02

Note. Target and nontarget sibling scores have been collapsed.

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .005$ ; \*\*\*\*  $p < .0001$ .

**5a. The link between sibling and marital conflict.** The prediction that sibling conflict and marital conflict would be positively correlated was examined by conducting partial correlations (see Table 8). Sibling conflict was found to be correlated with fathers' assessment of marital conflict as measured on the CTS. Specifically, results indicated that only fathers' assessment of marital conflict (whether it was assessment of husband-to-wife or wife-to-husband conflict) positively correlated with sibling conflict. Mothers' assessment of marital conflict did not correlate with sibling conflict.

Exploratory analyses revealed that overt conflict, as assessed by the OPS scale was not linked to a) overall amount of sibling conflict ( $r = .11$ , n.s.), or b) type of sibling conflict (i.e., destructive  $r = -.15$ , n.s., and constructive  $r = .20$ , n.s.). Thus, this study's results failed to make a connection between sibling conflict and whether parents were more likely to argue in front of their children as opposed to disagreeing in private.

**5b. Sibling conflict and marital conflict.** Siblings whose parents reported more destructive types of conflicts in their marital relationship were predicted to report more destructive types of conflict in their sibling relationship (see Table 9). Likewise, children whose parents engaged in more constructive types of marital conflict strategies were predicted to report more constructive strategies to resolve sibling conflict. However, a higher frequency of destructive sibling conflict was not reported by those children whose parents reported more destructive conflict, nor were the

Table 8

The Link Between Sibling and Marital Conflict

	Sibling Conflict (as assessed by siblings)
Father's assessment of husband-to-wife conflict	.26*
Father's assessment of wife-to-husband conflict	.25*
Mother's assessment of husband-to-wife conflict	.20
Mother's assessment of wife-to-husband conflict	.11
Couple's overall assessment of marital conflict	.23

Note. \*  $p < .05$ .



Table 9

Intercorrelations Between Siblings' Use of Conflict Strategies and Parents' Use of Marital Conflict Strategies

	Sibling Conflict Strategies			
	Prosocial	Equity	Destructive Conflict	Constructive Conflict
Parent Reasoning	-.20	.21	.17	-.13
Parent Verbal Aggression	.01	-.13	.01	.17
Parent Physical Aggression	.08	-.21	.16	.02
Parent Avoidance	.04	-.01	.06	.15

opposite findings revealed for constructive conflict. Therefore, the hypothesis was not supported.

**6. Parent-child conflict and types of sibling conflict.** Partial correlations were conducted in order to test the prediction that parent-child conflict and sibling conflict would be positively correlated. Findings are first reported for parental assessments of parent-child conflict (Table 10) and then for children assessment of parent-child conflict (Table 11). First, results indicated parent-child reasoning (as assessed by parents) was: 1) negatively correlated with constructive target sibling conflict (i.e., reasoning) and nontarget prosocial perceptions, and 2) positively correlated with destructive target sibling conflict. Parents' perceptions of parent-child conflict was not linked to any form of constructive or destructive sibling conflict reported by both target and nontarget siblings, but was positively linked to target siblings' prosocial rapport. The hypothesis that parents' views of parent-child conflict would be positively correlated with sibling conflict was not supported.

Second, the link between both siblings' perceptions of parent-child and sibling conflict was examined (see Table 11). It was found that parent-child reasoning as assessed by children was positively correlated with nontarget siblings' reports of constructive sibling conflict, prosocial rapport, and destructive sibling conflict. Furthermore, both siblings' perceptions of parent-child conflict was positively correlated with target siblings' reports of destructive sibling conflict and nontarget siblings' assessment of equity. Therefore, the prediction that children's reports of parent-child conflict would be linked with sibling conflict was partially supported.

Table 10

The Relation Between Parent-Child Conflict and Sibling Conflict as Assessed by Parents

Sibling Behavior	Parental assessment of parent-child conflict	
	Reasoning	Conflict
Target Prosocial	.02	.27*
Target Equity	.03	.07
Target Constructive	-.26*	.07
Target Destructive	.27*	.06
Nontarget Prosocial	-.29*	-.05
Nontarget Equity	-.13	.10
Nontarget Constructive	-.05	-.14
Nontarget Destructive	.13	.01

Note. \*  $p < .05$ .

Table 11

The Relation Between Parent-Child Conflict and Sibling Conflict as Assessed by Children

Sibling Behavior	Children's assessment of parent-child interactions	
	Reasoning	Conflict
Target Prosocial	-.08	-.17
Target Equity	.17	.22
Target Constructive	-.11	-.13
Target Destructive	.17	.37**
Nontarget Prosocial	.41**	.18
Nontarget Equity	.09	.39**
Nontarget Constructive	.34*	-.15
Nontarget Destructive	.41**	.19

Note. \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p .01$ .

**7. Marital and parent-child conflict.** The types of conflict strategies spouses report using in their marital exchanges were expected to be linked with parent-child conflict interactions as determined by both 1) parents and 2) children. First, partial correlations revealed a clear pattern (see Table 12): use of marital strategies (reasoning, verbal and avoidance) were significantly and positively associated with the four parent-child strategies (as rated by parents), while marital physical aggression was not. Second, results (see Table 13) indicated that children's reports of parent-child conflict interactions were significantly correlated with spousal conflict strategies in the following areas: a) reports of spousal reasoning strategies were negatively correlated with sibling reports of avoidance in parent-child interactions and a positive trend was noted with parent-child aggression, b) spousal reports of use of avoidance tendencies in marital relationships were positively correlated with children's reports of parent-child use of physical aggression and a trend was found with verbal aggression. Overall, the hypothesis was supported.

**8. Constructive and destructive marital conflict and sibling relationship qualities.** ANOVAs (2 x 2) were conducted in order to determine whether sibling relationships differed on conflict and warmth dimensions based on parental ratings of marital conflict. Two marital conflict groups were created. A constructive group was defined by scores below the mean on the destructive dimensions (e.g. verbal aggression, physical aggression, avoidance), and above the mean on the reasoning category. Parents who obtained scores below the mean on the reasoning category and above the mean on the destructive dimensions were categorized as the destructive

Table 12

Intercorrelations Between Parent-Child Interactions (assessed by parents) With Marital Conflict Strategies

	Parent-Child Reasoning	Parent-Child Verbal Aggression	Parent-Child Physical Aggression	Parent-Child Avoidance
Marital Reasoning	.66 <sup>***</sup>	.42 <sup>**</sup>	.32 <sup>*</sup>	.35 <sup>*</sup>
Marital Verbal Aggression	.62 <sup>***</sup>	.49 <sup>***</sup>	.40 <sup>**</sup>	.49 <sup>***</sup>
Marital Physical Aggression	.14	.06	.14	.08
Marital Avoidance	.61 <sup>***</sup>	.42 <sup>**</sup>	.29 <sup>*</sup>	.52 <sup>***</sup>

Note. <sup>\*</sup>  $p < .05$ ; <sup>\*\*</sup>  $p < .01$ ; <sup>\*\*\*</sup>  $p < .0001$ .

Table 13

Intercorrelations Between Parent-Child Interactions (assessed by children) With Marital Conflict Strategies

	Parent-Child Reasoning	Parent-Child Verbal Aggression	Parent-Child Physical Aggression	Parent-Child Avoidance
Marital Reasoning	.13	.02	.20*	-.34**
Marital Verbal Aggression	.15	.17	.17	.01
Marital Physical Aggression	.01	.09	.11	.12
Marital Avoidance	.16	.23*	.30**	-.08

Note. \*  $p < .10$ ; \*\*  $p < .05$ .

group. No significant differences (refer to Table 14) between siblings were found for 1) destructive conflict, 2) constructive conflict, 3) total amount of conflict as reported by the SRQ, and 4) total amount of warmth as assessed by the SRQ. The hypothesis that siblings would differ on these dimensions as a result of their parents' ratings of marital conflict was not supported.

### **Structural variables**

The purpose of the following analyses was to examine the relationship between sibling relationship qualities and sibling structural variables (see Table 15). These links were found: first, nontarget siblings' level of conflict was positively linked to target child's birth order, that is, nontarget siblings' reports of conflict were linked to siblings being second, third, fourth or fifth born. Second, target children's perceptions of rivalry within the sibling relationship were found to be negatively associated with nontarget sibling's sex and birth order, that is, less rivalry was reported by target siblings when nontarget sibling was a girl, and less rivalry was reported when nontarget birthorder status was second, third, fourth, or fifth born. Third, target child's reports of power/status within their sibling relationship was negatively correlated to type of family structure. That is, children from two-parent families were more likely to be reporting higher power/status qualities in their sibling relationship than children from one-parent families. In sum, there were few associations between structural variables and sibling relationship qualities.



Table 14

Summary Table for the Analyses of Variance of Conflict for Low and High Marital Conflict Groups

	Design	Source	df	SS	MS	F	p
A	Within	Group	1	16.47	16.47	.31	.579
		Error	29	1519.08	52.38		
B	Within	Group	1	16.09	16.09	1.05	.315
		Error	29	446.68	15.40		
C	Within	Group	1	72.00	72.00	.85	.360
		Error	48	4046.48	84.30		
D	Within	Group	1	507.84	507.84	.39	.537
		Error	47	61826.16	1315.45		

**Note.** A = destructive conflict by group;

B = constructive conflict by group;

C = SRQ conflict by group;

D = SRQ warmth by group.

Table 15

Intercorrelations Between Sibling Relationship Qualities and Structural Variables

	T Sex	NT Sex	T Birth Order	NT Birth Order	Family Structure	# of Children in Family	T Age	NT Age
T Conflict	.11	.11	.08	-.20	.23	.06	.02	.04
NT Conflict	.13	.01	.35**	-.10	-.09	.16	-.20	-.16
T Warmth	-.04	-.20	-.23	.03	-.20	-.20	.24	.23
NT Warmth	-.02	.01	-.20	.08	.21	-.03	.11	.08
T Rivalry	-.02	-.26*	.10	-.24*	.04	.15	-.10	-.11
NT Rivalry	.14	-.20	-.21	.08	-.09	-.06	-.02	-.01
T Power	.20	-.20	-.10	-.20	-.33**	.01	.01	.04
NT Power	.22	.09	.01	-.10	.06	.03	.02	.03

Note. T = target sibling; NT = nontarget sibling.

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ .

## Discussion

Employing a family systems perspective, the present study was designed to examine different family members' perceptions of their own and each others conflict strategies. Discussion of the findings will focus on: (a) analyses and interpretation of the research questions and exploratory findings, (b) limitations of the current study, and (c) future research directions.

In the present study, predictions were divided into two sets of questions, those exploring relations: 1) within a family subsystem (i.e., sibling, marital, parental), and 2) those examining the associations across family systems. Each set of questions will be discussed.

### Within Family Subsystems

The first set of predictions (questions 1 to 4) were concerned with investigating whether different family members perceive conflict with the same subsystems in a similar fashion.

Assessments of sibling conflict. First, it was hypothesized that both siblings' and parents' assessments of sibling conflict would be positively associated (question #1). This prediction was not supported - parents and children disagreed about levels of sibling conflict. One reason for the difference in perceptions of sibling conflict may be that parents and children may define conflict differently. For instance, in many of the sibling interviews conducted for this study, children frequently mentioned that they engaged in "play fighting" or that they were "pretending" to fight. Parents however, may have interpreted any kind of sibling confrontation as conflictual, whereas, siblings

may just be enjoying themselves. Vandell and Bailey (1992) support this explanation, and caution parents to distinguish between constructive and destructive conflicts before intervening. In addition, depriving children of the chance to solve and work problems out collaboratively, may have implications for the way they will deal with conflict in future contexts. Consistent with this premise are the studies (Dunn & Munn, 1986; Volling & Belsky, 1992) which reported that controlling and intervening maternal behaviors were linked with negative sibling interactions.

Even though sibling conflict was not a relationship dimension that parents and siblings agreed upon, they viewed warmth in a similar way. Of the three parental assessments of sibling relationship categories (i.e., warmth, rivalry, conflict), warmth was the dimension most frequently associated with sibling reports. A possible explanation for the predictive value of parental assessment of sibling warmth, is that it is a clearly defined relationship dimension. That is, there appears to be less confusion as to what constitutes warm, prosocial behaviors than conflictual behaviors. For example, teasing someone in order to hurt their feelings is very different from joking around with your sibling. The distinction between these two types of behaviors depend upon intent and interpretation, whereas, behaviors defining the warmth category (e.g., affection) may be easier to report.

Exploratory analyses indicated that siblings' perceptions of their own relationship were consistent for the warmth and conflict dimensions. Both siblings' (target and nontarget) reports of conflict were positively correlated. Likewise, target siblings' reports of warmth were positively linked with nontargets' reports of warmth.

A pattern of sibling reciprocity emerges since siblings tend to respond to one another in similar fashions (i.e., warm to warm, and negative to negative). These patterns are consistent with the view that reciprocal exchanges are of an egalitarian nature (Dunn, 1993).

Of interest, is the finding that both sibling conflict and sibling rivalry were positively linked to the level of relative power/status siblings reported. Issues of equity are concerned with sibling dominance and parental differential treatment. First, a possible explanation for this may be due to, as Furman and Buhrmester (1985a) argue, the result of sibling growth. They reported that the use of power/status techniques level off and relationships become characterized by more reciprocal types of exchanges as children mature during middle childhood. An alternative explanation, argues in favor of differential parental treatment as being a predictor of sibling conflict (Brody et al., 1992; McGuire & McCarthy, 1994). Equity theory advocates the notion that conflict is perpetuated by perceived injustice or unequal treatment. If children believe they are being unfairly dealt with by their parents, they may in turn take out their frustrations on their siblings rather than deal with their parents. The sibling relationship is a socially acceptable outlet for anger and frustration. Once again, the notion of perceived equity plays a major part in shaping the types of interactions siblings employ.

**Within the marital subsystem.** Child and spousal ratings of marital conflict were hypothesized to be positively associated (question #2) and this within subsystem prediction was supported. Previous research (Cummings, Simpson, & Wilson, 1993)

indicated that children do have the ability to distinguish between different types of conflicts (e.g., resolved versus disengagement). Children's perceptions of mom-to-dad and dad-to-mom conflict were significantly linked to parental assessments of mom-to-dad and dad-to-mom conflict. Thus, marital conflictual interactions were interpreted consistently by all family members. This finding has positive implications for family dynamics. If all family members consistently agree about spousal patterns of interactions (negative or positive), then fewer instances of misperception and misunderstanding should occur. Instead, constructive types of strategies such as problem-solving and negotiating should be facilitated. On the other hand, if family members are interpreting patterns of marital interactions differently, it would be more likely that destructive types of episodes would evolve. One of the main obstacles in family conflict is the notion of misperception. Once a common ground has been established the following resolution steps are more easily implemented.

**Within the parent-child relationship.** Parent and child ratings of the parent-child subsystem were predicted to be positively correlated (question #3). This hypothesis was only partially supported. Results revealed that parents and children were in accordance about children's roles in parent-child interactions, but disagreed about parental roles in parent-child exchanges.

In a study by Smetana (1989), it was found that although parents and children were in accordance over causes of parent-child conflicts, they did not agree on their meaning. Children were more likely to interpret conflicts as occurring over parental regulation of interpersonal relationships than were parents. This finding suggests a

possible source of variance between parental and child parent-child assessments in the present study. Another possible explanation for differing perceptions about parental roles in parent-child interactions may be the complementary nature of parent-child relationships. Most often, parents try to exert some sort of control over their children through discipline (Hetherington, 1988; Patterson, 1986), and expect their children to comply. This type of exchange dictates that the parent-child relationship is not an equitable power structure. Perhaps, this perceived inequity by children may skew their views about parent-child interactions.

Another possible explanation for the discrepancy in parent-child views found, is that a self-bias may have been emerging. That is, parents reported using more reasoning strategies in parent-child interactions than children reported parents using, while a trend revealed that children reported parents using more physical aggression than parents reported. Conversely, in child-to-parent interactions parents reported children using significantly more verbal aggression than children reported using. Clearly, then, whenever parents' and children's views differed, the self-reporter always rated him/herself more favorably. These findings complicate the conflict resolution process. In a non-egalitarian relationship, such as the parent-child one, self-reporter biases may emerge. Biased perception as pointed out by Deutsch (1973), contributes to the development of destructive conflict. Parents believe they are acting appropriately, while children perceive this "appropriateness" as unfair. In order to resolve parent-child conflicts a middle ground needs to be found.

There was some consistency, however, between parental interpretations of

child-to-parent and parent-to-child interactions, and likewise, children's views of child-to-parent and parent-to-child were consistent. That is, individuals appeared to be consistent about the way they interpreted bidirectional subsystem interactions. The consistency of bidirectional processes implies that a family systems theory is at work for individual family members' views about family functioning. Individuals perceive family dynamics as similar across systems, so if one system has problems, there is a possibility of placing the entire family system in a perceptual state of disequilibrium.

**Destructive and constructive sibling conflict.** The last of the within family subsystem predictions examined the influence of type of sibling conflict (destructive versus constructive) on the quality of the sibling relationship (question #4). Analyses yielded support for the hypothesis that siblings who exhibited more destructive conflict behaviors would be more likely to report negative sibling rapport, while siblings who employed a constructive approach with their siblings rated their relationship more positively. Thus, type of conflict strategies employed by siblings was associated with the quality of the sibling relationship. It appears that children are learning different patterns of behavior and that these patterns foster a cyclical and bidirectional link between conflict strategies and sibling relationships. This study's finding supports the literature's claim that there is a distinction between destructive and constructive conflict (Cummings, 1994; Furman & McQuaid, 1992). Until the present research, the distinction between these two types of conflicts had not been formally examined from a family systems perspective.

The present study also explored whether sibling relationship qualities as



measured by the SRQ (conflict, warmth, rivalry, power/status) were similarly correlated with constructive or destructive conflict strategies employed by siblings. More detailed findings indicated that sibling reports of conflict as assessed by the SRQ were positively linked with equity problem-solving techniques, whereby siblings would use dominance and power skills to get siblings to comply with them. Along the same line, destructive conflict strategies (e.g., aggression, forcefulness, manipulation) were positively related to negative rapport between siblings, while constructive conflicts (collaboration, problem-solving) were linked to more positive sibling rapport. Likewise, sibling warmth was negatively associated with destructive conflict, while positively linked with constructive conflict. A possible implication of these findings may be that children who engage in constructive types of conflicts with their siblings are able to work through their disagreements without hindering the positive feelings that exist between them. These patterns of findings imply that some sort of learning or development is taking place by those children who engage in constructive conflict or who have warm sibling relationships (bidirectional process). Children who are engaging in constructive types of conflict resolution may have grasped the concept that conflict does not have to be an entirely negative experience, and then apply this understanding to other facets of their sibling relationship. As discussed in the introduction, children learn about social rules, problem-solving, and communication, which provides them with the necessary tools for improved family relations (Chapman & McBride, 1992).

Similarly, children who engage in more types of destructive conflict may also

be learning that disengagement, non-resolutions, or manipulative strategies are normal. They too, are likely to apply the types of strategies and concepts they learn through sibling interactions to other aspects of their sibling relationships. Siblings appear to be engaging in a constant mode of interacting, as though either developing within a positive or negative framework.

In sum, within subsystem assessments of marital conflict interactions were consistent. While, sibling and parent-child reports were consistent for within-reporters only (i.e., members of the subsystem being assessed). There appears to be a perception discrepancy between parents and children about the child's role in both sibling and parent-child relationships. Future studies should consider examining the effect of power relationships such as these on misperception.

#### Across Family Systems

Based on Minuchin's (1985; 1988) work, the following set of hypotheses (questions 5a to 8) tested family systems theory that there is an interdependence among family subsystems. That is, there should be a positive relationship between different subsystems' reports of conflict strategies. Systems theory posits that individuals are affected by conflict in their own relationships, as well as conflict in the relationships between other family members (Emery, 1992). Furthermore, Hinde and Stevenson-Hinde (1987) list interpersonal perception as one of the key properties of relationships. That is, the way different family members perceive their relationships and the relations of other family members will influence future interactions.

**Marital and sibling conflict.** First, the connection between sibling conflict and

marital conflict was assessed (question #5a). Unlike previous research (MacKinnon, 1989; Jenkins, 1992), the present study did not reveal any significant links between overall assessment of marital conflict by parents and sibling conflict (as determined by siblings), although a trend was noted. Instead, only fathers' assessments of husband-to-wife and wife-to-husband conflict were significantly and positively correlated with siblings' reports of sibling conflict. This finding parallels previous research by Belsky, Youngblade, Rovine and Volling (1991) which demonstrated that marriages of low quality were linked with more negative father behavior and more negative child behavior than with mothers' behaviors. One possible explanation for this finding may be that fathers' perception of marital quality is more accurate than mothers' assessments, or that paternal dissatisfaction dictates the type of marital climate, thus influencing the sibling relationship. A possibility that needs to be further investigated is the potential implication that fathers have power over the affective quality of the marriage. In sum, the hypothesis that marital conflict would be associated with level of sibling conflict was partially supported.

Further analyses did not confirm the prediction using family systems theory that siblings' use of conflict strategies would be positively linked with parental use of marital conflict strategies (question #5b). This result leaves us with three possible implications. First, the sibling subsystem may be more of an independent system than any of the other subsystems. Second, perhaps, as in the case of the children interviewed for this study, individual child characteristics may be at work. Thus, for example, future research should control for temperament qualities. Third, this

nonsignificant finding may also be due to the nature of the study's sample. The fact that the present sample consisted of primarily intact families, and that families volunteered to be in the study indicates that the results cannot be generalized to other kinds of families who may be described as highly distressed.

To date, the premise of this hypothesis has been found to hold true with clinical samples. For example, Christensen and Margolin (1988) found a difference in the predictiveness of marital conflict between distressed and non-distressed families. They reported that in distressed families, marital conflict increased the probability of sibling conflict, whereas, in non-distressed families this was not the case. MacKinnon (1989) and Jenkins (1992) also found that siblings from disharmonious families were more likely to experience higher levels of sibling conflict. It should not be prematurely concluded however, that family status alone is indicative of poor sibling relationships, rather, it has been found that degree of cooperation and style of conflict resolution between divorced parents plays a key role on child behavior and adjustment (Camara & Resnick, 1989). The implications of this study's findings in conjunction with the literature indicate that the way in which families fight and resolve their disagreements may have a great impact on the way children adjust and adapt to conflict situations with their siblings, parents, and even peers.

**Parent-child and sibling conflict.** Once again, based on family systems theory and on past research (Kreppner, 1988; Volling & Belsky, 1992), it had been predicted that parent-child conflict and sibling conflict would be positively correlated (question #6). However, the present study did not confirm this prediction. In contrast to the

hypothesis, parental assessment of parent-child reasoning was not indicative of constructive types of conflict. Instead, the opposite was found, that is, parent-child reasoning strategies were negatively correlated with target siblings' constructive strategies and nontarget siblings' prosocial reports. In fact, parent-child reasoning was positively associated with destructive target conflict.

Contrary to the present study's findings, Volling and Belsky (1992) found significant links between parent-child interactions and sibling conflict. Facilitative and affectionate fathering was linked with prosocial sibling behaviors, while mother-child conflict was predictive of sibling conflict. These results are consistent with a family systems theory approach to family relationships. However, similar to the present study, Slomkowski and Dunn (1992), in their research examining differences in young children's disputes with their mothers and siblings, also found that children's arguments with their mothers were not related to those used when in dispute with their siblings. There were, however, correlations between partners' arguments in conflict within dyads (i.e., within parent-child and within sibling).

Also in support of the present study's results is a finding by Baskett and Johnson (1982) who reported that children's interactions with parents were more positive than their interactions with siblings. Both these findings (Baskett & Johnson, 1982; Slomkowski & Dunn, 1992) can be explained from an equity theory perspective, that is, parents represent the dominant power figure, therefore the relative power/status of this relationship dictates the types of parent-child interactions. In contrast with the sibling relationship, the parent-child relationship allows less opportunity for conflict or

disagreements to escalate. That is, there is no negotiation or problem-solving when parents decide enough is enough. Whereas, arguing with one's sibling is more socially acceptable. Furthermore, siblings may not have learned how to control the conflict so as to use strategies to de-escalate tense situations. In sum, the equity theory provides an interesting explanation of why there is a difference in parents' and children's reports of parent-child conflict and level of sibling conflict.

Next, siblings' interpretations of parent-child interactions were in line with the existing literature indicating that parent-child relations do influence level of sibling conflict (e.g., Brody et al., 1992). Parent-child reasoning was positively linked with nontarget sibling's reports of prosocial and constructive strategies, as predicted, yet was unexpectedly linked with nontarget destructive conflict strategies. That is, as hypothesized, parent-child conflict was correlated with target children's reports of destructive conflict. Once again, the hypothesis question was partially supported. These findings stress the importance of perception and who is reporting about the parent-child relationship. Children's reports of parent-child conflict were more indicative of sibling conflict strategies than parental assessments of parent-child conflict. Implying that whoever is directly involved in the relationship being analyzed has a more consistent and predictive evaluation or point of view.

**Marital and parent-child conflict.** The prediction that marital and parent-child conflict would be positively related (question #7) was examined by assessing the relation between marital conflict and 1) parent-child interactions as assessed by parents, and 2) parent-child interactions as determined by children. For parental

interpretation of parent-child conflict and marital conflict the prediction was confirmed. Parent-child reasoning, verbal aggression, and avoidance strategies were all positively correlated with marital reasoning, verbal aggression, and avoidance strategies as determined by parents. These findings reflect similar patterns in the literature (Belsky et al., 1991) that reported poor marital quality was indicative of more negative father-to-child behaviors. A surprising finding in the present study was the correlation between marital reasoning (a positive strategy) and avoidance, verbal and physical aggression (destructive strategies). Why would a positive strategy be linked with negative ones? A possible explanation may be that couples who argue or disagree are also more likely to exhibit a greater variety of both constructive and destructive conflict behaviors.

Second, parent-child interactions as assessed by children only partially supported the premise that marital conflict was linked to parent-child conflict. An unexpected finding that marital reasoning was positively linked to parent-child physical aggression was not in line with the supporting literature (Black & Pedro-Carroll, 1993; Kerig, Cowan, & Pape-Cowan, 1993). This finding does not support the family systems view that conflict in the relationships between other family members is transferable and affects the type of conflict any given family member experiences in his/her own interactions. However, the finding that marital reasoning strategies were negatively associated with parent-child avoidance tendencies is in line with the prediction that constructive conflict reasoning strategies would be uniformly employed across family subsystems. Concurrent with past studies (e.g., Easterbrooks & Emde,

1988), this study found that marital avoidance strategies were linked to parent-child verbal and physical aggression. Once again, the implications for family functioning reinforces a family systems approach that problems in one subsystem correspond to problems in other subsystems.

**Sibling and marital conflict.** Finally, the last prediction (question #8) tested the family systems position that siblings' perceptions of their relationship and their use of constructive and destructive conflict would be significantly different depending on their parents' ratings of marital conflict. Support for this prediction was not found. One reason for this result may be that since the sample of families participated voluntarily, they were not representative of the general population in which a wider range of conflict strategies and scores may be present. Therefore, the present study may have sampled a restricted range of family conflict. An alternative explanation may also be that children may bond in the presence of parental conflict (Kempton et al., 1991). That is, it has been argued that children from disharmonious homes develop closer sibling ties as a coping mechanism. Perhaps, the proposed hypothesis only holds true when children experience or are exposed to a great amount of conflict (positive or negative).

**Structural variables.** Analyses examining the relationship between sibling relationship qualities and structural variables were conducted. The following structural variables were examined: gender, birth order, family structure, number of children in family, and age.

First, only nontarget's gender was found to be correlated with a sibling



relationship quality. Specifically, less rivalry was reported by target siblings when their nontarget counterparts were girls. As Abramovitch et al. (1979) revealed, male siblings were more often aggressive, while female siblings tended to be more prosocial, a quality which may counteract the rivalry effect. Second, in the present study higher levels of conflict were reported by nontarget siblings whose target sibling was not the eldest child. It is not surprising to find that siblings who are closer in age also report higher levels of conflict and rivalry (Furman & Buhrmester, 1985b). Closely spaced siblings may spend more time together, and in turn have greater opportunities to engage in more conflicts with one another. In fact, older children are most likely to initiate both negative and positive behaviors more than younger siblings (Abramovitch et al., 1979). Third, in the present study, target siblings reported fewer instances of sibling rivalry when their nontarget sibling was not a firstborn. Fourth, target children from two-parent families reported higher levels of power domination than target children from single-parent families. Perhaps children from two-parent families are more concerned with issues of reciprocity, while children from single parent homes engage in more nurturing types of behaviors towards one another. This question should be examined in greater detail in future studies using appropriate sample size.

**A family systems model of conflict.** In order to summarize this study's main findings and to examine the pattern of results, it would be helpful to refer back to the family systems model presented earlier (see Figure 1 - p. 25). The aim of the present thesis was to explore the relationships between and within various family subsystems.

With reference to the model (see hypotheses #1, 2, 3, 4) it can be concluded that overall within family subsystem perceptions were consistent. That is, the three subsystems examined in the present study (sibling, marital, and parent-child) were perceived similarly by all family members. For example, in the sibling subsystem, both target and nontarget siblings rated their relationships similarly. The only set of inconsistent within family perceptions was evident in a) parent and sibling reports of sibling conflict, and b) parent and sibling reports of parental role in the parent-child interactions.

Research questions testing a family systems theory across subsystems failed to support the interdependence theory. In particular, questions #5a, #5b, and #8 did not reveal any connection between sibling patterns of conflict and parental conflict. Question #6 indicated a partial link between sibling conflict and parent-child conflicts as reported by children, but not as assessed by parents. Finally, question #7 revealed a connection between marital conflict strategies and parent-child relationships. The last patterns of findings may be indicative of a family systems theory at work between sibling and parent-child relationships, as well as between marital and parent-child relationships. The connection between marital and sibling relationships was not so clearly delineated.

Lack of agreement between family members presents a major implication for family functioning - a possible systems breakdown. Smooth family functioning hinges upon clear communication patterns and overall family agreement. If there are differing perceptions about family functioning, then coming up with a universal solution to

conflict will be more difficult.

The impact of family constellation variables such as gender, relative age, birth order, and family size were analyzed, but no major findings were revealed. Although the present study did not focus on the contribution of individual children's characteristics such as temperament, or cognitive abilities, it is an important part of the family systems model. Future research should include individual child differences and acknowledge it as a potential source of variance.

### Limitations of the Study

One of the limitations of the present study includes the correlational nature of the research. Although, the present study offers new insights into the relationship between different family subsystems, no causal inferences may implied. For instance, we cannot conclude that parental conflict causes sibling conflict. Of equal value is the premise that sibling conflict might influence marital climate. Considering that the study investigated new concepts and tested family systems theory, correlational analyses were suitable for preliminary groundwork. Future research should be geared towards exploring the causative links between parent-child, marital, and sibling conflict strategies.

A second limitation of this study was the result of sampling bias. Due to ethical considerations parent consent forms were sent home to all eligible families. Although the participation rate was high (90%), convenience sampling may have resulted. That is, families who accepted or volunteered to partake in the study may be different from nonvolunteers. For instance, these families may have been more willing

to assess their relationships, or have more of a positive outlook about their families compared to families who may have felt uncomfortable discussing personal views, or who may have had something to hide. This biasing effect is noted, but considering the ethical implications that needed to be upheld, could not have been avoided.

A further limitation of the present study has to do with the nature of data collection, namely, the use of self-report measures. Self-report measures (e.g., questionnaires, interviews) are subjective measures. That is, the person filling out the questionnaire, or the person being interviewed tells the researchers their side of the story. The present study was interested in exploring family members' perceptions about what was going on in the family system, but this perceptual interpretation must not be confused with actual occurrences of conflict.

### **Future Research Directions**

The present study focused on testing the family systems theory that similar conflict strategies would be employed within and across family subsystems. Future studies should keep this framework in mind and design studies which incorporate all family members' perceptions of conflict, but also include observational data. Past literature has focused on these topics independently of one another. Perceptions in conjunction with observational data should reflect a more accurate picture of what is transpiring. In fact, a possible future research project may be to test and compare the relationship between perceptual and observational data within families.

Further research studies should continue to make the distinction between destructive and constructive types of conflicts in their analyses of social conflicts.

Developmental research can test the children's cognitive understanding of different types of conflicts. Studies should be set up to explore the direct and indirect effects of exposure to different types of interparental conflict on children. In studies by Cummings et al. (1991) and Jenkins et al. (1989) children had an easier time coping with parental and interadult conflict when quarrelling was depicted as a process to obtain resolution as opposed to situations where no explanation or solution was presented. In fact, children's use of argument strategies were found to be predictive of sociocognitive performances (Slomkowski & Dunn, 1992). Discussion of feelings was related to the ability to recognize emotions, and the use of justification was related to mothers' use of justification strategies (Dunn, Brown & Beardsall, 1991; Dunn & Munn, 1987). Children's understanding and exposure to constructive conflict can enable them to problem-solve, negotiate, and perspective-take, thus future studies should examine this phenomenon across school, home, and even controlled conflict settings.

### **Implications**

One of the important results of this study was the finding that there was a difference between destructive and constructive conflicts. This finding if explored more extensively may provide both developmental psychologists and parents with alternative intervention techniques to dealing with conflict, as well as, the opportunity to reshape the way we deal and think about social conflict.

When parents are asked to describe instances of conflict and disagreement they rarely cite problem-solving, negotiating, or perspective-taking as part of the conflict

pattern In general, conflict is still seen as a negative entity. Empowering parents and children with the knowledge that conflict can be a positive tool, may enable families to gain some control over the destructive types of conflicts they experience at times.

Incorporated with the perception literature, psychologists and parents can some gain insight into why people react the way they do in certain conflict situations. Issues such as differential treatment, equity in family chores and duties, resolution, dominance and submissiveness, heavily depend on perceptual interpretations. Taking personal points of view into consideration may help parents become aware of their children's feelings and points of reference. Furthermore, developmental psychologists can pinpoint common trends among children's perceived injustices and help set up intervention tactics that teach families how to employ the appropriate constructive conflict strategies.

### **Conclusion**

The intent of this thesis was to make distinctions between positive conflict techniques that are beneficial to family dynamics, and negative techniques that may be detrimental to the family unit. This was done by employing a family systems approach to family conflict. Overall, the study's findings were concurrent with systems theory that family members would report similarities between their relationships. With the exception of parent-child interactions, all of the within subsystem hypotheses were confirmed. The predictions that across subsystems perceptions of conflict would be related were not as clearly supported. Sibling conflict strategies were linked to certain marital and parent-child conflict strategies, but not all.

Finally, children whose parents employed constructive versus destructive conflict strategies did not report using more constructive types of conflict strategies with their siblings, as predicted. This research has provided a preliminary insight into siblings' use of constructive and destructive conflict strategies. Based on the findings in this thesis, it can be argued that not all forms of conflict are detrimental to the social and emotional development of children.

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Appendix A

## DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

May, 1994

Dear Parents,

I am a graduate student at Concordia University working on my master's thesis in Child Study with Dr. Nina Howe of the Education Department. We are conducting a research project on sibling relations, and we hope to gain some knowledge about the type of relationships brothers and sisters experience within the broader family context. Specifically, we are interested in why siblings and parents fight sometimes and at other times get along well. We are writing to tell you about this study and ask for your participation as well for permission for your children to participate.

For this study, we would like you to complete three short questionnaires about how your children get along with each other, as well as how other family members view their relationships. An example of the types of questions that will be asked are, "How often do your children play together?", and how are disagreements resolved between brothers and sister, parents and children, or spouses? These types of questions give us an idea of how children develop relationships within the family.

This study requires that both parents fill out the appropriately labelled questionnaires. We will provide you with a stamped self-addressed envelope so that you can mail your questionnaire directly back to the University. It will take you approximately 30 minutes to complete these questionnaires. In appreciation for your participation an honorarium of \$10 will be given to each family upon completion of all questionnaires.

We would also like to meet with your grade 5 or 6 child for about 25 minutes at their elementary school. During this time we will ask them to fill out two questionnaires about their family and sibling relationships. In addition, a short interview asking children how they see their brother or sister will be conducted with some children. The same procedure will be used with your fifth or sixth grade child's closest-in-age school sibling. If your child's brother or sister does not attend the same school, then a home visit may be required.

The information collected from these questionnaires and interviews is entirely confidential and anonymous, and participation is completely voluntary. Only group findings will be reported not individual family findings. A report will be mailed to the families interested in the study's results. Your involvement in this research would be greatly appreciated since it will contribute to the increasing knowledge about how

siblings get along in families

If at any time you and/or your children wish to withdraw from the study you are free to do so. Should you have any questions do not hesitate to contact me or Dr. Nina Howe at 848-2008 (office).

Please fill out the attached permission form and return to your child's teacher. Thank you for your time and cooperation.

Sincerely,

Christina Rinaldi  
M.A. Graduate Student

Nina Howe, Ph.D.  
Associate Professor  
Department of Education

**PARENT CONSENT FORM**

I hereby give permission for myself and spouse to participate in the research project conducted by the Education Department at Concordia University. I understand that the study requires both parents to complete questionnaires and that both children will be interviewed at school and given questionnaires to fill out. As parents, our participation requires that we fill out the questionnaires brought home by our grade five or six child, and that we mail the questionnaires directly to the University. When we have completed the questionnaires, we will receive \$10 for participating.

Please check one of the following:

I **DO** give my children permission to participate.

I **DO NOT** give my children permission to participate

Please check one of the following:

My spouse and I **WILL** participate.

My spouse and I **WILL NOT** participate.

Please sign and print your names here:

Mother's name (sign) \_\_\_\_\_

(Print) \_\_\_\_\_

Father's name (sign) \_\_\_\_\_

(Print) \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Telephone Number \_\_\_\_\_

**PLEASE RETURN THIS FORM TO YOUR CHILD'S TEACHER IN THE ENVELOPE PROVIDED.**

**STUDENT CONSENT FORM**

Please read the following:

I have been asked to be in a research study about how brothers and sisters get along in their families. My participation in this study requires that I fill out two questionnaires and that I take part in an interview. For participating I can win a prize.

The information I give in this study is confidential and anonymous. Only Christina Rinaldi and Dr. Howe or their assistant will be aware of what I said in the questionnaires and interview. I do not have to take part in the study if I do not wish to do so, and even if I start to participate in it but then I change my mind, this is all right.

If after reading this you would like to participate in our study please fill out and sign the following:

Name (print) \_\_\_\_\_

(sign) \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Birthdate \_\_\_\_\_

Age \_\_\_\_\_

Boy \_\_\_\_\_

Girl \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher's name \_\_\_\_\_



Appendix B  
Sibling Relationship Questionnaire  
(SRQ)

I.D.#: \_\_\_\_\_

For each question, check the answer that is best for you.  
-----

1. Some brothers and sisters do nice things for each other a lot, while other brothers and sisters do nice things for each other only a little. How much do both you and your brother do nice things for each other?  
 Hardly at all  
 Not too much  
 Somewhat  
 Very much  
 Extremely much
  
2. Who usually gets treated better by your mother, you or your brother?  
 My brother almost always gets treated better  
 My brother often gets treated better  
 We get treated about the same  
 I often get treated better  
 I almost always get treated better
  
3. How much do you show your brother how to do things he doesn't know how to do?  
 Hardly at all  
 Not too much  
 Somewhat  
 Very much  
 Extremely much
  
4. How much does your brother show you how to do things you don't know how to do?  
 Hardly at all  
 Not too much  
 Somewhat  
 Very much  
 Extremely much

5. How much do you tell your brother what to do?  
 Hardly at all  
 Not too much  
 Somewhat  
 Very much  
 Extremely much
6. How much does your brother tell you what to do?  
 Hardly at all  
 Not too much  
 Somewhat  
 Very much  
 Extremely much
7. Who usually gets treated better by your father, you or your brother?  
 My brother almost always gets treated better  
 My brother often gets treated better  
 We get treated about the same  
 I often get treated better  
 I almost always get treated better
8. Some brothers and sisters care about each other a lot while other brothers and sisters don't care about each other that much. How much do you and your brother care about each other?  
 Hardly at all  
 Not too much  
 Somewhat  
 Very much  
 Extremely much
9. How much do you and your brother go places and do things together?  
 Hardly at all  
 Not too much  
 Somewhat  
 Very much  
 Extremely much

10. How much do you and your brother insult and call each other names?  
 Hardly at all  
 Not too much  
 Somewhat  
 Very much  
 Extremely much
11. How much do you and your brother like the same things?  
 Hardly at all  
 Not too much  
 Somewhat  
 Very much  
 Extremely much
12. How much do you and your brother tell each other everything?  
 Hardly at all  
 Not too much  
 Somewhat  
 Very much  
 Extremely much
13. Some brothers and sisters try to out-do or beat each other at things a lot, while other brothers and sisters try to out-do or beat each other only a little. How much do you and your brother try to out-do or beat each other at things?  
 Hardly at all  
 Not too much  
 Somewhat  
 Very much  
 Extremely much
14. How much do you admire and respect your brother?  
 Hardly at all  
 Not too much  
 Somewhat  
 Very much  
 Extremely much

15. How much does your brother admire and respect you?  
 Hardly at all  
 Not too much  
 Somewhat  
 Very much  
 Extremely much
16. How much do you and your brother disagree and quarrel with each other?  
 Hardly at all  
 Not too much  
 Somewhat  
 Very much  
 Extremely much
17. Some brothers and sisters cooperate a lot, while other brothers and sisters cooperate only a little. How much do you and your brother cooperate with each other?  
 Hardly at all  
 Not too much  
 Somewhat  
 Very much  
 Extremely much
18. Who gets more positive attention from your mother, you or your brother?  
 My brother almost always gets more positive attention  
 My brother often gets more positive attention  
 We get about the same amount of positive attention  
 I often get more positive attention  
 I almost always get more positive attention
19. How much do you help your brother with things he can't do by himself?  
 Hardly at all  
 Not too much  
 Somewhat  
 Very much  
 Extremely much

20. How much does your brother help you with things you can't do by yourself?
- Hardly at all
  - Not too much
  - Somewhat
  - Very much
  - Extremely much
21. How much do you make your brother do things?
- Hardly at all
  - Not too much
  - Somewhat
  - Very much
  - Extremely much
22. How much does your brother make you do things?
- Hardly at all
  - Not too much
  - Somewhat
  - Very much
  - Extremely much
23. Who gets more positive attention from your father, you or your brother?
- My brother almost always gets more positive attention
  - My brother often gets more positive attention
  - We get about the same amount of positive attention
  - I often get more positive attention
  - I almost always get more positive attention
24. How much do you love your brother?
- Hardly at all
  - Not too much
  - Somewhat
  - Very much
  - Extremely much

25. How much does your brother love you?  
 Hardly at all  
 Not too much  
 Somewhat  
 Very much  
 Extremely much
26. Some brothers and sisters play around and have fun with each other a lot, while other brother and sisters play around and have fun with each other only a little. How much do you and your brother play around and have fun with each other?  
 Hardly at all  
 Not too much  
 Somewhat  
 Very much  
 Extremely much
27. How mean are you and your brother to each other?  
 Hardly at all  
 Not too much  
 Somewhat  
 Very much  
 Extremely much
28. How much do you and your brother have in common?  
 Hardly at all  
 Not too much  
 Somewhat  
 Very much  
 Extremely much
29. How much do you and your brother share secrets and private feelings?  
 Hardly at all  
 Not too much  
 Somewhat  
 Very much  
 Extremely much

30. How much do you and your brother compete with each other?  
 Hardly at all  
 Not too much  
 Somewhat  
 Very much  
 Extremely much
31. How much do you look up to and feel proud of this brother?  
 Hardly at all  
 Not too much  
 Somewhat  
 Very much  
 Extremely much
32. How much does your brother look up to and feel proud of you?  
 Hardly at all  
 Not too much  
 Somewhat  
 Very much  
 Extremely much
33. How much do you and your brother get mad at and get into arguments with each other?  
 Hardly at all  
 Not too much  
 Somewhat  
 Very much  
 Extremely much
34. How much do both you and your brother share with each other?  
 Hardly at all  
 Not too much  
 Somewhat  
 Very much  
 Extremely much



35. Who does your mother usually favor, you or your brother?  
 My brother almost always is favored  
 My brother is often favored  
 Neither of us is favored  
 I am often favored  
 I almost always am favored
36. How much do you teach your brother things that he doesn't know?  
 Hardly at all  
 Not too much  
 Somewhat  
 Very much  
 Extremely much
37. How often does your brother teach you things that you don't know?  
 Hardly at all  
 Not too much  
 Somewhat  
 Very much  
 Extremely much
38. How much do you order your brother around?  
 Hardly at all  
 Not too much  
 Somewhat  
 Very much  
 Extremely much
39. How much does your brother order you around?  
 Hardly at all  
 Not too much  
 Somewhat  
 Very much  
 Extremely much

40. Who does your father usually favor, you or your brother?  
 My brother almost always is favored  
 My brother is often favored  
 Neither of us is favored  
 I am often favored  
 I almost always am favored
41. How much is there a strong feeling between you and this brother?  
 Hardly at all  
 Not too much  
 Somewhat  
 Very much  
 Extremely much
42. Some kids spend lots of time with their brothers and sisters, while others don't spend so much. How much free time do you and this brother spend together?  
 Hardly at all  
 Not too much  
 Somewhat  
 Very much  
 Extremely much
43. How much do you and your brother bug and pick on each other in mean ways?  
 Hardly at all  
 Not too much  
 Somewhat  
 Very much  
 Extremely much
44. How much are you and your brother alike?  
 Hardly at all  
 Not too much  
 Somewhat  
 Very much  
 Extremely much

45. How much do you and your brother tell each other things you don't want other people to know?  
 Hardly at all  
 Not too much  
 Somewhat  
 Very much  
 Extremely much
46. How much do you and your brother try to do things better than each other?  
 Hardly at all  
 Not too much  
 Somewhat  
 Very much  
 Extremely much
47. How much do you think highly of your brother?  
 Hardly at all  
 Not too much  
 Somewhat  
 Very much  
 Extremely much
48. How much does your brother think highly of you?  
 Hardly at all  
 Not too much  
 Somewhat  
 Very much  
 Extremely much
49. How much do you and your brother argue with each other?  
 Hardly at all  
 Not too much  
 Somewhat  
 Very much  
 Extremely much

Appendix C

Parental Expectations and Perceptions of Children's Sibling  
Relationships Questionnaire  
(PEPC-SRQ)

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

I.D. # \_\_\_\_\_

WHAT I SEE AS A GOOD SIBLING RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHILDREN

Imagine a family – not necessarily your own – in which two children get along very well. Others describe them as having a very good sibling relationship. These children are the same ages and gender as your children. How frequently do you think each of the following occurs in this kind of relationships?

	never	rarely	sometimes	usually	always
1. Physical aggression (hitting, pushing, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
2. Sharing	1	2	3	4	5
3. Jealousy	1	2	3	4	5
4. Playing together in a single activity	1	2	3	4	5
5. Competition	1	2	3	4	5
6. Respecting each others' property	1	2	3	4	5
7. Rivalry	1	2	3	4	5
8. Sharing worries or concerns	1	2	3	4	5
9. Anger or hostility	1	2	3	4	5
10. Loyalty or sticking up for one another	1	2	3	4	5
11. Arguments	1	2	3	4	5
12. Comforting one another	1	2	3	4	5
13. Fighting over territory or space	1	2	3	4	5
14. Protectiveness – looking out for the other's welfare	1	2	3	4	5
15. Feeling proud of one another	1	2	3	4	5
16. Conflicts where the problem never gets worked out	1	2	3	4	5
17. Talking to each other, conversations	1	2	3	4	5

I.D. # \_\_\_\_\_

	never	rarely	sometimes	usually	always
18. Fighting over objects	1	2	3	4	5
19. Helping one another	1	2	3	4	5
20. Threats	1	2	3	4	5
21. Teaching (how to play a game, how to read, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
22. Affection (hug, kiss, saying "I love you," etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
23. Trying to control each other's behavior using phrases like, "Don't do that," "Stop it," or "Leave me alone"	1	2	3	4	5
24. Kindness	1	2	3	4	5

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

I.D. # \_\_\_\_\_

### HOW I SEE MY CHILDREN'S SIBLING RELATIONSHIP

Please circle the number that best fits your feelings about the following aspects of your children's relationship during the past 2 weeks.

How frequently would you say each of the following occurs in your children's relationship?	How much would you say this is a problem?	If this is a problem, how easy would it be for you to improve this if you want to?	How much would you like help with this?
1. Physical aggression (hitting, pushing, etc.) (1) never (2) rarely (3) sometimes (4) usually (5) always	(1) it's not a problem (2) it's a small problem (3) it's a big problem (4) it's a very big problem	(1) very difficult (2) difficult (3) neutral (4) easy (5) very easy	(1) no help (2) a little help (3) a lot of help
2. Sharing (1) never (2) rarely (3) sometimes (4) usually (5) always	(1) it's not a problem (2) it's a small problem (3) it's a big problem (4) it's a very big problem	(1) very difficult (2) difficult (3) neutral (4) easy (5) very easy	(1) no help (2) a little help (3) a lot of help
3. Jealousy (1) never (2) rarely (3) sometimes (4) usually (5) always	(1) it's not a problem (2) it's a small problem (3) it's a big problem (4) it's a very big problem	(1) very difficult (2) difficult (3) neutral (4) easy (5) very easy	(1) no help (2) a little help (3) a lot of help

I.D. # \_\_\_\_\_

How frequently would you say each of the following occurs in your children's relationship?	How much would you say this is a problem?	If this is a problem, how easy would it be for you to improve this if you want to?	How much would you like help with this?
4. Playing together in single activity (1) never (2) rarely (3) sometimes (4) usually (5) always	(1) it's not a problem (2) it's a small problem (3) it's a big problem (4) it's a very big problem	(1) very difficult (2) difficult (3) neutral (4) easy (5) very easy	(1) no help (2) a little help (3) a lot of help
5. Competition (1) never (2) rarely (3) sometimes (4) usually (5) always	(1) it's not a problem (2) it's a small problem (3) it's a big problem (4) it's a very big problem	(1) very difficult (2) difficult (3) neutral (4) easy (5) very easy	(1) no help (2) a little help (3) a lot of help
6. Respecting each others property (1) never (2) rarely (3) sometimes (4) usually (5) always	(1) it's not a problem (2) it's a small problem (3) it's a big problem (4) it's a very big problem	(1) very difficult (2) difficult (3) neutral (4) easy (5) very easy	(1) no help (2) a little help (3) a lot of help
7. Rivalry (1) never (2) rarely (3) sometimes (4) usually (5) always	(1) it's not a problem (2) it's a small problem (3) it's a big problem (4) it's a very big problem	(1) very difficult (2) difficult (3) neutral (4) easy (5) very easy	(1) no help (2) a little help (3) a lot of help



I.D. # \_\_\_\_\_

How frequently would you say each of the following occurs in your children's relationship?	How much would you say this is a problem?	If this is a problem, how easy would it be for you to improve this if you want to?	How much would you like help with this?
<b>8. Sharing worries or concerns</b> (1) never (2) rarely (3) sometimes (4) usually (5) always	(1) it's not a problem (2) it's a small problem (3) it's a big problem (4) it's a very big problem	(1) very difficult (2) difficult (3) neutral (4) easy (5) very easy	(1) no help (2) a little help (3) a lot of help
<b>9. Anger or hostility</b> (1) never (2) rarely (3) sometimes (4) usually (5) always	(1) it's not a problem (2) it's a small problem (3) it's a big problem (4) it's a very big problem	(1) very difficult (2) difficult (3) neutral (4) easy (5) very easy	(1) no help (2) a little help (3) a lot of help
<b>10. Loyalty or sticking up for one another</b> (1) never (2) rarely (3) sometimes (4) usually (5) always	(1) it's not a problem (2) it's a small problem (3) it's a big problem (4) it's a very big problem	(1) very difficult (2) difficult (3) neutral (4) easy (5) very easy	(1) no help (2) a little help (3) a lot of help
<b>11. Arguments</b> (1) never (2) rarely (3) sometimes (4) usually (5) always	(1) it's not a problem (2) it's a small problem (3) it's a big problem (4) it's a very big problem	(1) very difficult (2) difficult (3) neutral (4) easy (5) very easy	(1) no help (2) a little help (3) a lot of help

I.D. # \_\_\_\_\_

How frequently would you say each of the following occurs in your children's relationship?	How much would you say this is a problem?	If this is a problem, how easy would it be for you to improve this if you want to?	How much would you like help with this?
12. Comforting one another (1) never (2) rarely (3) sometimes (4) usually (5) always	(1) it's not a problem (2) it's a small problem (3) it's a big problem (4) it's a very big problem	(1) very difficult (2) difficult (3) neutral (4) easy (5) very easy	(1) no help (2) a little help (3) a lot of help
13. Fighting over territory or space (1) never (2) rarely (3) sometimes (4) usually (5) always	(1) it's not a problem (2) it's a small problem (3) it's a big problem (4) it's a very big problem	(1) very difficult (2) difficult (3) neutral (4) easy (5) very easy	(1) no help (2) a little help (3) a lot of help
14. Protectiveness--looking out for the other's welfare (1) never (2) rarely (3) sometimes (4) usually (5) always	(1) it's not a problem (2) it's a small problem (3) it's a big problem (4) it's a very big problem	(1) very difficult (2) difficult (3) neutral (4) easy (5) very easy	(1) no help (2) a little help (3) a lot of help
15. Feeling proud of one another (1) never (2) rarely (3) sometimes (4) usually (5) always	(1) it's not a problem (2) it's a small problem (3) it's a big problem (4) it's a very big problem	(1) very difficult (2) difficult (3) neutral (4) easy (5) very easy	(1) no help (2) a little help (3) a lot of help

How frequently would you say each of the following occurs in your children's relationship?	How much would you say this is a problem?	If this is a problem, how easy would it be for you to improve this if you want to?	How much would you like help with this?
16. Conflicts where the problem never gets worked out (1) never (2) rarely (3) sometimes (4) usually (5) always	(1) it's not a problem (2) it's a small problem (3) it's a big problem (4) it's a very big problem	(1) very difficult (2) difficult (3) neutral (4) easy (5) very easy	(1) no help (2) a little help (3) a lot of help
17. Talking to each other, conversations (1) never (2) rarely (3) sometimes (4) usually (5) always	(1) it's not a problem (2) it's a small problem (3) it's a big problem (4) it's a very big problem	(1) very difficult (2) difficult (3) neutral (4) easy (5) very easy	(1) no help (2) a little help (3) a lot of help
18. Fighting over objects (1) never (2) rarely (3) sometimes (4) usually (5) always	(1) it's not a problem (2) it's a small problem (3) it's a big problem (4) it's a very big problem	(1) very difficult (2) difficult (3) neutral (4) easy (5) very easy	(1) no help (2) a little help (3) a lot of help
19. Helping one another (1) never (2) rarely (3) sometimes (4) usually (5) always	(1) it's not a problem (2) it's a small problem (3) it's a big problem (4) it's a very big problem	(1) very difficult (2) difficult (3) neutral (4) easy (5) very easy	(1) no help (2) a little help (3) a lot of help

I.D. # \_\_\_\_\_

How frequently would you say each of the following occurs in your children's relationship?	How much would you say this is a problem?	If this is a problem, how easy would it be for you to improve this if you want to?	How much would you like help with this?
20. <del>Teach</del> Treats (1) never (2) rarely (3) sometimes (4) usually (5) always	(1) it's not a problem (2) it's a small problem (3) it's a big problem (4) it's a very big problem	(1) very difficult (2) difficult (3) neutral (4) easy (5) very easy	(1) no help (2) a little help (3) a lot of help
21. Teaching (how to play a game, how to read, etc.) (1) never (2) rarely (3) sometimes (4) usually (5) always	(1) it's not a problem (2) it's a small problem (3) it's a big problem (4) it's a very big problem	(1) very difficult (2) difficult (3) neutral (4) easy (5) very easy	(1) no help (2) a little help (3) a lot of help
22. Affection (hug, kiss, saying "I love you," etc.) (1) never (2) rarely (3) sometimes (4) usually (5) always	(1) it's not a problem (2) it's a small problem (3) it's a big problem (4) it's a very big problem	(1) very difficult (2) difficult (3) neutral (4) easy (5) very easy	(1) no help (2) a little help (3) a lot of help
23. Trying to control each others behavior using phrases like, "Don't do that," "Stop it," or "Leave me alone" (1) never (2) rarely (3) sometimes (4) usually (5) always	(1) it's not a problem (2) it's a small problem (3) it's a big problem (4) it's a very big problem	(1) very difficult (2) difficult (3) neutral (4) easy (5) very easy	(1) no help (2) a little help (3) a lot of help

I.D. # \_\_\_\_\_

How frequently would you say each of the following occurs in your children's relationship?	How much would you say this is a problem?	If this is a problem, how easy would it be for you to improve this if you want to?	How much would you like help with this?
24. Kindness (1) never (2) rarely (3) sometimes (4) usually (5) always	(1) it's not a problem (2) it's a small problem (3) it's a big problem (4) it's a very big problem	(1) very difficult (2) difficult (3) neutral (4) easy (5) very easy	(1) no help (2) a little help (3) a lot of help
In general, how well would you say your children get along with one another?			
1 very poorly	2	3	4 neutral
	5	6	7 extremely well

Appendix D  
Conflict Tactics Scale  
(CTS)

**HUSBAND FORMS**

I.D.#: \_\_\_\_\_

No matter how well two people get along, there are times when they disagree on major decisions, get annoyed about something the other person does, or just have spats or fights because they're in a bad mood or tired or for some other reason. They also use many different ways of trying to settle their differences. Here is a list of things you and your wife might have done when you had a dispute, and that you and your children might have done when you had a conflict or disagreement. We would like you to try and remember what went on during these incidences. Please circle a number for each of the items listed below to show how often you or your partner did that in the past year. There are no right or wrong answers.

- 0 = Never  
 1 = Once that year  
 2 = Two or three times  
 3 = Often, but less than once a month  
 4 = About once a month  
 5 = More than once a month

**YOUR REACTIONS TO YOUR WIFE DURING A DISAGREEMENT:**

- |  |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1) I tried to discuss the issue calmly                         | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2) Did discuss the issue relatively calmly                     | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3) Got information to back up my side of things                | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4) Brought in someone else to help settle things (or tried to) | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5) Argued heatedly but short of yelling                        | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6) Yelled and/or insulted                                      | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7) Sulked and/or refused to talk about it                      | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8) Stomped out of the room or house                            | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9) Threw or smashed something                                  | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10) Cried  | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 11) Did or said something to spite the other                   | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |



- 12) Threatened partner verbally  
 0            1            2            3            4            5
- 13) Threw something at partner  
 0            1            2            3            4            5
- 14) Tried to get my point across with physical force  
 0            1            2            3            4            5
- 15) Used physical force out of frustration  
 0            1            2            3            4            5

- =====
- 0 = Never  
 1 = Once that year  
 2 = Two or three times  
 3 = Often, but less than once a month  
 4 = About once a month  
 5 = More than once a month

And what about your spouse/partner? Circle the appropriate number of times they did the same things this past year.

**YOUR WIFE'S REACTIONS TO CONFLICT WITH YOU:**

- 1) She tried to discuss the issue calmly  
 0            1            2            3            4            5
- 2) She did discuss the issue relatively calmly  
 0            1            2            3            4            5
- 3) She got information to back up her side of things  
 0            1            2            3            4            5
- 4) She brought in someone else to help settle things (or tried to)  
 0            1            2            3            4            5
- 5) She argued heatedly but short of yelling  
 0            1            2            3            4            5
- 6) She yelled and/or insulted  
 0            1            2            3            4            5

- |  |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 7) She sulked and/or refused to talk about it            | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8) She stomped out of the room or house                  | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9) She threw or smashed something                        | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10) She cried  | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 11) She did or said something to spite the other         | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 12) She threatened partner verbally                      | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 13) She threw something at partner                       | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 14) She tried to get my point across with physical force | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 15) She used physical force out of frustration           | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

---

0 = Never

1 = Once that year

2 = Two or three times

3 = Often, but less than once a month

4 = About once a month

5 = More than once a month

Now we would like you to answer the same questions but this time to answer the questions with conflicts and disagreements that you might have had in the past year with your children.

**YOUR REACTIONS WITH YOUR GRADE 5 OR 6 CHILD:**

- |  |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1) I tried to discuss the issue calmly                         | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2) Did discuss the issue relatively calmly                     | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3) Got information to back up my side of things                | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4) Brought in someone else to help settle things (or tried to) | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5) Argued heatedly but short of yelling                        | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6) Yelled and/or insulted                                      | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7) Sulked and/or refused to talk about it                      | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8) Stomped out of the room or house                            | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9) Threw or smashed something                                  | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10) Cried  | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 11) Did or said something to spite the other                   | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 12) Threatened child verbally                                  | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 13) Threw something at child                                   | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 14) Tried to get my point across with physical force           | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

15) Used physical force out of frustration  
 0                      1                      2                      3                      4                      5

=====

0 = Never  
 1 = Once that year  
 2 = Two or three times  
 3 = Often, but less than once a month  
 4 = About once a month  
 5 = More than once a month

**YOUR GRADE 5 OR 6 CHILD'S REACTIONS IN A DISAGREEMENT WITH YOU:**

1) Tried to discuss the issue calmly  
 0                      1                      2                      3                      4                      5

2) Did discuss the issue relatively calmly  
 0                      1                      2                      3                      4                      5

3) Got information to back up his or her side of things  
 0                      1                      2                      3                      4                      5

4) Brought in someone else to help settle things (or tried to)  
 0                      1                      2                      3                      4                      5

5) Argued heatedly but short of yelling  
 0                      1                      2                      3                      4                      5

6) Yelled and/or insulted  
 0                      1                      2                      3                      4                      5

7) Sulked and/or refused to talk about it  
 0                      1                      2                      3                      4                      5

8) Stomped out of the room or house  
 0                      1                      2                      3                      4                      5

9) Threw or smashed something  
 0                      1                      2                      3                      4                      5

10) Cried  
 0                      1                      2                      3                      4                      5

- 11) Did or said something to spite the other  
 0            1            2            3            4            5
- 12) Threatened you verbally  
 0            1            2            3            4            5
- 13) Threw something at you  
 0            1            2            3            4            5
- 14) Tried to get her or his point across with physical force  
 0            1            2            3            4            5
- 15) Used physical force out of frustration  
 0            1            2            3            4            5

- =====
- 0 = Never  
 1 = Once that year  
 2 = Two or three times  
 3 = Often, but less than once a month  
 4 = About once a month  
 5 = More than once a month

And finally, we would like you to answer the same questions but this time to answer the questions with disagreements that you might have had in the past year with your grade 5 or 6 child's closest-in-age sibling.

#### **YOUR REACTIONS WITH YOUR CHILD:**

- 1) I tried to discuss the issue calmly  
 0            1            2            3            4            5
- 2) Did discuss the issue relatively calmly  
 0            1            2            3            4            5
- 3) Got information to back up my side of things  
 0            1            2            3            4            5
- 4) Brought in someone else to help settle things (or tried to)  
 0            1            2            3            4            5

5) Argued heatedly but short of yelling	0	1	2	3	4	5
6) Yelled and/or insulted	0	1	2	3	4	5
7) Sulked and/or refused to talk about it	0	1	2	3	4	5
8) Stomped out of the room or house	0	1	2	3	4	5
9) Threw or smashed something	0	1	2	3	4	5
10) Cried	0	1	2	3	4	5
11) Did or said something to spite the other	0	1	2	3	4	5
12) Threatened child verbally	0	1	2	3	4	5
13) Threw something at child	0	1	2	3	4	5
14) Tried to get my point across with physical force	0	1	2	3	4	5
15) Used physical force out of frustration	0	1	2	3	4	5

=====

0 = Never

1 = Once that year

2 = Two or three times

3 = Often, but less than once a month

4 = About once a month

5 = More than once a month

**YOUR CHILD'S REACTIONS IN A DISAGREEMENT WITH YOU:**

- |  |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1) Tried to discuss the issue calmly                           | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2) Did discuss the issue relatively calmly                     | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3) Got information to back up his or her side of things        | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4) Brought in someone else to help settle things (or tried to) | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5) Argued heatedly but short of yelling                        | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6) Yelled and/or insulted                                      | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7) Sulked and/or refused to talk about it                      | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8) Stomped out of the room or house                            | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9) Threw or smashed something                                  | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10) Cried  | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 11) Did or said something to spite the other                   | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 12) Threatened you verbally                                    | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 13) Threw something at you                                     | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 14) Tried to get his or her point across with physical force   | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

15) Used physical force out of frustration

0

1

2

3

4

5





Appendix E  
O'Leary-Porter Scale  
(OPS)

I.D. #: \_\_\_\_\_

Please answer all questions to the best of your ability. Remember, the questions refer to your family situation at the present time. Thank you.

1) It is difficult in these days of inflation and tight budgets to confine financial discussions to specific times and places. How often would you say that you and your wife argue over money in front of your child?

Very often ( ) Often ( ) Occasionally ( ) Rarely ( ) Never ( )

2) When these arguments occur, does your grade 5 or 6 child most often:

Cry ( ) Show no reaction ( ) Become angry ( )  
Try to make peace ( ) Take sides ( ) Leave the room ( )

3) When these arguments occur, does your other child most often:

Cry ( ) Show no reaction ( ) Become angry ( )  
Try to make peace ( ) Take sides ( ) Leave the room ( )

4) Children often go to one parent for money after having been refused by the other. How often would you say your grade 5 or 6 child approaches you or your wife in this manner with rewarding results?

Very often ( ) Often ( ) Occasionally ( ) Rarely ( ) Never ( )

5) Children often go to one parent for money after having been refused by the other. How often would you say your other child approaches you or your wife in this manner with rewarding results?

Very often ( ) Often ( ) Occasionally ( ) Rarely ( ) Never ( )

6) Husbands and wives often disagree on the subject of discipline. How often do you and your wife argue over disciplinary problems in your children's presence?

Very often ( ) Often ( ) Occasionally ( ) Rarely ( ) Never ( )

7) When this occurs, does your grade 5 or 6 child most often:

Cry ( ) Show no reaction ( ) Become angry ( )  
Try to make peace ( ) Take sides ( ) Leave the room ( )

8) When this occurs, does your other child most often:

Cry ( ) Show no reaction ( ) Become angry ( )  
Try to make peace ( ) Take sides ( ) Leave the room ( )

9) How often have your children heard you and your wife argue about the wife's role in the family? (housewife, working wife, etc.)

Very often ( ) Often ( ) Occasionally ( ) Rarely ( ) Never ( )

10) At these times, does your grade 5 or 6 child most often:

Cry ( ) Show no reaction ( ) Become angry ( )  
Try to make peace ( ) Take sides ( ) Leave the room ( )

11) At these times, does your other child most often:

Cry ( ) Show no reaction ( ) Become angry ( )  
Try to make peace ( ) Take sides ( ) Leave the room ( )

12) How often does your wife complain to you about your personal habits (drinking, nagging, sloppiness, etc.) in front of your children?

Very often ( ) Often ( ) Occasionally ( ) Rarely ( ) Never ( )

13) How often do you complain to your wife about her personal habits in front of your children?

Very often ( ) Often ( ) Occasionally ( ) Rarely ( ) Never ( )

14) When you or your wife make these comments, does your grade 5 or 6 child:

Cry ( ) Show no reaction ( ) Become angry ( )  
 Try to make peace ( ) Take sides ( ) Leave the room ( )

15) When you or your wife make these comments, does your other child:

Cry ( ) Show no reaction ( ) Become angry ( )  
 Try to make peace ( ) Take sides ( ) Leave the room ( )

16) In every normal marriage there are arguments. What percentage of the arguments between you and your wife would you say take place in front of your children?

More than 75% ( ) 50-75% ( ) 25-50% ( ) 10-25 ( )  
 Less than 10% ( )

17) To varying degrees, we all experience almost irresistible impulses in times of great stress. How often is there physical expression of hostility?

Very often ( ) Often ( ) Occasionally ( ) Rarely ( ) Never ( )

18) When this happens, does your grade 5 or 6 child most often:

Cry ( ) Show no reaction ( ) Become angry ( )  
 Try to make peace ( ) Take sides ( ) Leave the room ( )

19) When this happens, does your other child most often:

Cry ( ) Show no reaction ( ) Become angry ( )  
 Try to make peace ( ) Take sides ( ) Leave the room ( )

20) How often do you or your wife display verbal hostility in front of your children? (Yelling, belittling, sarcasm, etc.)

Very often ( ) Often ( ) Occasionally ( ) Rarely ( ) Never ( )

21) At these times, does your grade 5 or 6 child most often:

Cry ( ) Show no reaction ( ) Become angry ( )  
 Try to make peace ( ) Take sides ( ) Leave the room ( )

22) At these times, does your other child most often:

Cry ( ) Show no reaction ( ) Become angry ( )  
 Try to make peace ( ) Take sides ( ) Leave the room ( )

23) How often do you and your wife display affection for each other in front of your children?

Very often ( ) Often ( ) Occasionally ( ) Rarely ( ) Never ( )

24) At these times, does your grade 5 or 6 child most often:

Leave the room ( ) Seem embarrassed ( )  
 Seem comfortable and happy ( ) Show no reaction ( )  
 Display jealousy ( )

25) At these times, does your other child most often:

Leave the room ( ) Seem embarrassed ( )  
 Seem comfortable and happy ( ) Show no reaction ( )  
 Display jealousy ( )

26) In your children's presence, what percentage of your talking to your wife would you judge to fall into the following categories?

Cheerful ( %) Complaining ( %) Angry ( %)  
 Conversational ( %) Sarcastic ( %)

27) In your children's presence, what percentage of your wife's talking to you would you judge to fall into the following categories?

Cheerful ( %) Complaining ( %) Angry ( %)  
 Conversational ( %) Sarcastic ( %)

28) How often does the family have fun together?

Very often ( ) Often ( ) Occasionally ( ) Rarely ( ) Never ( )

Appendix F

Sibling Interview

## SIBLING INTERVIEW

There should be a standard procedure at the beginning where the interviewer introduces herself and just a general warm-up period to establish rapport.

"Hi \_\_\_\_\_, today I'm going to ask you a few questions about your relationship with your brother or sister who is closest to you in age. What is this sibling's name (sibling B)?

Q1) Tell me about sibling B, how would you describe him/her to me? Do you spend time together or do certain activities with sibling B?

Q2) What are the types of things you do when you are together? What do you like to do together best? Why?

Q3) Do you and your sibling talk to each other about things? Do you share secrets, or tell each other about problems you might have?

Q4) Do you and your sibling do things together, like play games or sports together or go to the movies, etc.?

Q5) If you have a problem or are upset about something do you turn to sibling B for comfort and support? Do they turn to you for support?

Q6) Do you and sibling B share many things in common? Like what?

Q7) Most brothers and sisters argue about things with each other. How often do you argue with sibling B?

Q8) What do you argue about? Can you give me a few examples?

Q9) Can you recall a specific example of a particular argument you have recently had with sibling B? Who started it? Then what happened?



**Q10) How do you go about solving or ending the fight?**

**Q11) Does one of you usually make the first move to end the fight and try and make-up? Do you try to talk it out instead of arguing? Or is there one person who controls the situation more than the other?**

**Q12) If you and sibling B want to watch two different television programs, how do you decide who gets to watch their show?**

**Q13) Do you ever have to call in someone else to help you solve your conflict, like you parents, another family member, or your friends? Sometimes do your parents just decide to break up the fight or help you? What do they do?**

**Q14) When you argue do you argue about just one thing or do you argue about many things at the same time?**

**Q15) Would you say that most of your arguments with sibling B are verbal arguments, physical arguments, arguments where you talk things out and you work it out together, or a combination of these?**

**Q16) How do feel after having had a fight with sibling B?**

**Q17) How do your disputes with sibling B end? For example, are you both happy with the end result, are you upset with each other, do you avoid each other afterwards, or you both do not care?**

**Q18) Do either you or sibling B try to convince the other that your side is right?**

**Q19) Do you think there is a winner or a loser when you argue with sibling B?**

**Q20) How does sibling B argue? What are some of things s/he does during a disagreement? Can you give me specific examples from specific situations?**

Q21) And what do you do in response?

Q22) Do you think you argue too much with sibling B? Are you content with the way things are in your relationship with sibling B?

Q23) Do you think your parents think you argue too much?

Q24) Do you think it's a good or bad thing to argue with sibling B? Can you give reasons why it's good or bad?

Thank child for participating.

Appendix G

Sibling Interview Coding Scheme

## SIBLING INTERVIEW CODING SCHEME

After having transcribed the tape-recorded interviews, the following definitions will be used to categorize perceptions of sibling relationships. Each transcript is typed in a Q & A format so that the coder may identify which are the target questions in order to properly code these instances. As Furman and Buhrmester (1985) noted, siblings report various relationship qualities. It is these qualities that will be coded for throughout the transcripts.

ALL TRANSCRIPTS SHALL BE CODED FOR:

### I - Prosocial Behavior:

Prosocial behavior can be verbal or nonverbal, explicit or implicit instances or attempts at forming warm exchanges with another person or persons. It is the capability to understand the feelings and needs of another person (Dunn & Munn, 1986), and demonstrating this capability through various types of exchanges or cognitions.

- a) **INTIMACY:** disclosure, sharing of secrets, showing trust of sibling.
- b/c) **COMPANIONSHIP:** wanting to spend time and do things with sibling, it is clear that a friendship exists and that the children associate frequently, converse and share each other's company often. Child mentions that he/she laughs, giggles or praises sibling, expresses verbal enthusiasm, or engages in cooperative joint play. Mention of doing things together such as playing, or shopping, or making and building things.
- d) **SIMILARITY:** the sharing of things in common, liking the same things or sharing the same interests.
- e) **NURTURANCE BY CHILD:** the child explains, models or demonstrates how to perform a task or the child offers or attempts to offer assistance or help to sibling. The child exhibits caring and sharing (in a nurturing manner) for and with sibling.
- f) **NURTURANCE OF SIBLING:** child being interviewed perceives to be receiving nurturance from sibling (see previous code).
- g) **ADMIRATION BY CHILD:** wants to emulate or be like and with sibling, tries to copy sibling by dress, or by hanging out with him/her and their friends.

h) **ADMIRATION OF SIBLING:** the child perceives the above traits as being applied to him/her by his/her sibling

i) **AFFECTION:** hugging, kissing, or affectionately touching sibling

## II - EQUITY

Equity is a subjective aspect of any relationship. In order to assess equity within a relationship different perceptions of the relationship are called upon. Equitable outcomes are not always equal outcomes. Equity is a condition in which people receive from a relationship in proportion to what they perceive they are putting into it (Myers, 1990).

a) **DOMINANCE BY CHILD:** child controls interactions by dictating, ordering, or manipulating the situation by taking charge.

b) **DOMINANCE OF SIBLING:** child is dominated by sibling who takes control of interactions

c) **COMPETITION:** to seek or strive for the same thing as sibling, as if to carry out a contest and see who wins, to try to get to limited resources

d) **DIFFERENTIAL PARENTAL TREATMENT:** when a child perceives his/her parents to be favoring one child over the other - whether the partiality is actual or just perceived is irrelevant

e) **RECIPROCITY:** exchanges of an egalitarian nature. Reciprocal exchanges involve acts of one sibling responding to with similar acts by the other sibling. Reciprocity is not necessarily a positive exchange, it may involve negative exchanges of an egalitarian nature as well.

## III - CONFLICT STRATEGIES

There are two different types of conflict strategies - constructive and destructive.

Constructive conflict is a type of conflict situation where individuals are able to avoid escalation and expansion of the conflict issue into other domains. The disagreeing dyad should be capable of engaging in mutual problem solving, and maintaining social interaction.

Destructive conflicts are conflicts in which threats or coercion are used, and where expansion and escalation beyond the mutual issue occurs.

Three specific indexes exist that signal whether conflict should be coded as destructive according to Furman and McQuaid (1992). These three points are:

1) If conflict occurs frequently or constitutes a high proportion of the dyad's interactions (if conflicts are frequent we suspect they are not being resolved).

2) If the conflict is extended in nature or is expressed in more marked forms such as aggression, then it would appear that the conflict has escalated and is thus likely to be destructive.

3) If conflicts (even minor ones) between the members of a particular dyad end with disengagement, we would classify them as destructive. It is also important to note, that consistent withdrawal or disengagement may serve to curtail constructive resolution of conflict.

#### **A) DESTRUCTIVE STRATEGIES**

1) **NEGATIVE VERBAL BEHAVIOR:** arguments, child threatens, teases, insults, engages in sarcasm, name-calling, yelling, whining or protesting.

2) **NEGATIVE PHYSICAL BEHAVIOR:** the child hits, attacks, pushes or engages in fighting (not play fighting)

3) **UNFOCUSED CONFLICT.** when conflict is not focused and the issue at hand gets blown out of proportion

4) **NO RESOLUTION:** when the same issues are argued about over and over suggesting no resolution, or when someone gives in as in submission but without a mutual conclusion

5) **AVOIDANCE:** ignoring, walking away, stomping out of room.

- 6) **ONE-SIDEDNESS:** always thinking their side is right, no room for listening to others opinions, being close-minded
- 7) **MISUSE OF APOLOGY:** when one party apologizes just to get person off their back without really meaning it
- 8) **MANIPULATION:** acting victimized, appealing to authority to take sides or decide
- 9) **SULKING:** making negative facial expressions, and frowning or moping but not attempting to solve anything.
- 10) **APATHY:** not caring about finding a resolution or about how the fight ends.

**B) CONSTRUCTIVE CONFLICT CODES:**

- 1) **COMPROMISE:** each party has to make a concession or give up something in order to get to the end goal
- 2) **PRELIMINARY RECONCILIATION:** an invitation to play, apology, making a joke or downplaying the conflict and moving on to something else, but not necessarily resolution. Feeling badly about having had a fight or about arguing - showing that the child has given the situation at hand some thought and would like to resolve things and indicates this through his/her remorse even if nothing is done about it.
- 3) **COLLABORATION/PROBLEM SOLVING:** unlike compromise collaboration is when two individuals work together to come up with solutions to problems or conflicts. It is more than a give and take type of attitude, it is working through, brainstorming, negotiating, and coming up with a mutual solution.
- 4) **CLEAR RESOLUTION OF CONFLICT:** when the conflict is worked out, and siblings don't leave things up in the air, but rather, decide on a solution.
- 5) **FOCUSED CONFLICT:** when an argument or conflict is focused on just one issue or problem at a time.
- 7) **OPENNESS:** a child's willingness to listen to sibling's points of view even if differing than his/her own.