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Toward a Definition of Adult Sibling Resilience

by

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Abstract

The sibling relationship is considered one of the longest lasting connections an individual will have to another person (Walker et al., 2005). Despite this, it is a consistently understudied population in family research and, when studied, siblings are primarily examined during adolescence and often only in the context of conflict and rivalry. Additionally, much of this research does not examine the effects of sibling relationships on the larger family system. This thesis seeks to address this gap in the literature by understanding how the adult sibling literature presents and defines dimensions of sibling relationships. In doing so, it also seeks to examine whether these qualities can lead to a proposed definition of sibling resilience.

Key words: adult siblings, resilience, support, connection, warmth

Introduction

There is an abundance of resilience research focusing on the individual, and how one may continue to competently function in the face of significant risk (Patterson, 2002a). In the last twenty to thirty years this has expanded to include family resilience, which considers the family as a system with the potential to exhibit resilience through family strengths, adjustment, adaptation, and coping strategies. This expansion in the literature assists in furthering the understanding of the range of resilience - that it can be applied to group systems as well as individual people. Family resilience focuses on the family as a group, but there is no literature to date addressing the resilience of subsystems within the family, such as the sibling subsystem.

This literature analysis will examine the sibling subsystem in the larger family context and attempt to define sibling resilience by looking at the present literature on individual resilience, family resilience, and dimensions of adult sibling relationships. The focus on adult siblings is an attempt to bridge the gap in sibling relationship research. Most of the scholarship

around sibling relationships focuses on children and adolescents, and the oldest generations (Cicirelli, 1991; Walker, Allen, & Connidis, 2005). As sibling ties have a longer duration than most other connections, within or outside of the family, it is crucial to examine sibling relationships at multiple points in the lifespan. Young adult and mid-life siblings should not be discounted in the larger sibling relationship research, even if communication decreases and distance between siblings increases in midlife. There is lifelong potential for sibling support, even in the physical absence of a sibling after adolescence. A strong sibling connection may have the possibility to influence greater family resilience, as the sibling subsystem within the family influences and is influenced by other family subsystems (Cicirelli, 1991).

Understanding Resilience

To gain a clearer understanding of the ways in which resilience is applied to sibling relationships, it is necessary to examine the definitions of resilience as applied to individuals and in the scope of individual and family research. Resilience, as applied to the individual, is described as "...competent functioning in some domain after exposure to a significant risk" (Patterson, 2002a, p. 350). Individuals exposed to such risks are defined as resilient because, in most instances, people in these situations show symptomatic or dysfunctional behavior (Patterson, 2002a). This is not to say that the people in these significant risk situations emerge with no consequences to their functioning, they are simply to recover more quickly as a function of protective factors. It must also be noted that resiliency is not a static state of being, it is more accurately "...a series of dynamic contextual processes in which one can struggle well when faced with expected and unexpected life events" (Karraker and Grochowski, 2006, p. 62, as cited in Higgins, 1994). Taking this into consideration, there will never be an individual who is always

resilient in every circumstance. There are only individuals that may be better equipped in the face of adverse events.

Family resilience modifies these definitions, as they are applied to a group rather than a single individual. Instead of considering the family as a factor for individual resilience, family resilience views the family as one functional unit (Walsh, 1996). McCubbin and McCubbin (1988) describe resilient families as those that can cope successfully through life transitions, stress, or adversity. The nature of looking at a family in the context of resilience requires clear conceptualization of the family's outcomes, significant risks to the family, and any protective mechanisms that are preventing unpleasant outcomes (Patterson, 2002a). Family resilience examines the strengths and capabilities of families, how these interact with the demands of daily life, their application to family adjustment (in the short term) or family adaptation (in the long term), and seeks to understand why some families are able to function better than others in the face of adverse events (McCubbin & McCubbin, 1988; Patterson 2002a). Built from theories and research on family stress, coping, and adaptation, the language used in connection to family resilience often reflects dimensions of these topics (Walsh, 1996, 2016).

Language Around Resiliency

Resilience research uses several varying terms when referring to the concepts connected to individual and family resilience. Perception of events, support, adaptation, adjustment, coping, and strengths are all explored in connection with resilience, as they influence the ability of individuals and families to bounce back from adverse events. The perception of events is of particular importance, as it can influence other aspects of individual and family resilience (i.e., support, adaptation, adjustment, coping, and strengths). The way in which an event is perceived affects how an individual or family responds, whether that event is to be considered inconvenient

or devastating (Karraker and Grochowski, 2006). Family response changes as the meaning prescribed to an event is modified.

Adjustment and adaptation are measures often used in resilience research to differentiate between short-term and long-term individual and family changes. Adjustment can require the change in a schedule for a few weeks to work around an injury (e.g., a broken arm). Adaptation, however, requires changes in families that have long term consequences to family roles, rules, patterns of interaction, and perceptions (Price et al., 2010, as cited in McCubbin, Cauble, & Patterson, 1982). For example, a family member paralyzed in an accident may require significant changes to family routines, the roles that members take on within the family, and individual perceptions of the new family structure.

Coping in the context of resilience research focuses on the balancing of challenges and strengths (Karraker and Grochowski, 2006). Sharon Price, Christine Price, and Patrick McKenry (2010) consider coping as it interacts with family resources and perceptions, though they carefully differentiate these resources and perceptions and coping actions. Coping is reflective of what the individual or family is actively doing, and the availability of resources or perception of an event does not necessarily reflect the reaction of the family as a unit.

Supports and strengths are often discussed synonymously in resilience research. Strength, from this perspective, involves the development or retention of protective factors to successfully manage risk exposure (Patterson, 2002b). This can include various support structures, communication, routines and traditions, and general health (Karraker and Grochowski, 2006). The list of potential family protective factors is extensive, and their use varies across different families.

Resilience Models

From this resilience research a series of models have emerged to support continued work around resiliency with individuals and families. The earliest of which is Rubin Hill's ABCX Model. Originating from Rubin Hill's family stress research, addresses the relationship between stressors (A), resources (B), definitions of the stressors (C), and crisis events (Karraker and Grochowski, 2006). Building off this, Wesley Burr introduced the Double ABCX Model. This expansion of Hill's work allows for a more thorough examination of postcrisis adaptation and the accumulation of stressors and resources.

The Family Adjustment and Adaptation Response (FAAR) Model draws from some aspects of the ABCX and Double ABCX Models. Family demands and capabilities are in an active balancing process, which interact with the family's understanding of these demands and capabilities, their own family identity, and the way they view the world as a unit, and brings them to a level of adjustment or adaptation (Patterson, 2002a). If demands begin to outweigh the family's capabilities, the family may experience a crisis. The way in which a family continues to function after such a crisis determines the resilience of the family. An understanding of these models may help in the future development of models for sibling resilience. As family resilience models draw from models of individual resilience, so too may sibling resilience draw from models of family resilience.

Adult Sibling Relationships

The Sibling Relationship

When examining family resilience, it is necessary to consider sibling's relationships to one another as the sibling tie is typically the longest lasting familial relationship (Walker et al., 2005). Sibling research requires a focus on larger social networks, as this social tie is flexible throughout the lifespan, and this broad focus makes it possible to examine other family ties -

using the sibling relationship as the central tie for individuals and families (Walker et al., 2005). This is also considered in Cicirelli's (1991) discussion of the sibling subsystem in conjunction with family systems theory. Among two other family subsystems (spousal and parent-child), any events occurring within the sibling subsystem affect and are affected by the other subsystems. While this view does not insist that siblings are a central tie from which to examine the larger family system, it demonstrates the reciprocal nature of the sibling relationship to other relationships within the family.

Examining Siblings in Emerging and Middle Adulthood

Sibling research focuses largely on children and adolescents however, in recent years, there has been more attention paid to sibling relationships among older generations - primarily those within the "baby boomer" cohort (Cicirelli, 1991). This allows us insight on the importance of sibling relationships near the beginning of life and near the end of life, but there is a significant gap between these two points that is largely unexamined. In part, this may be due to the nature of sibling relationships in emerging and middle adulthood. As siblings transition into adulthood, their separate lives may naturally strain the relationships they have with one another. Contact may decrease, siblings may have more proximity between them, and they may turn to other social ties to share information about themselves during this and later periods in time (Walker et al., 2005). Sibling ties may not be voluntary, but there is an element of choice involved in sibling ties that is more common in nonkin relationships (Walker et al., 2005, as cited in Allan, 1977).

Who is represented in the sibling research?

When siblings are included in research, there is typically a clear definition of what constitutes sibling ties. In past research, sibling relationships include full siblings (biologically

related through both parents), half siblings (biologically related through one parent), step siblings, or adoptive. Siblings can be related - biologically or by law - in any number of ways, but this still does not fully account for all sibling ties (Walker et al., 2005). There are currently no studies that ask people to clarify the qualities and identifiers they require for the title of sibling. Sibling ties can exist in name only - should these relationships be discounted from research because there is “no relation”, or because the individuals’ parents are not married to one another? As current studies only pull from biological or legal definitions of siblings, the full scope of sibling relationships, as defined by participants themselves, cannot be understood. The sibling relationship is one of the longest lasting relationships within the lifespan and the lack of a complete definition of siblings is a disservice to sibling research.

The composition of the sibling dyad also informs the types of relationships represented in sibling research. The gender composition of the sibling dyad, life stages, age differences, number of siblings, socio-economic status, race, and ethnicity are all mediators of the sibling relationship that impact sibling support systems. There is some variability in the literature relating to the strength of some of these mediators, many of which have mixed results across disciplines and time. Gender, particularly, has varied results from study to study. Sisters are often found to provide more psychological support to siblings, though there are also existing studies that show no difference between sexes (Avioli, 1989; Descartes, 2007). Similarly, research appears to support stronger psychological involvement for sibling dyads that include a woman, though there is evidence to support that siblings of the opposite sex grow closer over time (Avioli, 1989).

Changes throughout stages of life may also impact the availability and type of support offered to siblings, especially in connection to age (Descartes, 2007). In young adulthood, people

focus primarily on building their lives away from the family. There is a greater focus on finding and settling into an occupation, marriage, and starting a family. Understandably, this may take more attention away from the maintenance of a sibling relationship. Although there is potentially less support among siblings in this stage of life, it is also possible that this support takes on a different shape (Cicirelli, 1991). Instead of instrumental support, siblings may simply maintain a supportive relationship by maintaining contact with each other.

The difference in age between siblings also affects relationships within the dyad. As Conger and Little (2010) state, siblings that are closer in age tend to go through similar life transitions at the same time. Siblings closer in age will likely find it easier to connect as a result of sharing similar experiences. Descartes (2007) also identifies the number of siblings, or “sibship size” as a mediator of support. She mentions that there are also variable results from these studies. A person in a larger family may have one sibling they feel close to and, subsequently, to whom they provide more support. Conversely, there is also evidence that there is a higher occurrence of support exchange in sibships with a larger number of siblings.

While less research is conducted on sibling support in connection to socio-economic status, the literature that exists indicates that more support may be higher for working-class siblings than middle class siblings, however the types of support that is offered may differ (Avioli, 1989). Little work has been done to examine the role race and ethnicity plays in the way sibling dyads evolve and more research must be conducted to reach a full understanding of race and ethnicities influence on the sibling relationship. The small amount of literature available appears to suggest that race and ethnicity is a valuable factor to consider, as research has found higher degrees of closeness and solidarity in sibling relationships among African-American and Italian-American families than white sibling dyads (Avioli, 1989). These factors are crucial to

consider in both the subsequent analysis and any future research that is conducted around the sibling relationship. The frameworks of individual and family resilience offer a starting point from which a definition of adult sibling resilience can be built and, though the literature may not be fully representative of all adult sibling relationships, this paper strives to address this and the multitude of variables impacting the relationship between adult siblings.

Methodological Approach

This thesis seeks to understand how the adult sibling literature presents, explores, and defines sibling connections, strengths, supports, adjustment and adaptation, coping, and warmth. It further examines whether these qualities in a sibling relationship can lead to a proposed definition of sibling resilience by analyzing the existing literature on resilience and adult siblings. This literature analysis first identifies common qualities in the sibling relationship across the literature and examines how these qualities are defined. As these qualities are defined, the definitions are examined to see if they are consistent throughout the literature, or if the varying sources apply different meanings to these terms. The literature is then categorized by content area, such as sibling connection, sibling strengths, and coping. Content areas were retained if they were recurring in the literature, specifically if there were two or more sources provided for the chosen terms. Next, the sibling literature is examined to understand what is being said about the sibling relationship and whether certain qualities of these relationships are more valuable than others, or if some of these qualities can be encompassed in a larger content area (e.g., sibling connection, sibling intimacy). The terms used across sibling literature are then examined to understand the measures used by researchers and how this further contributes to definitions around sibling relationships. The literature analysis ended once saturation of sibling relationship qualities was experienced.

Analysis and Results: Dimensions of Sibling Relationships

The dimensions in a sibling relationship used to begin organizing and analyzing the sibling relationship literature were connection, strength, supports, adjustment and adaptation, coping, and warmth. These dimensions were chosen upon a cursory reading of general resilience research and the adult sibling literature, as the terms featured prominently in one or both of these areas of research. Sub-qualities or content areas were established upon reading through the adult sibling research. When recurring terms were seen and could be identified across multiple sources, they were given a position as a sub-quality. These sub-qualities were nestled within the larger dimensions—the categories were selected based on early exploration of the literature.

Results

Connection was the highest occurring dimension in all respects, with four sub-qualities (communication, contact, closeness, and confiding) and a presence within seventeen sources (see Appendix A). The dimension of support followed in number of sources with sixteen and had two sub-qualities (reciprocity and commitment). Warmth contained three sub-qualities (intimacy, affection, admiration) and had a presence in nine sources. The dimension of adjustment and adaptation had no sub-qualities and a presence in only two sources and, similarly, the dimension of coping had no sub-qualities and only two sources in which it was featured in the sibling literature. As a point of interest, there were no sources present in the sibling literature for the dimension of strength. Sibling strength is not a feature of the sibling relationship that is of significance to researchers compared to other dimensions. A succinct breakdown of the completed analysis representing these dimensions and sub-qualities can be seen in Figure 1.

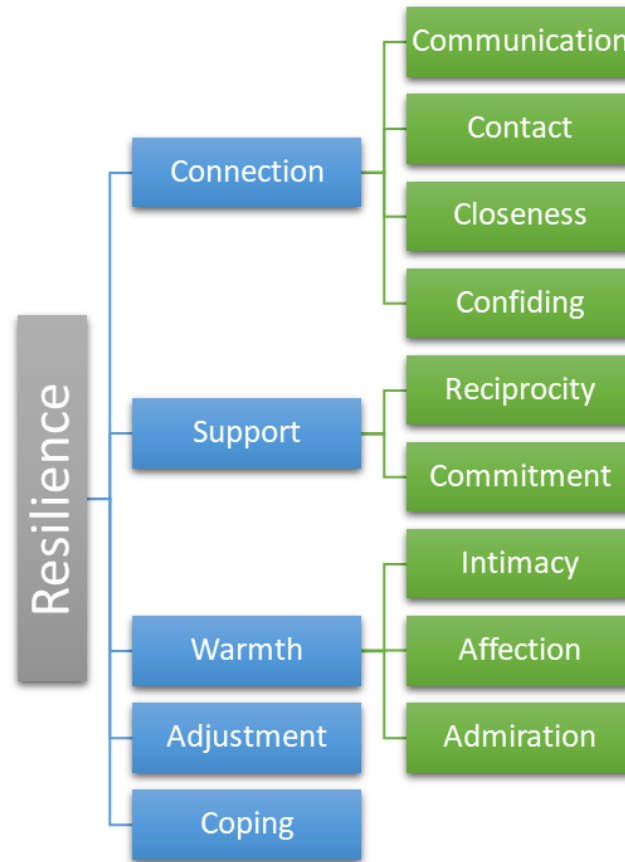


Figure 1. Dimensions of adult sibling relationships.

Sibling Connection

The dimension of sibling connection was most often examined through sibling closeness and rivalry, although other approaches, such as identification of different types of sibling connections, are also seen in the literature (Cicirelli, 1991). Closeness, in sibling research, often considers the framework of the family in which the siblings grew up and is influenced by shared childhood experiences (Ross & Milgram, 1982). Rivalry, however, is often considered to be initiated by adults in childhood when it is perceived that one sibling is favored over another. In some instances, especially in large families, there is also the perception of sibling-initiated rivalry, where a group of siblings is given responsibility for “starting” the rivalry (Ross & Milgram, 1982). When looking at sibling connection through the scope of closeness and rivalry,

closeness is often considered to increase as siblings age, where sibling rivalry is less clear and split between research utilizing direct measurement and clinical methods (Cicirelli, 1991). Much of the literature examining the dimension of sibling closeness only addresses closeness and rivalry. This needs to expand outside of the constraints of a relationship characterized primarily through family experiences in childhood – whether these connections are antagonistic or not.

Emotional closeness is also often addressed in literature examining sibling closeness. This is explored through siblings' use of affectionate communication and communication-based emotional support and experienced by siblings through participation in family functions, endurance of family hardships, through shared interests, and through age related issues (Rittenour et al., 2007). Emotional closeness also impacts other aspects of the sibling relationship, as an individual that feels emotionally close to a sibling is more likely to confide in them, visit, and provide support (Connidis & Campbell, 1995; Rittenour, 2007). Emotional closeness can be expressed to siblings in several ways, though much of the literature focuses on communication.

Communication in sibling relationships in this context is largely studied over the telephone. As adult siblings may be geographically distant from one another, telephone calls are a significant method of communication between affectionate siblings. There are instances in the literature that the dimension of communication is discussed and measured through direct contact, though this is most often seen when it is used synonymously with the term contact. For this reason, the dimensions of communication and contact have been differentiated by the siblings use of the telephone to keep in touch. Christine Rittenour, Scott Myers, and Maria Brann (2007) discuss the use of affectionate communication and communication-based emotional support to demonstrate emotional closeness in their study of sibling commitment. Affectionate

communication is the purposeful enactment of feelings of closeness, care, and fondness, which includes verbal, nonverbal, and supportive communication (Floyd & Morman, 1998). Rittenour et al. (2007) found that the more communication present within a sibling relationship, the higher the level of intimacy – which directly impacted sibling commitment.

Scott Myers, Kerry Byrnes, Brandi Frisby, and Daniel Mansson (2011) also examined affectionate communication, though they focus more intently on investigating the way this communication is utilized in adult sibling relationships. Specifically, on whether it is used as a strategic or routine relational maintenance behavior – the actions and activities utilized to maintain relational desired definitions (Myers et al., 2011, as cited in Canary & Stafford, 1994). Using them routinely implies that these behaviors are done unconsciously, and used strategically, these behaviors are done intentionally, and likely with less frequency than routine relational maintenance behaviors. As previously mentioned, adult siblings are more likely to be separated geographically and have other demands that take them away from the sibling relationship. Myers et al. (2011) posited that, due to the nature of sibling relationships in adulthood, it would be most likely that adult siblings engage in strategic relational maintenance behaviors. In their study, examining participants in emerging and later adulthood, they found it was more common for siblings to engage in strategic relational maintenance behaviors and offered two reasons why this might occur. First, it may reduce any uncertainty adult siblings experience about the relationship – because of the likely reduction in communication during adulthood, checking in may alleviate anxieties about the state of the relationship. In line with the first reason, siblings could have an invested interest in maintaining the relationship. Contacting a sibling, in this case, becomes a reminder of the importance a sibling places on the relationship.

Contact is often used interchangeably with communication in the sibling literature. It holds a separate subcategory because, while similar in definition to communication, contact tends to include more instances of personal contact – rather than communication done solely over the phone, by email, or through letters. Voorpostel and Blieszner (2008), in an examination of the intergenerational solidarity and support between adult siblings, establish contact between family members as a characterization of sibling support. The general idea being that the more siblings are in contact with one another, the greater the likelihood of affection and willingness to help in times of need. In sibling research, the gender of a sibling appears to be significant to contact (and likely communication). Over the telephone, women contact their highest contact sibling (a single sibling) and the larger sibling network more often than men, and those whose highest contact sibling is a sister tend to spend more time talking over the phone than those with a brother as their highest contact sibling. For in-person contact, it is also more likely for women to be in contact with their siblings (Connidis & Campbell, 1995).

Sibling Support

Much of the support offered between siblings in emerging and middle adulthood is psychological. Commonly, siblings in this age group are only called upon for physical help if a crisis necessitates the additional support (Cicirelli, 1991, as cited in Troll, 1975). At this time, many adult siblings may be separated in terms of distance and are more heavily focused on their individual lives. While siblings at this age see less of each other and may communicate less, simply being available for psychological support (e.g., serving as a confidant, giving advice, boosting morale) was more significant than any particular level of interaction (Cicirelli, 1991).

In the literature, one of the commonly identified aspects of psychological support is emotional support. While there are varying definitions of emotional support, there is a consensus

that it involves "...the expression of empathy, sympathy, concern, compassion, validation of feelings and encouragement" (Rittenour et al, 2007, p. 173). Emotional support is also often categorized within or discussed in connection with social support (Myers & Bryant, 2008; Rittenour et al, 2007). Emotional support is seen as an aspect of social support, and its separate categorization in research endeavors speaks to the importance of considering emotional support in the sibling relationship. In their study of behavior indicators of sibling commitment, Scott Myers and Leah Bryant (2008) list five superordinate categories of social support – tangible, emotional, informational, esteem, and network support. Of the categories here, the only other aspect of social support discussed consistently throughout the sibling literature is information support. This is not to say that the other categories are insignificant regarding sibling research, only that little research has been conducted to observe these categories.

The use of emotional support outside of social support is commonly used in abuse and addiction literature. In their study of the childhood sibling subsystems that may emerge in abusive family systems, Jennifer Williams, Shelley Riggs, and Patricia Kaminski (2016) characterize the "defensive subsystem" as an adaptive relationship in which one sibling acts as a caretaker for the others. The sibling in the caretaking role serves as a source of protection and emotional support for the other siblings to promote their development and adjustment, despite the family's circumstances (Williams et al., 2016).

As stated previously, the use of social support is often more generalized than emotional support. Social support is examined to assess psychological outcomes in various sibling relationships (Mikkelsen et al., 2011; Milevsky, 2005), and is often used as a measure or intertwined with another dimension of sibling relationships such as sibling communication, commitment, or closeness. (Mikkelsen et al., 2001; Myers & Bryant, 2008; Sanner et al., 2018).

The use of social support in assessing the nature of sibling relationships is particularly prevalent in divorce literature. Kimberly Jacobs and Alan Sillars (2012) in a study examining sibling social support following parental divorce, include emotional, informational, and instrumental support in the category of social support. The results suggested that sibling support was roughly equal to that of maternal support in all categories except availability/companionship, where greater support is received from siblings, and that supportive siblings seem to provide a buffer through shared experiences and a sense of continuity (Jacobs & Sillars, 2012). As a point of interest, this is the only source that references resilience, although it is intertwined with support.

The dimension of support within the sibling relationship has the most variability in how it is defined. There is no agreement across the sibling literature on a set definition of support, nor a consensus on the configuration of the sub-qualities nestled within support. Social, emotional, instrumental, instructional, esteem, and network support are only a few of the sub-qualities that exist in the sibling literature, and their use appears to rely on either the discipline the literature falls under or are referenced from previous research.

Sibling commitment is frequently considered in connection to sibling support and emotional closeness. Commitment is described as a psychological attachment characterized by the expression of personal desire, feelings of obligation, or the feeling that one must commit to the relationship because of societal pressures (Rittenour et al., 2007, as cited in Johnson, 1999). Although most of the research focuses on romantic or platonic relationships, commitment can be measured and understood within other close relationships. Given the involuntary nature of the sibling relationship, and the changes that occur in this relationship from adolescence to adulthood, studying commitment in the adult sibling population provides useful insight on the level of involvement siblings maintain with one another.

In their study around the use of behavioral indicators of sibling commitment, Myers and Bryant (2008) identify eleven behaviors through which siblings express commitment: tangible, emotional, informational, esteem, and network support, everyday talk, shared activities, both verbal and nonverbal expressions, protection, and intimate play (playful behaviors that include play-fighting, name-calling, and teasing). Of these, protection was used with the most frequency. And, while some of these behavioral indicators are similar to those of other close relationships, there are behavioral indicators that seem to be unique to siblings, including tangible support, protection, and intimate play (Myers & Bryant, 2008). Additionally, Rittenour et al. (2007) suggest that siblings who show support both emotionally and affectionally are likely to remain committed to the relationship despite potential barriers – such as proximity or parenthood.

Reciprocity is understood as a give and take within a relationship. In her research around the social support functions of siblings in later life, Paula Avioli (1989) describes three proposed types of reciprocity: generalized reciprocity, negative reciprocity, and balanced reciprocity. In generalized reciprocity, aid is given without the expectation of repayment. Negative reciprocity is the opposite of this, in which an individual seeks only to take from the relationship without giving anything in return. Balanced reciprocity, as its name suggests, is characterized by direct and equitable exchanges – a middle ground between generalized and negative reciprocity. This is the type of reciprocity often applied to the sibling relationship, as siblings tend to expect some type of exchange for assistance given (Avioli, 1989). There is no need for this reciprocation to be immediate, or even in kind, though if a sibling fails to reciprocate entirely the relationship is likely to suffer as a result. An exchange is considered equitable so long as it satisfies the sibling pair (Avioli, 1989). For this reason, these exchanges are likely to be unique across sibling relationships and may be subject to change across situations.

Lara Descartes (2007) examined data from a larger study on how individuals exchanged support with family and friends to understand exchange between adult siblings. Several of her participants reflected on the warm, close relationships they had with siblings in relationships involving exchange. Examples of the balanced reciprocity exchanges referred to previously are present within the interviews. An African American woman with a younger brother and two sisters discussed loaning her brother money and helping him with transportation, mentioning that she did not mind it because she knew he would eventually pay her back. This was also present in her relationship with her sisters, one of which cut her hair in exchange for childcare (Descartes, 2007).

However, there do appear to be exemptions to the nature of balanced reciprocity in the sibling relationship connected to the age (Descartes, 2007). Younger siblings are potentially exempt – in part or in full – from reciprocity exchanges. This can occur if an older sibling takes responsibility over younger siblings and excuses them from this expectation. In this instance, the oldest typically takes responsibility for the organization of events and even resources in a time of family crisis. This is further supported from youngest sibling accounts of the expectation that they will be released – at least partially – from these acts of reciprocity (Descartes, 2007). This calls back to the idea that the reciprocal nature of the sibling relationship is predominately determined by the siblings themselves.

Sibling Warmth

Warmth, as a dimension of the sibling relationship, is often characterized and measured by looking at smaller relationship sub-qualities. As measured in the Adult Sibling Relationship Questionnaire (ASRQ) these included similarity, intimacy, affection, admiration, emotional support, instrumental support, acceptance, knowledge, and contact (Stewart et al., 2001). In her

study of the sibling relationship as a way to cope with stress in early adulthood, Katarzyna Wałęcka-Matyja (2015) posits that sibling relationships in early adulthood are primarily characterized by the dimension of warmth. She found that this dimension was predominate over the factors of conflict and rivalry, and that the higher level of perceived similarity and experiences of closeness had a direct impact on sibling self-esteem among sisters.

As stated previously, intimacy is often used as a measurement of sibling warmth or characterized within the dimension of warmth. Scott Myers and Alan Goodboy (2010) describe intimate sibling relationships as being characterized through emotional interdependence, psychological closeness, empathy, and mutuality. Myers and Goodboy's (2010) study sought to understand the use of relational maintenance behaviors across sibling relationships. It was found that siblings whose relationships could be classified as intimate used relational maintenance behaviors to a higher degree than siblings whose relationship was classified as congenial, loyal, or apathetic/hostile. Tied to this finding, sibling relationships classified as intimate also tend to include a larger variety of communication methods that siblings employ to keep in touch, including direct contact, telephone calls, e-mail, cards, and text messaging (Myers & Goodboy, 2010). Although, interpersonal communications are often favored in these relationships, as intimate siblings are often more involved in one another's lives.

A study of sibling commitment lists intimacy expression and intimate play as supra-ordinate categories (Myers & Bryant, 2008). Superordinate categories included in intimacy expression included everyday talk, in which talk or message on a regular basis to maintain the relationship, and shared activities, such as watching television, eating together, or simply occupying the same space. Intimate play, as described earlier, are playful behaviors unique to

each sibling relationship. These expressions and behaviors serve to reaffirm commitment between siblings in emerging adulthood (Myers & Bryant, 2008).

The sibling research uses affection largely as a measure of warmth or closeness (Connidis & Campbell, 1995; Stewart et al., 2001). However, in a study proposing typologies of sibling relationships in abusive family systems, affection is used as a characterization of sibling adjustment (Williams et al., 2016). Additionally, sibling relationships that are high in affection function as a protective factor against internalization in the wake of stressful life events (Gass et al., 2007). As is common with other dimensions of the sibling relationship, affection is often intertwined with other categories.

Admiration is often used within the description of warmth (Wałęcka-Matyja, 2015). In examining typologies of adult sibling relationships, Stewart et al. (2001) found that admiration is low in adolescents, when instrumental support is greater. Conversely, admiration for one's siblings is higher in later adulthood when there may be less opportunity or capability for instrumental support. Of course, this admiration is typically only found in sibling relationships that are characterized as supportive and intimate.

Sibling Adjustment and Adaptation

This dimension encompasses both sibling adjustment and adaptation, as these are often examined simultaneously within resilience research. In the scope of this thesis, however, adjustment was the only dimension of the sibling relationship that was present in the literature. In examining social support among emerging adult siblings, Avidan Milevsky (2005) sought to understand whether sibling support related to psychological adjustment. This is exhibited through lower scores on loneliness and depression, and high scores on self-esteem and life

satisfaction as a result of sibling relationships with high support. It was noted, however, that these differences in adjustment may lead to these differences in social support (Milevsky, 2005).

Adjustment as a dimension is often considered in literature that addresses considerable change. One such field is divorce. Again, adjustment in this area is often conceptualized through social support. Jacobs and Sillars (2012) posit that support from both siblings and parents likely encourages post-divorce adjustment. The results of this study are mixed, as only the dimension of availability/companionship of sibling support was able to predict an improvement of sibling adjustment to divorce.

Siblings and Coping

Coping and adjustment are often examined within similar fields involving considerable change. Divorce literature also often focuses on coping within the sibling relationship. One of the focuses of Jacqueline Bush and Marion Ehrenberg's (2003) study of the perspective of young adults on the influence of family transitions is the impact of the sibling relationship on coping with divorce. In this qualitative study, 67% of the participants reported that the sibling relationship positively impacted their coping with parental divorce. This was accomplished through availability, older sibling reassurance to younger siblings, modelling, knowledge of a shared experience, the stability of the sibling relationship, humor, and even the mere presence of a sibling (Bush & Ehrenberg, 2003). While looking generally at stress and not divorce, Wałęcka-Matyja (2015) emphasized that, for the sibling relationship to positively impact coping in situations of stress, that relationship must reflect commitment and warmth on behalf of the siblings. In the analysis of this literature, it is clear that many of the dimensions and sub-qualities are interconnected, though the dimensions most present and reflective of the adult sibling relationship are connection, support, and warmth.

Discussion

In an examination of the literature, the sibling relationship can be prominently characterized by the dimensions of connection, support, and warmth. Within connection, communication and direct contact are particularly important. While contact between siblings can occur outside of vocal communication and face-to-face meetings, these seem to be beneficial in the maintenance of warm sibling relationships (Myers & Goodboy, 2010). Support as a dimension provides a variety of terms and definitions to work with and also encompass larger dimensions discussed in this analysis (i.e., connection, adjustment and adaptation). There is no consensus on the categorization of sub-qualities within support, an unanticipated result that changed the structure of the analysis. Support is present through many of the dimensions listed, and the high number of different terms developed across the literature provide a variety of perspectives through which to examine the sibling relationship, though there are often terms that refer to the same concept. Narrowing these definitions down will assist in providing a clearer picture of sibling support structures.

With that said, emotional and/or psychological support are crucial to the adult sibling relationship. As emerging and middle adulthood are times of great individual change away from the family, the maintenance of support from a distance becomes a necessity. Warmth, while containing a fair number of sub-qualities, was primarily concerned with sibling intimacy, as these terms are often used interchangeably. Warmth also largely affects other dimensions of the sibling relationship. A relationship that is high on warmth and commitment is often required for a dimension such as coping or support to be positively impacted (Walęcka-Matyja, 2015).

The relationships between siblings is so varied and unique across families, that is difficult to establish a set definition that may be applicable to all adult siblings. Through this analysis,

however, it can be expected that a resilient sibling relationship will rely prominently on the dimensions of connection, support, and warmth. This is reflected in the variety and versatility of the sub-qualities encompassed in these dimensions. While categorized into different dimensions, the sub-qualities present in this study are heavily intertwined throughout the literature. As examples, admiration in the sibling relationship is heavily reliant on support and intimacy, and commitment is considered in connection to support, intimacy, and connection. These dimensions and sub-categories are so interlaced, that they can also be seen in aspects of adjustment and coping. Adjustment is conceptualized primarily through social support in the sibling relationship, and coping is most positively impacted in a warm and committed relationship. In the past literature, family resilience examined dimensions similar to individual resilience (e.g., strengths, adaptations) and through this analysis it is clear that a definition of adult sibling resilience requires some of the same dimensions, but different parameters/sub-qualities to fully realize this unique family relationship.

Future Research

Future research must be conducted to understand how siblings are experiencing the dimensions of the sibling relationship, as this will allow researchers to build and reach a consensus on measurable variables that support a deeper understanding of sibling resilience. Until research is conducted, it is unclear whether siblings themselves would categorize connection, support, or warmth as important dimensions within their relationships in connection to resilience. Or if the sibling relationship would suggest new dimensions or sub-qualities.

It would also be beneficial for future research to include more than the participant and one sibling in the study. Often, the participant is reporting on their sibling relationship with no input from said sibling. Gaining information from all siblings identified and examining a larger

sibling group (other than the dyad) may provide information on these dimensions of the sibling relationship that is not yet available.

One of the largest drawbacks in sibling literature is the lack of diversity in the populations being studied. It is common to examine only one member of the sibling dyad and gather reports on the sibling to whom they have the greatest or most impactful relationship (whether positive or negative). Additionally, a lot of the literature examines intact (always married parents) families and siblings who are fully related to one another. Though it exists, there is significantly less research on half or stepsiblings. There is also a lack of racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity in the populations participating in most sibling research. Many of the participants are white, middle-class, and it is common that the person reporting on their siblings to be an undergraduate attending university. Finally, the sibling literature gives little attention to gender identity in connection to possible dimensions of sibling resilience (connection, support, warmth, etc.). As an example, differences in gender are discussed in terms of the amount of communication that occurs between adult siblings, and even which gendered sibling is responsible for the communication. However, these differences are examined on a strict gender binary. Little, if any, research examines siblings that identify outside of this binary and, as a result, research lacks a full understanding of how gender impacts dimensions of the sibling relationship. There is a need for more research on adult siblings, and this research must consider the many identities, diversities, and unique qualities of the sibling relationship within families.

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Appendix A

Dimensions of Sibling Relationships

Word Used	Prevalence
Coping	Bush & Ehrenberg, 2003 Walęcka-Matyja, 2015
Strengths	
Support Reciprocity Commitment	Avioli, 1989 Weaver et al., 2003 Bush & Ehrenberg, 2003 Milevsky, 2004 Milevsky, 2005 Milevsky et al., 2005 Sherman et al., 2006 Descartes, 2007 Rittenour et al., 2007 Myers & Bryant, 2008 Voorpostel & Blieszner, 2008 Mikkelson et al., 2011 Myers et al., 2011 Jacobs & Sillars, 2012 Sanner et al., 2018
Connection Communication Contact Closeness Confiding	Ross & Milgram, 1982 Cicirelli, 1991 Connidis & Campbell, 1995 Bush & Ehrenberg, 2003 Weaver et al., 2003 Milevsky, 2004 Milevsky, 2005 Milevsky et al., 2005 Rittenour et al., 2007 Voorpostel & Blieszner, 2008 Myers & Goodboy, 2010 Mikkelson et al., 2011 Myers et al., 2011 Jacobs & Sillars, 2012 Tibbets & Scharfe, 2015 Walęcka-Matyja, 2015 Sanner et al., 2018

<p style="text-align: center;">Adjustment & Adaptation</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Milevsky, 2005 Jacobs & Sillars, 2012</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Warmth Intimacy Affection Admiration</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Stewart et al., 2001 Milevsky, 2004 Milevsky et al., 2005 Sherman et al., 2006 Rittenour et al., 2007 Myers & Bryant, 2008 Myers & Goodboy, 2010 Myers et al., 2011 Tibbets & Scharfe, 2015 Wałęcka-Matyja, 2015</p>

The dimensions of adult sibling relationships examined in this study are highlighted in green, with the sub-qualities of these dimensions listed underneath them. Sources highlighted in green on the right indicate that the article focused heavily on the dimension provided on the left. There are sources that appear under multiple dimensions, which occurred if more than one dimension or sub-quality was observed in the sibling relationship, or if a dimension or sub-quality was used as a significant measure of another dimension.