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Sibling Conflict and Caregiving for Aging Parents

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Sibling Conflict and Caregiving for Aging Parents

by

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A Dissertation Presented to the
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This dissertation was submitted by Jennifer E. Lawer under the direction of the chair of the dissertation committee listed below. It was submitted to the Halmos College of Arts and Sciences and approved in partial fulfillment for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Conflict Analysis and Resolution at Nova Southeastern University.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to Andrew, Joe and Nick– my three Godchildren. I thank them for all the hugs, the quality time together, and for how they make me laugh constantly. They remind me of how thankful I am to have grown up with my sister Marcie and my brother Mike.

Acknowledgements

I want to give a special thank you to my Mom and Dad. I could have never moved to Florida, completed this PhD program or written this dissertation without their patience, encouragement, help and support.

To my participants- I am forever grateful for your insight. Thank you for being so generous with your time and for talking to me at length about your experiences. Given how personal and sensitive this topic is, I feel gratitude for every single participant who took the time to share what it was like for them to manage conflict and give care to an aging parent. Listening and learning from your stories was one of the most rewarding parts of this research. I believe that the wisdom that you shared can help others to better respond to these challenges with greater compassion and understanding.

A very special thanks to Danny LaFrankie, for his sense of humor and extensive insight. Some of the most important findings of this study surfaced following our conversations, which helped me to see this topic in a new light. His influence on my thinking brought fresh perspectives to my research.

To Dr. Neil Katz, who has given me so much help and support on researching this topic. His classes have been some of the most wonderful influences on my learning. His expertise on theory, emotional intelligence and human factors inspired me to explore this topic from the conflict resolution field. I am thankful for how much he has helped me to use these skills through application and personal reflection.

I want to thank Dr. Robin Cooper for her patience and guidance. When I reflect on the challenges of analyzing data and developing a theory, she offered continuous support during this complex process. Her encouragement helped me to discover key

findings and make theoretical observations. I am thankful for her clarity and support throughout the research process.

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A big thank you to my fiancé Josh who is the best listener I have ever known. We both come from loving supportive families, who mean the world to us, so it was easy for him to understand why this topic was so meaningful to me. Thanks, Josh, for hearing my thoughts on this research, offering feedback and for distracting me when I needed to take a break.

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Abstract

This dissertation presents the results of a grounded theory study of the key factors of sibling conflict when caregiving for an aging parent. Following interviews with 30 participants, I conducted initial coding, focused coding and theoretical coding, which led to the development of a theory that explains the relationship of conflict factors such as: beliefs & values, feelings & emotions, roles & expectations, and behaviors & responses. The dissertation includes a discussion of how birth order theories, power theories and psychodynamic theories apply to sibling conflict. In addition, I discuss how the findings apply to conflict resolution skills and offer recommendations of how emotional intelligence, reflective listening, interest-based problem solving, assertion and personal reflections may expand people's capacity to improve how they manage sibling conflict during the caregiving process.

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

This dissertation examined the topic of conflict between siblings when caregiving to their aging parent(s). It spoke to the following research questions: *What are **key factors** that influence conflict among siblings who are caring for an aging parent? How do siblings manage conflict? And how can we use what we learn from this study in order to help alleviate/address family conflict?*

Objectives

The objectives of the study were to uncover "key factors" that contributed to sibling conflict. The study explored the relationship of these factors, for a better understanding of the main causes and underlying issues. It also offered perspective for understanding the contingency of each factor in relation to the conflict. Other objectives were to develop a theory that emerged from the lived experience of participants. The theory was rooted in data that emerged from interviews. A final objective was to share insight on how society may go about improving their capacity to care for aging adults. This connected with conflict resolution skills, and how they may be applied for improved results.

Context of the Conflict

The context of the conflict applied to modern social issues and how the challenges of aging are currently being experienced. In many ways the modern experience of caregivers has become a greater burden (Zarit et al., 1980). Financial expenses, geographic distance and occupational restraints to caregiving create new challenges for families.

The conflict also examined a transition point in life, where an aging parent becomes reliant on their adult children for care. In the context of social gerontology, this examined the phase of life where parents and adult children adjust to new roles. This study explored the current experience of this conflict. From the perspective of a modern social issue, I examined obstacles and challenges that apply to the conflict. This involved an examination of society and how it responds to the conditions for conflict. It also explored family roles, as reinforced by culture, gender and birth order, to see how these expectations connected with the conflict.

For the context of this study, all participants were adults with one or more siblings, who were involved in the caregiving process for one or both of their aging parents. Caregiving was broadly defined as any form of care given on a regular basis. I used the definition of the National Caregiving Alliance, Center on Caregiving, who define caregiving as "an unpaid individual (for example, a spouse, partner, family member, friend, or neighbor) involved in assisting others with activities of daily living and/or medical tasks" (Family Caregiver Alliance, 2019). Another term, key factors, refer to the main or most essential components or issues of the conflict. My research question focused on identifying what factors that contributed to the conflict.

Aging in the United States

Context of this problem applied to the location of participants in the study. The subjects in the research came from American participants. Aging, sibling conflict, and caregiving are experiences that occur globally; however, my research sheds light on the experience of aging and caregiving in the United States. Sociologist Jill Quadango reflects on how these challenges contribute to modern social issues, connecting to the

fields of conflict resolution, sociology, gerontology, cultural issues, healthcare, and gender studies. For instance, American families are more likely to be spread out, living far from parents and siblings. This geographical distance occurs in many non-western countries- where neighbors, relatives and friends can offer care to aging people with greater ease. Health care and other care related needs may be more expensive in western countries, which may also account for stress on families. Also, with more women in the workforce, less time may be able to be spent providing care to family members (Quadango, 2018).

The study provides background on the historical progression of aging in Western countries, specifically in the United States. This identifies patterns and common challenges associated with caregiving. I will touch on nursing home, hospice and in-home care noting how their presence has become more common (Hooyman & Kiyak, 2010). I highlight changes in gender roles, explaining how this issue impacts women in the "sandwich generation" (Henslin, 2016) as they struggle to provide care to their adult parents and their own children.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this qualitative research was to develop a grounded theory that explored key factors in sibling conflict during the process of caregiving for their aging parents. The research problem generated an in depth understanding of the key factors and offered insight from research themes. Another goal was to examine the relationship among the factors to determine main factors and root causes. The purpose was to better understand why siblings engage in conflict and how this insight is applicable to resolving conflict.

Following the guidance of qualitative research scholars, John Creswell and Cheryl Poth, I formulated my purpose statement by reducing my study to a "single, overarching central question and several sub-questions" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 137). This guidance was helpful in organizing my questions around the major purpose of my study, being focused on the key factors, in the context of the conflict.

<div align="center">**Relevance**</div>

I believe that this study holds relevance as a modern social issue. Examining this type of conflict may offer beneficial learning to a wide range of individuals. Since aging is a part of the life course, this topic is significant to anyone who is interested in how to cope during this challenging time. This is significant since it offers wisdom on how to navigate these challenges. In certain ways, this transition, and the way society faces these challenges with aging and sibling conflict is relatively a new phenomenon. With increases in life expectancy in the past few years, it is common for people to live far longer, increasing the need for caregiving (Russo, 2010). Gerontologist Steven Zarit notes the social and emotional impact of this process highlighting modern challenges experienced by caregivers, who often report feelings of overburden and stress (Zarit et al., 1980). This sheds light on the conflict in connection with modern social issues. It also draws attention to the need for improvements in how our society provides care to family members throughout the aging process.

Also, when envisioning life course, this is a major life transition- it is often difficult to perceive or understand how it feels to be in this transition until the person is experiencing it, thus it provides reflection on a commonly overlooked phase of life.

A possible take away from this research includes recommendations for how to confront sibling conflict that promote empathy, compassion, forgiveness, clear perceptions, and improved relationships. Interpersonal conflict has the power to help people self-reflect and get to know themselves better- to see how their role in conflict impacts others. I believe that the benefits of this type of self-reflection can extend beyond the immediate parties of an interpersonal conflict to reach the family and community. The following quote by Lao-Tzu illustrates this concept, stating,

If there is to be peace in the world,

There must be peace in the nations.

If there is to be peace in the nations.

There must be peace in the cities,

There must be peace between neighbors.

If there is to be peace between neighbors,

There must be peace in the home.

If there is to be peace in the home,

There must be peace in the hear. (Lao-Tzu & Mitchell, 1988)

Conceptualizing the Problem

I explore this problem of sibling conflict and caregiving for aging parent as a modern social issue. At this current time in history, the experience of caregivers has become a greater burden (Zarit et al., 1980). This is a tremendously stressful issue for families, and the struggle appears to be the most stressful for industrialized countries with a modern lifestyle. Over the past century, the challenges of this problem have intensified.

Despite advancements in technology, medicine and longevity, society remains limited in its capacity to help families make this transition and respond to the challenges of aging.

I conceptualized sibling conflict as multi-faceted and complex. The types of conflict that arise cover a wide range of contributing factors. I linked this to the purpose of my study, which was to uncover the key factors for the purpose of exposing new dimensions of the conflict.

Conclusion

This chapter introduced the research question, objectives, study purpose, research context and relevance to the field. The section also offered a historical background to the conflict, framing the issue of aging as a modern social issue. It explained how research was conceptualized and highlighted the need for new approaches to how society addresses challenges with aging. In the next chapter, I present a literature review that outlines theoretical application and how my research contributes to the field.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This section offers an examination of literature that connected with my research topic. It applied birth order theories, power theories, group theories and psychodynamic theories lenses for viewing key factors in sibling conflict. It also offers an evaluation of how each theory was applied to my research topic.

Interpersonal Conflict

This conflict specifically illustrated interpersonal conflict between siblings as they were caregiving for aging parents. When defining the term conflict, Hocker and Wilmot note "conflict is an *expressed struggle* between at least two interdependent parties who perceive incompatible goals, scarce resources, and interference from others in achieving their goals" (Hocker & Wilmot, 2014, p. 13). This incorporated an examination on literature that contributes to better understanding the communicative exchanges that contribute to resolutions.

Literature Review Strategy and Grounded Theory

I followed Kathy Charmaz's approach in grounded theory, and I collected information for the literature review, prior to research. Charmaz explains how this is an important part of the research process (Charmaz, 2010). I note the concerns of Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, founders of the traditional grounded theory methodology. Glaser and Strauss stress that the data is at risk of contamination. This illustrates cause for concern since ethical issues arise when a researcher begins to form and organize data from literature. The concern is that the data is coming from past literature, rather than basing their findings in theories that emerge directly from interviews with subjects. I took this concern into account. I felt that I gave a valid interpretation of data while still

acknowledging past literature. In my case, this helped to identify gaps in the research. This helped me to think about how my research may (or may not) help contribute to the field. I am guided by Charmaz's statement "We stand *within* the research process rather than above, before, or outside it" (Charmaz, p.180). I found the relevant literature helpful in providing context to my area of research. I kept this in mind as I allowed my theory to emerge spontaneously, grounded in the accounts of subjects.

Reflections on Literature Review Strategy

The selected method for this study included the literature review, prior to interviewing participants. Reflecting on this, it was important to stress the importance of removing bias when selecting relevant theories that connect with the conflict. This spoke to the concerns of Glaser and Strauss who advise researchers to create a literature review only after data has been collected to remove bias (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). As I reflect on my selected method, I kept their concern in mind, and I noted the risk of contaminating data. To avoid this, I used bracketing to put aside my ideas on potential theories that may apply to the conflict. This was helpful since the theories that I selected prior to my interviews changed. After speaking with subjects' other theories were a more applicable fit for explaining the conflict experience of subjects. I reflected on the importance of using theories in the literature review section that are rooted in the results of my interview findings. Prior to collecting data, my literature review included theories on groups and authority, power, birth order and psychodynamic theories. The selection of theories changed following the collection of data to include other theories that were a better fit.

Socio-Cultural Considerations

Social and cultural considerations add perspective to sibling conflict. This explores the social context of role confusion and anomie. This also explains how the conflict relates to US cultural traits including individualism, competition and approaches to end-of-life care.

Changing Roles

Sociologist Jim Henslin defines roles as "the behaviors, obligations and privileges attached to a status" (Henslin, 2019, p. 107). He continues, "The sociological significance of roles is that they lay out what is expected of people" (Henslin, p. 107). This is helpful when exploring how roles change in the context of an aging family, when roles must adapt to change-- and adult children take on the new role of caring for their parents. In terms of microsociology, this illustrates symbolic interaction, developed by George Herbert Mead and Charles Horton Cooley, this perspective illustrates how symbols are used "to establish meaning, develop their views of the world, and communicate with one another" (Henslin, 2019, p. 107).

Francine Russo, comments on what family psychologists refer to as the "twilight years" (Russo, 2010, p. 15) where siblings and their aging parents experience a different type of family transition. She notes "Up until quite recently, there has been little or no reason to discuss this phenomenon. It did not exist in its present form for most families. Now, however, because of the convergence of historical and social forces…as record numbers of boomers come together to address the decline and death of their parents, there is a pressing need to understand this transition" (Russo, 2010, p. 15). Social worker Lynn Cibuzar, who leads family meetings in conflicted sibling groups observes this first-hand.

She explains "There are no role models for this," (Russo, 2010, p. 7) sharing how all siblings express common feelings of being in unfamiliar circumstances. These ideas are highly relevant in conflict. As a changing society, the need to re-envision these roles remains unmet.

Anomie and Roles

The feeling of being in unfamiliar territory fits with the term coined by sociologist Emile Durkheim, "anomie" or "a lack of norms" (Henslin, 2016, p. 14). In the context of rapid social change- norms, roles and expectations are less defined, leaving people in a state of confusion. The term emerged during Europe's industrial revolution, where society had transitioned from a close-knit farming based social setup, to an impersonal modern system. This left people feeling isolated and socially dislocated. Relationships became more impersonal with people leaving traditional lifestyles in the countryside to work factory jobs in cities (Henslin, 2016). High levels of anomie left people confused about their role.

Several parallels can be drawn between these rapid changes and modern American society. Many participants grew up with more traditional upbringings where roles and expectations were clearly defined. Families had a clearer idea of what was expected from each sibling. The transition to being a caregiver creates a situation where siblings do not know what their new role should be. They may experience high uncertainty with how to respond to big decisions and small details. The process of adapting to new roles may take place gradually, or in the case of a medical emergency, the need for adaptation be more immediate. From this perspective, conflict may be rooted in confusion over how to respond to the challenges of the caregiving role.

Individualistic & Collective Cultural Considerations

Cultural considerations also complicate sibling conflict. Hofsetde, Hofstede and Minkov characterize the United States as a highly individualistic society, where "the ties between individuals are loose: everyone is expected to look after him – himself and his or her immediate family" (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 92). Perceived obligations to caregiving may be less relevant for Americans than other more collectivist countries. Collectivism, pertains "to societies in which people from birth onward are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, which throughout people's lifetime continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty" (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 92).

In individualistic countries such as the US, the burden of care tends to fall on the nuclear family making caregiving more difficult for siblings. Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov note that personal time, personal accomplishment and freedom are valued in individualistic countries (Hofstede et al. 2010). These cultural traits may diminish the caregiving experience. Through the lens of an individualistic culture, caregiving may be seen as a burden, inconvenience or a thankless task, rather than a labor of love. I would argue that having strong community ties, typical in a collectivist culture, is advantageous to aging parents and families allowing for a healthy web of social relationships as a form of social support.

Competition in American Culture

Psychologist Alfie Kohn notes the presence of competition in American culture. Kohn states "Our economic system is predicated on competition, while our schooling, from the earliest grades, trains us not only to triumph over others but to regard them as obstacles to our own success. Our leisure time is fulfilled with highly structured games in

which one individual or team must defeat another. Even within the family there is rivalry—a muted but often desperate struggle that treats approval as a scarce commodity and turns love into a kind of trophy" (Kohn, 1992, p. 2). Kohn's perspective explains how conflict among siblings may be rooted in rivalry.

These ideas illustrate how when siblings compete against each other, their overall success as collective caregivers is diminished. As referenced in Kohn, Ann Strick asserts that competition is "an American cultural addiction" (Strick, 1978, p. 112) and Paul Watchel adds "competition is almost our state religion" (Watchel, 1983, p. 284). The negative impact of these tendencies may be rooted in a culture of competition. The competitive mindset encourages siblings to see their goals as a desire to win, or to overpower their siblings, and get their way at all costs. These create the circumstances for intense conflict.

Cultural Influences to How Others Conceptualize the Problem

I note how individualistic and competitive thinking is a major factor in how others have conceptualized the problem of sibling conflict and caregiving for aging parents. This thinking is prominent part of the current, dominant culture. In economics, Adam Smith identifies the assumption that people make decisions based on their own "rational-self interest" (Smith, 1776). Richard Dawkins's concept of "the selfish gene" in biology and evolution echo how these ideas have been incorporated into culture (Dawkins, 1976, p. 1). These ideas may also stem from scientific and philosophical reductionism that separates individual parts from their whole for study (Descarte, 1657). From these perspectives it would appear obvious that sibling conflict may stem from selfish, individual interests. While this is one way of perceiving sibling behaviors, I acknowledge

the limitations of this line of thinking. Sibling conflict is much more complex and exploration of the motives of behavior may not be as easily explained using reductionist science and philosophy. An analysis of the impact of sibling conflict may challenge these dominant cultural assumptions. This is illustrated by the way that caregiving decisions have an impact that extends far beyond separate individuals needs of siblings. From this perspective, the interconnected nature of this conflict helps illustrate the link between individual and collective factors in conflict.

Cultural Considerations and End-of-Life Care

Elizabeth Kubler-Ross reflects on the way modern culture has created challenges to dying with peace and dignity. She states, "The more we are making advancements in science, the more we seem to fear and deny the reality of death" (Kubler-Ross, 1969, p. 22). These are valid cultural concerns that participants shared when discussing cultural approaches to healthcare for aging people. Psychologist Elizabeth Kubler Ross identifies a strong presence of death denial in American culture. She questions "What factors, if any, contribute to an increasing anxiety in relation to death? What happens in a changing field of medicine, where we have to ask ourselves whether medicine is to remain a humanitarian and respected profession or a new but depersonalized science in the service of prolonging life rather than diminishing human suffering?" (Kubler-Ross, 1969, p. 25). She points out that "dying nowadays is more gruesome in many ways, namely more lonely, mechanical and dehumanized." (Kubler-Ross, 1969, p. 22). The increase in feelings of anxiety may impact all family members making the experience more stressful.

This illustrates how the challenges of dying with dignity have increased. Charles Eisenstein comments, "Our society, unprecedented in its wealth, has also developed a

fear of death equally unprecedented in history. Both on a personal and institutional level, prolonging and securing life has become more important than how that life is lived. This is most obvious in our medical system, of course, in which death is considered the ultimate 'negative outcome,' to which even prolonged agony is preferable" (Eisenstein, 2003 p. 162). An awareness of this insight on life and death may help society re-consider their role in the care giving process as parents near the end of their life. They may consider how they can make the experience more humane and compassionate.

These social and cultural issues worthy of consideration in the context of sibling conflict. An awareness of these challenges helps address areas for social and cultural change.

Group Theories: Authority, Dependency, New Roles and Legitimacy

Group theories of British psychoanalyst Wilfred Bion explore how sibling conflict connects with patterns of group behavior, concerning authority, dependency, roles and legitimacy.

Authority/Leadership

Bion's group theories examine the role of authority and power disputes in sibling conflict. This may occur when a sibling or siblings gain new power over their parents as caregivers. Often, the authority of siblings in power are challenged, which often escalates the conflict. While it is necessary for clear leadership when taking care of a parent, establishing new leadership among the siblings is often an uncomfortable transition period for a family.

Conflict can emerge when one or multiple siblings are selected to take legal control of their parents, in the form of a power of attorney. A power of attorney is

explained by Hicks as a legal document you can give to another person "to act as your representative in business, financial and health decisions that would otherwise require your explicit input" (Hicks, 2018). Power of attorney is usually designated to one sibling, giving them authority over decision making. It may put the siblings who have the power of attorney in a leadership position and create a power imbalance between siblings. These ideas are expressed by Bob Partners article "Authority, Leadership, and Organizational Life". Partners states "We both love authority and hate it" (Partners, 1995, p.2). This relates to the conflict, since siblings may want clear leadership, and at the same time, feel desire to rebel against that authority. Sibling may want someone to delegate tasks, and then behave in ways that challenge the tasks being delegated.

Dependency/Independence

As referenced by Katz, group theory scholars Warren Bennis and Herbert Shepard explained how groups progressed through phases of dependence and independence in their formation (Katz, 2010, p. 65). This applies to sibling conflict, since most siblings may want to feel part of the group, and simultaneously, maintain their independence from it.

Partners states that "We are inevitably torn between a wish for dependence (to feel vulnerable and to be "taken care of") and a wish for autonomy (to be invulnerable, "independent," omni-competent). We want to establish a connection to authority, to colleagues, to the task at hand, and yet we also have feelings of aggression, competition, and rivalry toward both leaders and peers." (Partners, 1995, p. 2). Some siblings may strive for unity when making decisions, while other siblings wish to pursue caregiving tasks independently.

Establishing New Roles in the Family

In the context of group conflict, Wilfred Bion's theories applied to the family as a group in transition where the roles of parents and children must change. In this role reversal, parents are now a situation where they require care from others and adult children become caregivers. As referenced in Katz, Bion describes two dimensions, he calls the "work group" (Katz, 2010, p.60), with the conscious group process, and the "basic assumption group" (Katz, 2010, p. 60), which refers to the groups unconscious motivations. I apply this conflict in the context of family caregiving- the work group tasks include the new siblings group effort to give care to their parents, and assist with decisions. The basic assumption of the family includes the new unconscious or emotional impulses which are not in service to the family caregiving tasks.

Psychoanalyst Khan is referenced in Russo stating "We're dealing with the universal fear, projected onto the parents, that one has to deal with life's demands on one's own, that the parents no longer, in a mythological sense, exert power in a beneficent way." (Russo, 2010, p. 34). This may explain why, many adult siblings felt inner turmoil at the unconscious level, in ways that complicated the caregiving process. As referenced by Russo, Khan states "often there is a subconscious wish that the child can experience the parent's continued authority in a way that continues to control destiny and will continually be protecting and loving the adult child" (Russo, 2010, p. 146). Khan adds, "The realization that now I have the power over them can be sobering and saddening and frightening…" (Russo, 2010, p. 146). This offered an explanation as to why establishing new roles felt so difficult for participants.

The conflict fits with group theories in connection to the formation of new roles in the family. As noted by Partners, "roles we end up taking in group dynamics are a function of the interaction between our personal wishes, needs, and fears, and the group's collective wishes, needs, and fears." (Partners, 2010, p. 3). This applies to conflict between personal wishes and collective wishes for the family. This theory is useful in uncovering the complexities of taking on new role expectations. Siblings often feel confusion over their new role. Complex feelings over personal and collective needs may create stress and amplify conflict.

Basis of Legitimate Leadership

This concept explores the basis of a group leader's legitimacy. In terms of group authority, this examined the criteria used to determine legitimate authority. In the context of sibling conflict, it emphasized what factors would be used when selecting the role of leader. This may be determined by who gets power of attorney for their parents. Russo notes, it is usually rooted in the culture of the family (Russo, 2010). For example, if a family believes that finance is the most important matter for making decisions, perhaps the sibling with a background in finance may be selected. This highlights how leadership can be derived from personal character traits. Robert Terry, director of the Reflective Leadership Program, explains a framework commonly used to organize views of leadership. As referenced in Katz, these leadership categories include "trait, situational, organizational, power, vision, ethics, courage, and authenticity" (Katz, 2016, p. 46). This fits with sibling conflict when considering how authority is determined. Conflict may be avoided when siblings feel comfortable with how leadership is delegated. This also considers valid or invalid reasons why siblings take on leadership roles.

Evaluation of Group Theories

A strength of the group theories lies in how highly applicable they are to authority, independence/dependence, role and legitimacy issues in sibling conflict. The ideas on authority, dependence and independence are useful for better understanding conflict over how caregiving tasks are delegated. Challenges with new roles are also relevant to the struggles of sibling conflict. They also applied to hidden unconscious motivators to the surface which was illustrated in dependency in group behavior. Bion's are a strong fit for understanding how families struggle to form new roles. Conflict may arise from confusion over roles, and uncertainty over caregiving tasks. Bion notes that conflict is inevitable in these phases of group development. This is useful in that it recognizes the extent to which sibling conflict occurs as a normal part of a family transition. A weakness of group theories is that they are more appropriate for analyzing organizational groups. Families are a more complex group for analysis. When examining how siblings respond to leadership, authority, dependency and role challenges, many complicating factors may be present, making it difficult to identify examples that are consistent with group theories.

<div align="center">

Power Theories

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This theory explored how power inequality influenced the conflict. This also explored how parties engaged in conflict differently because of their position of power. I used the theories of social psychologist Peter Coleman in application to sibling conflict. This specifically examined power dynamics, perceptions of power, and sources of power.

High and Low Power Dynamics in Conflict

I explored how power dynamics influenced sibling conflict. This explored the idea that parties in low power fight harder against their adversary in high power-- because they were motivated by the desire to "get even" (Hocker and Wilmot, 2015, p. 128). This offered perspectives on motives in sibling conflict. "Research suggests that situations where there exist significant imbalances of power between groups are more likely to discourage open expressions of conflict and conflict escalation than situations of balance" (Coleman, 2014, p. 151). In my research, I gave consideration to Coleman's power theories in connection to themes in sibling conflict involving perceptions of power, sources of power and power dynamics.

Perceptions of Power

In the context of sibling conflict, I examined how siblings perceived their power in the conflict. This explored the idea that most parties in high power are blind to their privilege. Often siblings with power, do not understand the perception of the siblings in low power. I was drawn to Coleman's study on how to bring this to awareness to parties in power, and how to communicate inequality without making the opposing party feel attacked. I made connections with Coleman's research study *Implications for Training in Conflict Resolution* which details an experiment created by Susan Fountain (Coleman, 2014). Observations from this study illustrate experiments with groups placed in situations of high and low power. The lack of perception that parties in high power experienced revealed that they were blind to their privilege and lacked an awareness of the experience of the party in lower power. I was interested in how this insight connects

to sibling conflict, emphasizing ways to communicate effectively in the situations of power imbalance.

Conflict resolution insight on power perceptions in conflict echo Peter Coleman's theories. Hocher and Wilmot state that "perceptions of power are almost always inaccurate" (Hocher & Wilmot, 2016, p. 122). Given the fact that sibling conflict is often emotionally charged, this inaccuracy plays a negative role in the conflict. Hocher and Wilmot note "In emotionally involving conflict, we usually feel out of power…feelings are not the only or even a very accurate guide" (Hocher & Wilmot, 2016, p. 122). Power theories are useful for explaining how and why sibling conflict escalates. Hocher and Wilmot point to a common misperception in conflict where "each person firmly believes that the other person has more power" (Hocher & Wilmot, 2016, p. 122). This is highly applicable to sibling conflict. Many participants believed that their siblings had more power than they did. They perceived their sibling to be their parents' favorite child, or that they received preferential treatment. Conflict escalation is likely to occur when both parties feel that they are in low power, and motivated by a desire to get even. Thus, the ideas on perceptions of power are useful tool for understanding sibling conflict.

Sources of Power

Coleman's theories refer to several examples of sources of power. These include "wealth, social capital, physical strength, weapons, intelligence, knowledge, legitimacy, respect, affection, organizational skills and allies" (Coleman, 2014, p. 140). These concepts highlighted how that power can come from various sources. This was relevant to disputes where one sibling may hold more or less power than their sibling or siblings. It may occur when one sibling is in a situation where they have a greater say over a

decision or caregiving arrangement. In legal terms, one sibling may be named a power of attorney, giving them legal power over their parents. A sibling may obtain power based on their professional background. For instance, a sibling who is a medical doctor may assume greater power over health care decisions. A sibling that has a closer relationship with a parent may use power get their way on arrangements. Thus, power derived by many sources of power.

Discussion on power sources offer empowering insight. Siblings may realize that they have power in other ways. Reflection on power sources are useful to help parties in low power realize that they have more power than they think. They may use Coleman's sources of power to consider how they may derive power in ways that fit the contribution that they wish to make to caregiving. This realization may reduce feelings of victimization, helplessness and negative cycles of getting even. Siblings in situations of high power may also reflect on sources of power to avoid the pitfalls of getting carried away with too much power. According to Hocher and Wilmot, high power can lead to corruption and mental distortions. (Hocher & Wilmot, 2016). Hocher and Wilmot also note the co-dependent relationship among power dynamics in the example of a high-power physician and the patients they serve, questioning "How can a physician be a physician without people who need healing?" (Hocher & Wilmot, 2016, p. 127).

Evaluation of Power Theories

I note strengths in Coleman's power theories, especially in empowering parties in low power to confront power imbalances. However, I acknowledge a limitation since these power theories are applied more readily to international relations rather than inter-personal conflict. Also, Coleman's theories do not give attention to the complex motives

behind why each party behaves as they do. Coleman's theories fit with political/social movement in a macro level. However, some research does involve group/individual conflict where power imbalance occurs. A criticism of this theory is that it may be unclear to determine who really has high/low power in certain sibling conflicts. For instance, in one interview, a pair of siblings each shared how they each thought that their Mother liked the other sibling better- both thought they were in low power. By comparison, power in political realms may be more easily identified. While it is more elusive to identify in this type of sibling conflict, Coleman's ideas are still applicable.

Birth Order Theories

This theory explains that first born, middle born, and last born children all take on characteristics as a result of their birth order. These habits apply to roles of siblings in conflict. I note how birth order habits are a useful lens for analyzing sibling conflict, drawing from the research of Alfred Adler and Kevin Leman.

Austrian psychiatrist, Alfred Adler offers insight on how birth order impacts psychological development. I use Adler's theories illustrate how the childhood socialization patterns influence personality. Kevin Leman offers contemporary examples of common birth order traits.

First Born Siblings

According to Kevin Leman, siblings acquire habits from their place in the family birth order (Leman, 2009). Oldest siblings, given their position in the family, are often nudged into a leadership role, caring for their younger siblings, taking on the following characteristics: "Perfectionist, self-sacrificing, reliable, conscientious, list maker, well

organized, hard driving, natural leader, critical, serious, scholarly, logical" (Leman, 2009, p. 14).

Because of this, it is common for first-borns to take the lead on decision making. They may be accustomed to planning, organizing and delegating responsibilities to their siblings. According to Coan, Sanbucu and Garia "Situational circumstances encourage younger children to look up to and ask questions of their older siblings" (Coan et al., 2018, p. 3). Brink and Matlock point out that older siblings play a role in raising their younger siblings (Brink & Matlock, 1982, as cited in the Coan et al., 2018). This illustrates how first born take on leadership skills from a young age.

Sulloway's research on birth order illustrates a correlation between traits of "conscientiousness" (Sulloway, 2007, p. 162; Coan et al., 2018, p. 3) and "neuroticism" (Sulloway, 2007, p. 162; Coan et al., 2018, p. 3) among first borns. This is likely to emerge because first borns are encouraged to be thoughtful and considerate to their siblings needs. Patterns of neurotic behavior may result from being placed in a situation where they are pressured to achieve at a high level; at the same time, they were responsible for constantly looking out for their siblings well-being. First borns may experience a greater need for control based on the pressures derived from birth order.

These habits of oldest siblings presented several important insights for sibling conflict. Reliance on the oldest sibling for leadership was problematic. Often, this unfairly neglects the abilities of other siblings and re-ignite rivalries. It also creates unrealistic expectations for oldest siblings, placing them in a situation where they must take on a greater share of responsibilities. Conflict may also emerge from oldest siblings' perfectionist tendencies. They may hold their younger siblings to high standards, that are

impossible to live up to. They may take on traits that make them bossy or demanding towards their siblings, making sibling interactions a challenge.

Middle Siblings

Leman describes common middle born sibling characteristics, which include "mediator, compromising, diplomatic, avoids conflict, independent, loyal to peers, has many friends, a maverick, secretive, used to not having attention" (Leman, 2009, p. 18). Leman observes traits among middle children such as being compromising and diplomatic from managing relationships with their older and younger siblings. (Leman, 2009). Leman states "Because they couldn't have mom and dad all to themselves, and get their way, they learned to negotiate and compromise" (Leman, 2009, p. 156). The influence of this experience may explain why middle children often acquire these social skills.

Birth order habits of middle children are applicable to sibling conflict. When engaged in conflict, they may take on the role of the peacemaker and try to mediate between other siblings when engaged in conflict. Salmon, as referenced by Coan, Sanbucu and Garia, notes that middle children often form stronger relationships with people outside of their family (Salmon, 2003 as cited in the Coan et al., 2018). Families may give special attention to first borns as leaders, and extra affection to last borns. Therefore, middle children may feel a desire to forge their own independent identity. Kidwell points out that middle borns tend to feel stronger bonds with friends and significant others (Kidwell, 1982, as cited in the Coan et al., 2018). In connection with sibling conflict, middle children may be less involved with their immediate family.

Conflict may emerge from different expectations on levels of engagement when caregiving.

Middle born tendencies may also contribute to perceptions on rules and authority. As referenced in Leman, Adler contrasts these first born and middle born perceptions. Characterizing first borns, Adler notes that her or she "likes the exercise of authority and exaggerates the importance of rules and laws" (Adler, 1927, p. 22). Middle children on the other hand, "will be inclined to believe there is no power in the world in which cannot be overthrown" (Adler, 1927, p. 22). This may put middle children in a position where they are likely to challenge leadership of other siblings.

Last Born Siblings

Leman describes characteristics of last born siblings, which include "manipulative, charming, blames others, attention seeker, tenacious, people person, natural salesperson, precocious, engaging, affectionate, loves surprises" (Leman, 2009, p. 14).

Leman points out that parental influence on last borns is likely more relaxed (Leman, 2009). Parenting style may soften for children born later, compared to more rigid parenting of older children. With a less serious influence from parents, it is possible that this the environment was more conducive to taking risks, bending rules and deviating from normal expectations.

This presents implications for sibling conflict. As referenced by Coan, Sanbucu and Garia, Adler notes, "Last born children are usually perceived as less capable and less experienced when compared to their older siblings (Adler, 1927, as cited in Coan et al., 2018).

In terms of conflict, last borns are skilled in engaging with their siblings and offering creative solutions to problem solving. They are less likely to over-think issues. In terms of making caregiving decisions, they are decisive, and may be less likely to belabor details.

Alongside these positive traits, last borns have tendencies to make decisions impulsively, and not think things through (Leman, 2009). They may be likely to blame others for mistakes, since they have childhood experiences where their older siblings were encouraged to look out for them (Leman, 2009). In conflict, they may clash with older siblings who are likely to be more controlling. Common disputes may occur when oldest siblings refuse to rely on youngest siblings to complete caregiving tasks.

Psychologist Frank Sulloway builds on the emotional division of labor in families, characterizing last borns as rebellious and prone to revolutionary thinking (Sulloway, 1996). Sulloway's work connects how last born traits fit with rebellious behaviors as the drivers of social change. They may demonstrate boldness in their behaviors and actions. They may be more open to unorthodox approaches to caregiving and feel comfortable challenging the authority of institutions or their siblings. Sulloway also explains common conflict tactics, explaining "Lastborn children use low power strategies such as humor, social intelligence and alliances with siblings as tactics to gain an upper hand over the firstborn child" (Sulloway, 1999, p. 14). These last born conflict tactics may be useful in understanding patterns of sibling conflict.

Evaluation of Birth Order Theories

I believe that birth order theories are highly useful for understanding sibling conflict. The impact of the family socialization has a tremendous influence. In terms of

conflict, behaviors and beliefs about how siblings should act are shaped by birth order. The birth order habits that are acquired in childhood likely play a major role in the how siblings respond to conflict.

While I believe that birth order has strength in revealing patterns of character traits, it can lead to assumptions about how each birth order behaves. Since motives in conflict are complex, it may be misleading to assume that people behave as they do in conflict because of their birth order. While it may offer insight on motives, it offers no definitive answers. Birth order patterns can be helpful-- however I note ways that the habits can create stereotypes. Most people are likely to have several characteristics that do not illustrate their own personal traits, which run contrary to the patterns described in the literature.

Psychodynamic Theories of Behavior

Originated by Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis, this concept was developed by Carl Jung and Erich Fromm. The theory details how intrapsychic processes are used by people to make sense of their realities (Raines, 2018, p. 40). As referenced by Kilhstrom, "Sigmund Freud, the father of psychoanalysis, based his approach on the idea of conflict involving unconscious forces" (Kihlstrom, 2015, p.1). This is a useful theory when examining the hidden emotions and unconscious influences of participants engaged in conflict.

Under the umbrella of psychodynamic theories of behavior lie defense mechanisms of denial, displacement and disassociation (Freud, 1920). These three behaviors arise as a method of protection when realities are too difficult face. The theories help explain why the emotions are repressed and removed from conscious

awareness. These behaviors may offer an explanation toward behaviors that result from sibling conflict when situations become overwhelming. The theory helps in understanding the powerful way the unconscious mind can influence behaviors in conflict. These behaviors may play a role in contentious conflict, where siblings may be unaware of their use of defense mechanisms. Defense mechanisms often complicate caregiving when siblings are unable to face important realities about their parents aging.

Organizational conflict resolution practitioner Susan Raines, notes "defensiveness can make problem solving quite difficult" (Raines, 2013, p. 40). As referenced by organizational conflict resolution practitioner Susan Raines, Sandy, Boardman and Deutsch comment on these theories, "People develop defense mechanisms to 'control their impulses, thoughts, actions and realities so that they won't feel anxious, guilty or ashamed. If their controls are ineffective, they develop defense mechanisms to keep from feeling these disturbing emotions" (Raines, 2018, p. 40). Many aspects of the caregiving process and sibling conflict are likely to cause feelings of anxiety, guilt or shame. Thus, they are likely to cope using defense mechanisms.

Raines highlights the presence of defense mechanisms in conflict resolution. She explains "Denial occurs when the reality of a situation is so overwhelming that it potentially causes an emotional breakdown. To avoid this potential, one refuses to acknowledge the reality of a situation" (Raines, 2018, p. 41). Denial may be a method for avoiding the pain of facing the realization that their parents are aging or in decline.

Psychoanalyst Khan is referenced in Russo stating "We're dealing with the universal fear, projected onto the parents, that one has to deal with life's demands on one's own, that the parents no longer, in a mythological sense, exert power in a

beneficent way." (Russo, 2010, p. 34). For this reason, many adult siblings feel inner turmoil at the unconscious level, in ways that complicate the caregiving process. As referenced by Russo, Michael Khan states "often there is a subconscious wish that the child can experience the parent's continued authority in a way that continues to control destiny and will continually be protecting and loving the adult child" (Russo, 2010, p. 146). Khan adds, "The realization that now I have the power over them can be sobering and saddening and frightening…" (Russo, 2010, p. 146). These overwhelming feelings offer an explanation as to why siblings may use a defense mechanism and how denial, displacement and disassociation play a role in sibling conflict.

Evaluation of Psychodynamic Theories

The strength of these theirs lie in their application to the relevance of complex feelings and hidden emotions. The theory also draws attention to the motives behind behaviors which is useful for personal reflection in application to the conflict. Deeper analysis of this theory may reveal several emotional issues that cause siblings to be overwhelmed by feelings. Analysis using this theory may generate a greater understanding of the role of unconscious motivations and challenging feelings. These theories are limited in that they are speculative, and difficult to prove. Given the complexities of behavioral motives the theory lacks the ability to offer definitive causation. While the theories offer possible interpretations of behavior, they are more speculative, since a wide range of factors may influence the behaviors of siblings during conflict.

Contributions to the Field

This research explores sibling conflict and caregiving for aging parent as a modern social issue. Given the fact that this is a relatively new phenomenon, my research addresses a gap in the current literature. While several studies have examined this conflict from the perspective of social gerontology and psychology, my approach focused on key factors of sibling conflict from the perspective of conflict resolution. The research highlights the social and cultural forces that contribute to the conflict. It applies theoretical insight for new perspectives of understanding the problem. It also offers recommendations to address what individuals can do to improve the way they manage sibling relationship during the caregiving process.

This research contributes to the field by offering discussion on how this conflict connects with concepts in the theories, such as authority, role expectations, leadership, power, birth order and psychodynamic behavior responses. I believe that this topic is significant since it highlights the way theoretical application can offer greater understanding. Insight from this research can help people who experience this conflict to embrace this challenging struggle with greater empathy and compassion for their siblings. Theoretical analysis offers insight on the challenges of group behavior where disputes over authority, dependency, leadership and roles are a occur as a phase of group development. Insight can be gained regarding power, how it can be balanced and how to avoid misperceptions that escalate conflict. The theoretical application shares how birth order influences the different ways siblings respond to conflict. Theories also offers a awareness of the difficult challenges with overwhelming emotions through exploring the defense mechanisms. These theories are useful lenses when better understanding the

multiple complex forces that influence sibling conflict during the process of caregiving for an aging parent.

Conclusion

The literature review offered theoretical perspectives that fit with the specific research question and focus areas. The section offered rationale for how and why each theory was selected. It acknowledged the strengths and limitations of each theory. The chapter also evaluated grounded theory literature and shared how the research contributes to the field. The next chapter on methodology focuses on the process of designing the research study, collecting and analyzing data.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodological process of the research. It presents the research design, the role of the researcher, the selection criteria for participants, method for data collection and data analysis approach.

Research Design

To begin, I selected qualitative methods because they best speak to the nature of my research questions surrounding sibling conflict. According to Cooper and Finley, "qualitative research is the study of people and phenomena in their natural setting and reflects and emphasis on the meaning people find in their natural social life" (Cooper & Finley, 2014, p. 2). Qualitative methods best address sibling conflict, which explored the perspective of the participants and their experience. As referenced in Creswell, Lincoln and Denzin note that "qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Creswell, 2011, p. 7).

Within qualitative methods, I selected a Constructivist Grounded Theory approach (Charmaz, 2010) developed by sociologist and qualitative research scholar Kathy Charmaz. This method was appealing because my research question explored the social construction of reality. It examined sibling conflict, viewed through the lenses of multiple realities (Charmaz, 2010). This approach best fit my epistemological and ontological considerations.

Constructivists view truth as being relative and dependent on one's perspective. This view recognizes the importance of how humans create meaning. This view rejects some notion of objectivity, and it focuses on how the subjects perceive their experience,

revealing multiple truths. This was highly applicable to sibling conflict. Often, a point of contention arose from the idea that there is one objective truth. The constructivist approach allowed for insight by describing how members of conflicting parties viewed their reality. This acknowledged the idea of multiple "truths" from the viewpoints of different experiences (Charmaz, 2010, p. 10).

This fit with my research ontology and the presence of multiple realities. In terms of interviewing, this ontological approach was revealed in sibling conflict and was especially relevant to discussions on key factors. This was especially significant for discussions on feelings, which were a main factor in sibling conflict. The words and actions of siblings often provoked strong feelings. This acknowledged that a single event may have caused different emotional responses. These different emotions varied from sibling to sibling. In terms of conflict, embracing this ontology has the potential to bring insight to the conflicting parties, as siblings come to understand each other's experience.

According to Cooper and Finley, "Epistemology is concerned with the knowledge we have about social reality and how we gain that knowledge" (Cooper & Finley, 2014, p. 27). This was applicable to my research design which focused on research questions that allowed participants to elaborate on the underlying emotional factors they experience during the conflict. Through hearing stories through qualitative interviews, participants had an opportunity to share their experience of sibling conflict. The experience may have allowed for empathy to arise, which play a positive role in alleviating conflict.

Using constructivist grounded theory, I interviewed 30 participants who elaborated on their experience of sibling conflict while caregiving for their aging parent. I

gave careful attention to these epistemological and ontological concerns while arranging

my findings, noting how I as a researcher created my own socially constructed reality.

Sample

Sample size was 30 participants. Participants were all adults, (at least 18 year of

age or older) who are able to talk at length about the experience of sibling conflict and

caring for one or both parent(s). In this research, care giving was broadly defined as any

form of care given on a regular basis. I refer to a definition of "caregiving" by the

National Caregiving Alliance, Center on Caregiving, defined as "an unpaid individual

(for example, a spouse, partner, family member, friend, or neighbor) involved in assisting

others with activities of daily living and/or medical tasks" (Family Caregiver Alliance,

2019). Participants may be currently immersed in the conflict or share from a past

experience. Consideration will be given to obtain both male and female participants.

Setting and Conditions

Of my thirty participants, all interviews were conducted in a face to face setting-

either virtually, via Zoom or in person meetings. Each participant was given the interview

questions prior to the meeting to give them time to reflect on each question and think

about what they wanted to share. Using insight from Charmaz, I wanted to gather 'rich

data' by intensive interviewing through conversations with participants (Charmaz, 2010),

and I wanted my setting to be centered on keeping the participants comfortable. Charmaz

comments on the role of the interviewer, noting, "The interviewer is there to listen, to

observe with sensitivity, and to encourage the person to respond. Hence, in this

conversation, the participant does most of the talking" (Charmaz, 2010, p. 26). Charmaz

also stresses that "the in-depth nature of an intensive interview fosters eliciting each

participant's interpretation of his or her experience" (Charmaz, 2010, p. 25). For this reason, the interviews were centered on the participant.

Location and Duration of Interviews

I conducted 13 interviews in person, and 17 virtually via Zoom. When planning an interview, I offered multiple options (meeting at a private location, over zoom, restaurant) and allowed them to select a location where they would feel comfortable discussing the topic. I shared the questions to the participants immediately, so that they could see the questions upfront and ask for clarification prior to the start of the interview. For participants who made interview arrangements in advance, I emailed the questions, allowing them a chance to review the questions and have time to think about how they would answer each question. I believe that the extra time helped participants provide a thoughtful response.

The settings were casual. I interviewed some participants in their own home at their kitchen table and they expressed that they were happy to have privacy to discuss the topic from their home. Some, selected a more public setting and were happy to discuss the topic over a meal at restaurant of their choice. With public settings, the participant and I were still able to talk one on one. Others selected a location that based on convenience for them, such as meeting on a Saturday afternoon at their fishing camp. "The in-depth nature of an intensive interview fosters eliciting each participant's interpretation of his or her experience" (Charmaz, 2010, p. 26) thus, my aim was for a setting that would make participants feel comfortable sharing their story and how they interpreted their experience.

Data Collection

The Zoom interviews were also informal. The virtual setting was convenient for most participants, who were happy to have the opportunity to discuss the topic from their home. I recall one participant who was a caregiver to her aging parent, who lived at home. She explained that her privacy to talk about this topic was limited at home. She was concerned that the parent who lived with her at home could hear her discussing the sensitive topic. She was still able to talk at length on the questions, however she was frequently checked her setting to make sure she was not interrupted during the interview.

Recording Data and Collection Instruments

Virtual participants all gave voluntary consent to be recorded via Zoom. For participants whom I met in person, I used a voice recorded app on my cell phone. The in-person participants gave consent to be recorded through the app on my cell phone. One interview was sufficient to gather information for the majority of participants, however for some I used follow up phone calls to gather additional details.

Time of Study

The study took place starting in January 2020. My first ten interviews took place in person with participants. In March 2020, when the lockdowns from COVID-19 pandemic took place, I conducted more interviews virtually. I note that the circumstances from these changes did not impede the opportunity to gather rich data from my participants- in fact it may have enhanced the quality of the interviews. Participants were extremely generous with their time. When sharing the questions for participants, and setting a date and time to talk, I explained that the interviews were open ended and the time that they wish to talk was at their discretion. Interviews averaged about 40 minutes,

however many participants exceeded this- some up participants spoke over 2 hours.

Zoom interviews were conducted from March and all through the summer of 2020.

Perhaps having additional free time at home and a more flexible schedule contributed to

participants having time to talk. It may also be possible that the circumstances of the

global pandemic, political unrest, stress and uncertainty influenced the way participants

approached the study. Participants had time to self-reflect on the context of their

experience. Their discussion gave opened up to new ways of looking at their conflict

experience. Perhaps the circumstances and the extra time enhanced participants ability to

make deep reflections and share quality, in depth insight.

Interview Experience

Charmaz notes that intensive interviews give the interviewer an opportunity to

"go beneath the surface of ordinary conversation and examine earlier events, views, and

feelings afresh" (Charmaz, 2010, p. 26). This illustrates my experience- interviews were

conversational, however, the conversation was centered around the participant sharing

their experience, with me listening. I noticed that many participants wanted to talk and

had insight to share. I did very little probing for more detail or explanation. I also was

surprised by the depth that was shared by participants. I felt little need to ask participants

to dig beneath the surface of their experience- they went to these topics on their own

accord. One tactic I did use with interviewing was offering validation while listening.

Charmaz advocates for interviewers to "validate the participant's humanity,

perspective, or action" (Charmaz, 2010, p. 26). I used validation as needed in the process

of listening. When the topic of thoughts, feelings and actions surfaced, they shared deeply

personal stories. Some became emotional discussing the topic. The experience was

humbling. Most participants were strangers or casual acquaintances and I was thankful for how they shared sensitive stories with openness. Some participants expressed gratitude for having the opportunity to share their story to someone who would listen, and felt that the process of being interviewed was a positive one, allowing participants to be heard and get things off their chest.

Data Analysis

Data was analyzed using three cycles of coding. In my first cycle of coding, I began by going line through line of each transcript for initial codes. I was specifically interested capturing the participant's experience of conflict. Charmaz stresses that in grounded theory, there should be no distance between *initial coding* and the data. Thus, my initial codes were a list of action verbs. I took every verb that showed reference to conflict and used the gerund form (by adding "-ing"). The list of first cycle codes was organized in an excel document. Codes were read and re-read several times at this stage to familiarize myself with the emerging data.

Next, I used focused coding which Charmaz characterizes as the process of prioritizing codes from specific segments of the transcript. In this section, I began to apply Corbin and Strauss's idea of the "constant comparison" method used in grounded theory (Charmaz, 2010, p. 7). After a series of reading and re-reading I took time to reflect on the data. Groupings emerged from re-reading and reviewing the list of first cycle codes. After studying this data several times, I began to group similar codes together and noticed some of the categories that were emerging. I listed groups, and then began to arrange codes that fit under the description of each group. New categories and sub-categories emerged. I continued with this process until I was left with 24 categories. I

took note of the key concepts and most the commonly occurring codes within each category. I also kept a record of how many codes appeared in each category by tallying the number of codes within each category. This was to note frequency. It was useful to numbers that indicated how often participants brought up each category topics in their discussions on conflict.

After listing the 24 categories, I jotted down notes about each group, main concepts, and my reflection to what was emerging in the groups through "memo-writing" (Charmaz, p. 158). I followed the instructions of Charmaz, who recommends to "scrutinize these categories for power, purpose, pattern" (Charmaz, p. 158). Memos allowed for immediate reflections of the data to emerge. It also captured the main idea in each group. I listed quotations from participants that best described what was emerging from participants. I took note when findings fit and did not fit with my predictions. I also took note when certain themes appeared more frequently and added description to show context, focusing on *what*, *how* and *why* questions that these groups expressed (Charmaz, 2010).

I continued to play with the arrangement of each category to explore relationships among the groups. Categories were grouped in charts and visual guides. During this process, I noticed umbrella categories with a broad scope, and subsequent categories which could be encompassed under the umbrella categories. Among the main categories, groups emerged "Beliefs & Values," "Roles & Expectations," "Feelings & Emotions" and "Responses". Among the remaining 21 categories, 4 to 5 were identified as sub-categories and arranged under each main category. It was helpful to create flow charts and visuals to map out arrangements of each main category and sub-category. Next, I

identified that each of these four main categories were contingent on each other.

Responses to conflict were *derived* from on the feelings and emotions of participants.

Feelings were *contingent* on how participants perceived their roles and the expectations

that they placed on the situation. And roles and expectations *emerged* from the beliefs

and values of participants, which were a foundational part of sibling conflict. I used the

visual illustration of a pyramid to show a hierarchy of contingency, with each theme

nestled within its subsequent theme.

My results were a four-tiered (upside own) pyramid, listing four main categories

and 21 subsequent categories. The four main categories then became my first four

themes. Themes 1, 2, 3, and 4 explain the relationships of *Beliefs & Values*, *Roles &*

Expectations, *Feelings & Emotions* and *Responses* in the context of sibling conflict.

Theme 5 describes patterns that emerge from the context of conflict. This theme

illustrates how feelings are often distorted and blown out of proportion- and that these

intense feelings often emerge at the time of important decisions being made. Theme 6

highlights "hidden" emotions (hidden to both participants and siblings) that are often

complex and multi-faceted. This theme explores deeper emotions that lie behind

important decisions. As the data emerged, participants addressed how a decision on

medical issues, the estate, or financial issues can quickly set off conflict. Decisions,

power struggles and legal issues were a cause of conflict, yet deeper issues surface which

revealed that hurt feelings and deep emotions to be an underlying factor that was a driver

of conflict—more so than the decisions themselves.

Method for Data Collection & Data Analysis Approach

Data was collected through qualitative interviews. The questionnaire (Appendix A) is brief and based on clear, open ended questions. Participants had the opportunity to review the questions prior to the interview, which gave them an opportunity to think about the questions. This provided them extra time to think about their responses. Follow up discussions were used for supplemental information.

Some of the questions I asked participants included, "*What has been your experience of caregiving for your aging parents?*" "*What do you feel are key factors that lie at the root of sibling conflict during the caregiving process for your aging parent(s)*? and "*How do you manage conflict with your siblings*". My questions connected with my research question of "*What are key factors in sibling conflict?*". The questions were framed to enable participants to talk at length from their experience, which gave me the opportunity to gather rich data for analysis. I kept in mind how the grounded theory must emerge from the facts. Thus, I organized my questions in a way that allowed participants to share their conflict experience. I drew conclusions from their response as the basis of my grounded theory formulation.

Summary and Conclusion:

This section explained how I went about my research process, my recruitment process and how I was able to gather rich data from interviews. I explain the methodological process that was used starting with initial coding, focused coding, theoretical coding which. I note how the implementation of these steps led to the emergence of a grounded theory, which was rooted in the data gathered from participants. The following section shares the analysis of the study. It introduces the grounded theory,

the hierarch of contingent key factors, and research themes. It shares stories and experiences of participants to illustrate the 24 key factors that were most prominent among the participants in their discussions on sibling conflict during their caregiving experience.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

This chapter shares the results of the study. It provides the demographic information of participants and their background. The section introduces the key factors and the grounded theory that emerged from the data. Research themes are presented to discuss how the theory relates to the conflict. The results provide an in dept discussion of the key factors, which were grouped into main categories and sub-categories. The section expands on each factor and offer insight from participants on how each factor connected with their conflict experience.

Demographics

Data was collected from 30 participants who could talk at length about their personal experience of conflict with a sibling (or siblings) while caregiving for an aging parent. Participants were at different stages of the conflict. For most participants, their sibling conflict had occurred years ago. A few had just recently lost a parent weeks prior to the interview. Some were currently enmeshed in the experience. For each participant, their stage of the conflict offered perspectives on how key factors evolved through the process. For instance, for conflicts that had occurred in the past, some participants had years to make peace with the situation. For others the anger, hurt and frustrations were still intense, even when many years had passed. For some current conflicts, the participants indicated mild or moderate levels of conflict and made predictions on issues that may impact future tension. It was interesting to examine how feelings evolved in different stages of the conflict.

Of my 30 participants, 19 were currently residing in Florida. I had 16 participants who were living in Fort Lauderdale, one from Tampa, one from Orlando. From western Pennsylvania, I had six participants – two from the city of Pittsburgh, three from Indiana, PA a town of approximately 13,000 people, and two participants from Sigel, PA a rural commune. One participant was from Nashville, Tennessee and two from Greenwich, Connecticut. This allowed for my sample to include people from rural and urban areas.

Of my participants in Florida, many were from out of state or out of the country. Two grew up in New York City and one from Illinois. Three were born in Jamaica, one from El Salvador, and one was born in Italy and grew up in Argentina. All participants were American citizens living in Florida. Of the 30 participants, there were 12 males and 18 females. All were American citizens.

The following chart includes the names (pseudonyms) of participants, their birth order and the number of siblings. The sample includes a variety of First Born, Middle Born, and Last Born siblings. Number of siblings range from two siblings to eighteen siblings. Participants included siblings from traditional and non-traditional families with some from blended families and some with half siblings. One participant was adopted. The chart includes the birth order of siblings and number of siblings in each participant's family.

Table 1

Participants

	NAME	BIRTH ORDER
1	Paulo	Last Born of two siblings (*1 older sister*)
2	Ethan	Last Born of two siblings (*1 older sister, one older brother*)
3	Noah	Middle Born of three siblings (*1 older brother, 1 younger brother*)
4	Elizabeth	Last Born of two siblings (*1 older sister*)
5	Jazmin	Last Born of six siblings (*2 older brothers, 3 older sisters*) and older half siblings
6	James	Middle Born, second of four siblings (*one older brother, two younger brothers*)
7	Lachlan	Last Born of five siblings (*3 older brothers, 1 older sister*)
8	Jada	Last Born, youngest of eight siblings
9	Xavier	Middle Born, second of six siblings (*1 older brother,*
10	Naomi	Middle Born, second of five siblings (*1 older brother, 4 younger sisters*)
11	Tamara	First Born, oldest of five siblings and older half siblings
12	Caroline	First Born, oldest of three siblings (*1 younger sister, 1 younger brother*)
13	Axel	First Born, oldest of three siblings (*2 younger brothers*)
14	Jane	Middle Born, third of four siblings (*1 older sister, 1 older brother, 1 younger sister*)
15	Carlee	Middle Adopted, second of three siblings (*1 older adopted sister, 1 younger sister, biological child of parents*)
16	Samuel	Middle Born, second of four siblings (*1 older sister, twin younger brother, 1 younger sister*)
17	Shannon	Middle Born, fourth of five siblings (*2 older brothers, 1 older sister, 1 younger brother*)
18	Lily	Middle Born, fifth of eight siblings (*2 older sisters, 3 older brothers, 1 younger sister, 1 younger brother*)
19	Amy	Last Born of two siblings (*1 older sister*)
20	Augustus	Last born, youngest of three siblings (*2 older brothers*)
21	Karen	Middle Born, second of three siblings (*1 older brother, 1 younger brother*)
22	Vincent	First Born of four siblings (*3 younger sisters*)
23	Molly	First Born of three siblings (*2 younger sisters*)
24	Hunter	Last Born of five siblings (*3 older brothers, 1 older sister*)
25	Anya	Middle Born of six siblings (*3 older 3 younger siblings*)
26	Hannah	Last Born of two siblings (*1 younger brother*)
27	Fiorella	Middle Born, second of five siblings (*1 older brother 3 younger sisters*)
28	Imani	Middle Born, of seven siblings
29	Ursula	Last Born of four siblings (*2 older sisters, 1 older brother*)
30	Bernard	Middle Born, eighteenth of twenty siblings (*9 sisters, 9 brothers*)

Research Questions

The results of the study were framed to fit the research question, "*What key factors contribute to sibling conflict (during the process of caregiving for their aging parents)?"* The results also shed light on how siblings respond to conflict through the research question, *"How do siblings manage conflict?* Results were also arranged with consideration to the research question, *"How can we use what we learn from this study in order to help alleviate/address family conflict?*

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to better understand the "key factors" of sibling conflict. Thus, the study shares insight on how to help others. The study seeks to better understand the conflict experience so that future people in similar situations can use what they learn to address the difficulties of this experience. Insight will be shared on what worked or did not work for siblings when engaged in conflict. Other insight shares reflection on difficult feelings and emotions. The study highlights underlying beliefs and expectations that arose from participants' experiences. The study will use these reflections to help audiences better address conflict. This includes better understanding motives, improving self-awareness, fostering cooperative relationships, revisiting long term goals, reflecting listening, improving communication, and repairing damaged relationships. The study purpose aligns with goals of increasing awareness on the experience, allowing empathy to arise naturally with greater understanding of sibling conflict.

Figure 1

Key Factors of Sibling Conflict and Caregiving for Aging Parents:

Beliefs, Roles, Feelings, Emotions and Responses

<u>**Hierarchy of Contingent Factors:**</u>

RESPONSES
FEELINGS &
EMOTIONS
ROLES
BELIEFS

Beliefs (and Underlying Values): Culture, Beliefs, Religion & Values, Personal Traits,

Upbringing, Gender & Age Spacing of Siblings

Roles (and Expectations): Roles & Family Expectations, Birth Order, Planning

& Family Wishes, Arrangements & Decisions, Money/Finances/Estate, Medical

Issues, Time (Future & Past Concerns), Occupation, Logistics, Legal Issues,

Geography

Feelings & Emotions: Emotions & Feelings, Stress,

Empathy/Understanding (or lack thereof), Motives &

Goals, Power & Perceptions of Power,

Responses: Tactics & Results, Competition, Cooperation Issues,

Communication Issues

Explanation of Research Themes

Theme 1: Responses:

Exploring participants' _responses_, helps understand reactions of siblings during conflict: This looks at the _how_ or _why_ behind behavioral responses in conflict, when participants experience opposing goals with a sibling(s). An analysis of responses reveals that <u>feelings and emotions</u> influence (or trigger) responses. This focuses on analysis of behaviors and actions. It shows how participants act towards siblings, how they conduct themselves what tactics they use, whether they are competitive or cooperative, what communications issues they experience and the magnitude of the conflict.

Theme 2: Feelings and Emotions:

Examination of _feelings and emotions_ provide context in understanding sibling conflict. A wide range of intense, challenging feelings are present during sibling conflict. Feelings are often derived from how siblings perceive their <u>roles and expectations</u> in conflict. Common emotions include stress, empathy, understanding (or lack thereof). It also sheds light on how participants felt about motives & goals and perceptions of power.

Theme 3: Roles & Expectations:

Sibling conflict is influenced by how participants view their _role_. This includes their perception of how they think they should behave based on _expectations_ that they place on themselves and their siblings. Deeper analysis of roles and expectations reveals the underlying <u>beliefs and values</u>. It also exposes how they felt about their role and the emotions that emerge from their expectations. The

underlying beliefs and values influence the delegation of tasks, the assignment of leadership roles and decisions on planning, family wishes, arrangements and decision, money/finances/estate, legal and medical issues. Roles are also shaped by family expectations, occupations, logistics, and geography. Expectations of ideal sibling relationships are also contingent on beliefs and values.

Theme 4: Beliefs & Values

    Sibling conflict exposes core beliefs and values of participants. Examination of conflict reveals that the _beliefs and values_ of participants are foundational to sibling conflict. Culture, religion, personal traits, upbringing, and gender shape the beliefs and values held by participants engaged in sibling conflict.

Theme 5: A "Triggering Event" - Making Decisions

    Conflict frequently emerged when it came time to make an important decision on caregiving- yet the decisions themselves were an *indirect* cause of conflict. Conflict was *directly* triggered by feelings. This was often connected to motives/goals and beliefs/values. Decisions exposed siblings' values and beliefs, and how siblings ranked the importance of these values. The decisions also exposed behavior patterns often connected to family history, birth order, sibling rivalries past family conflict. These deep emotions were often complex with participants experiencing multiple emotions simultaneously.

Theme 6: Hidden Emotions and Distorted Feelings

    Strong feelings such as anger, hurt and contempt often revealed "hidden" or unconscious emotions. These emotions were frequently distorted and blown out of proportion. There were often accompanied by competitive tactics. These included zero

sum thinking, sibling favoritism, teaming up, "playing dirty", being punitive, and overpowering.

Explanation of Grounded Theory

The theory argues that sibling conflict is contingent on four major categories: beliefs & values, roles and expectations, feelings & emotions and responses. In connection to Charmaz, this hierarchy also reveals how "the studied experience is embedded I larger and often, hidden positions, networks, situations and relationships" (Charmaz, p. 130). Responses were derived from feelings, which were influenced by roles and expectations; Beliefs and values were foundational to the hierarchy of categories. The theory also acknowledges twenty-four factors present in sibling conflict during caregiving for an aging parent.

In connection with Symbolic Interaction, this explores how each participant co-creates their reality. The theory responds to how participants they see themselves, and the micro-sociological world surrounding each participant (values, culture, norms, expectations, role expectations). This fits in with George Herbert Mead who notes "the starting place for analysis that includes the person's imagined understanding of the other person's role and response during interaction" (Charmaz, 2010, p. 127). This hierarchical set up helps set up a symbolic analysis of each participant's belief system. In connection with Charmaz, the theory acknowledges the presence multiple realities. The questions in this hierarchy focus on "What do people assume is real? How do they construct and act on their view of reality? Thus knowledge—and theories—are situated and located in particular positions, perspectives, and experiences" (Charmaz, p. 127).

This also fits in with an interpretative definition of a theory which focuses on understanding. By exploring the underlying *beliefs* of key factors in sibling conflict, this makes important revelations to how and why participants perceive their *roles* and how and why they *respond* to conflict the way they do.

The theory gives attention to how perceptions shape role expectations, and how modern challenges present new obstacles. This may offer explanations as to why traditional beliefs and traditional role expectations may experience strain due to pressures from modern lifestyles.

Definition of Conflict

Hocher and Wilmot state, "Conflict is an expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties who perceive incompatible goals, scarce resources, and interference from others in achieving their goals" (Hocher & Wilmot, 2014, p. 13). As an interpersonal conflict the theory provides a lens to view "the communicative exchanges that make up the conflict episode" (Hocher & Willmot, p. 13). According to Hocher and Wilmot, "perception is at the core of all conflict analysis" (Hocher & Wilmot, 2014, p. 13). Thus, a definition of conflict was selected with attention to perception. The theory allows for an analysis of *perceptions*, through examination of beliefs and values. Exploration of beliefs and values were presented as key factor in understanding conflict. Perceptions of incompatible goals, scarce resources and interference are all explored through the analysis of the 24 key factors of sibling conflict.

Organization for Written Response of Categories: 24 Key Factors of Sibling Conflict

    I.   (Main Category) Beliefs & Values

Sub-Categories:

A. Culture

B. Religion

C. Personal Traits

D. Upbringing

E. Gender

II. (Main Category) Feelings & Emotions:

Sub-Categories:

A. Stress

B. Empathy/Understanding

C. Motives & Goals

D. Power & Perceptions of Power

III. (Main Category) Roles & Expectations:

Sub-Categories:

A. Birth Order

B. Planning & Family Wishes

C. Arrangements & Decisions

D. Money/Finances/Estate

E. Legal Issues

F. Medical Issues

G. Occupation

H. Logistics

I. Geography

J. Time (Future & Past Concerns)

IV. (Main Category) Responses

Sub-Categories:

A. Tactics & Results

B. Competition

C. Cooperation

D. Communication

Main Category – Beliefs and Values

Beliefs and values were a central theme of sibling conflict. A key point is the idea that "perception is at the core of all conflict analysis, (Hocher & Wilmot, 2014, p. 13) thus, analysis allows for a greater understanding of how beliefs, and values shape the context of conflict.

This main category was comprised of sub-categories: *Culture*, *Personal Traits*, *Upbringing*, *Religion* and *Gender*. Results of the theory illustrate a hierarchy of factors; all other main categories were contingent on beliefs and values: *Feelings and emotions* exposed reflections of in *beliefs and values*, and *expectations and roles* were rooted in feelings. These influenced the *responses* of participants.

In connection with symbolic interaction, the analysis of this category explores how each participant "co-creates their reality" (Henslin, 2015, p. 15). The theory responds to how participants they see themselves, and the micro-sociological world surrounding each participant's values, culture, norms, expectations, role expectations (Henslin, 2015). This fits in with George Herbert Mead who notes "the starting place for

analysis that includes the person's imagined understanding of the other person's role and response during interaction" (Charmaz, 2010, p. 127).

The hierarchical set up of this grounded theory helps provide understanding of how belief systems and values influence other factors in sibling conflict. By exploring the underlying *beliefs* as a key factor in sibling conflict, this makes important revelations to how and why participants perceive their *roles* and how and why they *respond* to conflict the way they do. This hierarchy also reveals how "the studied experience is embedded in larger and often, hidden positions, networks, situations and relationships" (Charmaz, 2010, p. 130).

Beliefs and values were captured in codes. These included codes such as, "being there; supporting you" "thinking it is terrible when siblings don't talk" "believing in not cutting family out of life" and "thinking family is supposed to be everything". These codes show significant emphasis on the importance of family be being there for each other and offering support. It indicates that participants sensed a 'wrongness' from the idea of 'cutting out family' and no longer talking. All of these comments indicate the relationship between beliefs, feelings, expectations and help explain reactions to sibling conflict. The formation of these belief systems is illustrated by analysis of the sub-themes in this category.

Sub-Category – Upbringing

Most participants referenced how their upbringing played an influential role in their current sibling relationship, which was useful for better understanding the context of sibling conflict. Interview discussions typically began with participants talking about their childhood. This helped to provide a clearer picture of what their home and family

life was like. Codes included "having a good family life," "being brought up properly" "Always being close" and "growing up sharing everything". These comments revealed the way upbringing helped in forming beliefs and values of participants. Many codes applied specifically to conflict. These included, "fighting not tolerated," "screaming not tolerated," "being raised to get along with siblings," "fighting as kids" "growing in love" and "learning to look back in laughter".

When discussing upbringing, participants gave specific attention to their parents' influence. This included codes such as "mother teaching us, 'hate is a strong word'" and "remembering that in context of sibling conflict'". Many credited their good relationship to the influence of their parents. These include "dad making sure we were close" "[good relationships with siblings] having to do with the kind of people my parents were" "thinking my mother would be incredibly proud" and "being how our parents raised us". Some participants described difficult relationships with parents, which included, "Growing up in 'extremely dysfunctional' family," "not being allowed to talk about issues," "not being allowed to question," "being used to submitting into crazy insane things" and "Not needing strict parenting as a kid". Some participants grew up with close family relationships as a child, but as an adult, they struggled with the relationships.

Jada shared that her childhood upbringing encouraged the mindset of "keeping the family together no matter what". This became a challenge later in her adult sibling relationship. Many participants came to re-define their beliefs later in life. In Jada's case, letting go of the belief that family has to be everything, was helpful to her. She continues, "I've come to redefine what family means. Family is blood. Blood is not always thicker than water. If its' mixed with jealousy and bitterness. It does not always mean that blood

is thicker than water. God puts people in your life to build to mold, so someone else can help in a healthy way." She went on to explain:

"It's been a struggle. I'm gonna lie. But once mom got sick, I saw the behaviors and attitudes [of siblings], it made me step back. And I was mentally putting myself in a position of – taking care of mom right now is most important- all that other stuff is not gonna matter. I don't need to dabble in all that. When you loose a loved one- it will make you question your life and the quality of your life. And what you haven't done. Have you fulfilled your purpose in life? All these question will come up. And in doing that it made me realize its time to stop taking care of them and start taking care of me. And it made me realize that if that means not having a relationship with them [siblings]. If that means that we don't communicate, don't see each other, I'm ok with that, because when I forced it, it was negative.

Reflections from participants help clarify how conflict can often emerge from a belief in how a sibling relationship "ought" to be. For Jada, her beliefs and values evolved. Codes and stories highlight each participants' different upbringing, which is useful for understanding the way values and beliefs impact sibling conflict.

Sub-Category - Personal Traits

During interviews, participants often gave a characterization of their siblings' personality traits. These codes and stories were descriptive. Most notably, they explained how their sibling's personal traits came to light when discussing conflict. Some personal traits that contributed to conflict included, "sister being spoiled," "being jealous of siblings," "sister being the 'evil' one," "sibling being domineering, pushy," "sister being

the major conflict," "youngest being the favorite sibling," "being the "golden child',"

"being very bossy," "being very stern; disciplinarian". Personal traits that were described

more cooperative traits included "brother being more on the passive side, "not having big

egos," and "being the peacemaker".

Listening to the comments from participants revealed how perceive their siblings'

personalities. Deeper reflections may reveal how and why their siblings acquired these

personal traits. Participants acknowledge that conflict is often a result of many contributing

factors and circumstances. However, participants expressed how influential the personal

traits of their siblings were in the context of conflict.

Sub-Category - Culture

This sub-category illustrated how cultural influences shaped beliefs and values.

One participant, Fiorella, who was born outside the US notes how her roles converged

with culture and birth order. She explained "I was born in Argentina. My parents are

Italian, so those two cultures… its just assumed that your parents just come live with you

when they age, and you just take care of them". She continues, "There was no grey, it

was like I was a child they took care of me, I'm *supposed* to take care of them. These

ideas are closely rooted in Italian culture, where family closeness and loyalty are strong

values.

Traditional cultural ideas shaped how one is expected to care for family

(especially aging parents). These were a powerful influence for Fiorella. Conflict often

arose when modern challenges created obstacles to traditional caregiving. She explained:

> "OK, if you come from an Italian background, you're supposed to know. Coming
>
> from that background you're not supposed to go away. But this is the US. So

Americans pick up and go because of a job or school. At what point are you

supposed to go back [move back home to care for parents]? Or are they supposed

to follow you? Now you have the Italian way of being. Proud – pride, pride.

Pride! Mom and Dad do not want you to tell them what to do. So I lived close

then I lived far and I lived close again."

Fiorella explained that geography was not a problem for her because other

siblings lived nearby, but she asserts, "Culture is a pivotal part of how this whole thing

played out…Nobody in my lifetime did anyone ever say "hey you don't have to do that

just because you're the oldest' its like a cultural expectation, that you are the older sister

you have to be 'the giver'. This contributed to conflict when siblings took on adult roles.

This was not healthy for the sibling relationships. Keeping her traditional role as 'the

giver,' and the one who is expected to oversee caregiving hindered cooperation between

the siblings. When Fiorella's younger sister became the primary caregiver for her parents,

she was uncomfortable seeing her sister in that role.

Similar to Fiorella's experience, Jada noted how culture overlapped with

expectations for siblings of different birth orders. Coming from a traditional Jamaican

family that had immigrated to the US right before she was born, she noted how they saw

"children being seen and not heard". As the youngest of ten children, she was often not

taken seriously.

Another participant, Xavier, who grew up in Haiti, comments the importance of

"taking into consideration culture" when discussing how American mindsets differed

from what he was exposed to with different healthcare approaches. A procedure was

recommended for his 96 year old mother, and he was not sure if something this invasive would be in her best interest given her age. He explained:

"You have to…you have to trust the doctors sometimes but some other times you have to tap into your roots and your culture…you know. Your own reality. Not every one of us have the same reality…based on your background…so we can all learn from each other. Doesn't make you better, it doesn't make you worse than others. Different realities, it's a fact of life".

As a Haitian American, he noticed the potential that this procedure offered to help his mother, while being mindful to keep the focus on his mom's quality of life. Xavier did take the advice of the doctor. The procedure was successful, and his mother recovered. Many cultures outside the US may approach end of life care from a different paradigm. For instance, American cultural influences may contribute to prolonging life, even when quality of living is diminished. This can contribute to conflict when disagreements arise over end-of-life care decisions.

These cultural influences were a useful perspective for understanding the context of sibling conflict. The stories from participants also illustrate how beliefs and values of a culture often overlap with other categories such as birth order and medical decisions. This helps understand how interconnected these factors are in the context of understanding sibling conflict.

Sub-Category – Religion

Religion was mentioned by participants during their interviews in a variety of different contexts. Several participants drew inspiration from their faith. Codes like "putting God above everything" illustrates how some participants used religion as source

of comfort during the challenges of their experience. One participant, Ursula, explained how her caregiving experience took place as she was entering ministerial seminary to become a Christian reverend. Studying religious teaching helped her to practice forgiveness. Ursula commented how her faith expanded her capacity to forgive:

> Then other thing that around forgiveness, or letting things go. Going to seminary, I was like, all of the stuff, I was holding from 2012 up to 2015 [years when she was caregiving] did leave just because I had a chance to get a fresh start and go to school. I took it, and it popped up at key moments. I was able to start to interrogate those things and try to work through them…I realized that I could not do this work [ministry] until I try to heal myself.

Studying in the seminary gave her an opportunity to reflect. She continues "forgiveness sounds…like not accurate enough cuz…not that I don't 'forgive'- but because its bigger than forgiveness. As deeply as I know my pain and how it informs the lessons that I showed up. How can I recognize that everyone is a full person? And know the ways that their pain informs the way that they show up?" Comments like these show an overlap between religion and other categories, such as empathy and communication.

A few participants experienced division from having views different from their parents. These were illustrated by comments such as "being all about 'sitting on a church pew,'" "being divided on politics/religion," "bickering with sister over different views," "seeing things differently" and "sister not going to church". The influence of religion was useful for understanding various dimensions of the conflict. Overall, comments on religion appeared to be a more indirect influence on conflict.

Sub-Category – Gender

During interviews, participants rarely mentioned gender in the context of conflict. Codes from this category occurred the most infrequently. Yet the two codes on how gender intertwined with conflict. indicated beliefs about how women are expected to behave. These codes were, "being seen as 'needing' to do this as a woman," and "knowing my place as a daughter/caregiver". I note the overlap with culture and upbringing, which often defines gender roles. Returning to Fiorella's experience, she notes how being in the US after her upbringing in a traditional Italian household, she shared "…And there was a double standard, where my brother didn't have to be that way because he's a boy". She explained how her parent's beliefs about gender remained traditional even while immersed in US culture. She shared how when she came of age in New York City, she embraced non-traditional beliefs about gender norms. This difference in beliefs and values caused immense challenges for her relationship between her and her parents. As the years progressed, Fiorella was able to help her parents better understand her experience, and their beliefs on gender evolved.

Many women still believe that caregiving is something that engaged in freely and of their own will. Gender expectations were not as common a motivator. Many female participants expressed how happy they were to be able to spend quality time with their parents as they age. This sentiment was expressed by male participants as well. As one participant, Bernard noted, "It has to be out of love". He comments on his motives for caregiving, "You know it was a privilege. You know, cus it was my dad. And I loved him that much."

Aside from Fiorella, participants did not discuss their gender as a factor in sibling conflict. However, her story illustrates how beliefs about gender can change. Yet, beliefs and perspectives of older generations can contribute to conflict by creating an idea of how caregiving tasks should be assigned.

I note the way many women in the "sandwich generation" (Henslin, 2015, p. 40) a term used by sociologists to describe people sandwiched between caring for their children and parents simultaneously. Their experience is often incredibly stressful from trying to balance multiple roles. Even with role expectations changing, beliefs about women being caregivers to parents may still be traditional.

Main Category - Feelings and Emotions

Based on participants' responses, feelings and emotions were played an important role in conflict. Participants shared extensively on many topics-- such as the power of attorney, medical decisions, legal/financial issues, their role, and birth order. However, interview discussions were centered on how participants felt and the emotions they experienced.

This section uses the term feelings and emotions interchangeably even though the distinction between the two terms is noteworthy. Psychiatrist and Philosopher Neel Burton, as referenced by Wake Forest University's Clinical Mental Health Counseling, defines emotions as "multi-faceted experiences" of "internal subjective experiences, facial expressions and physiological reactions" (Burton, 2020, p. 1). Burton explains how emotions are often both unconscious and conscious. Feelings were defined as "both emotional experiences and physical sensations – such as hunger or pain" and "a conscious experience" (Burton, 2020, p. 1). In reference to conflict, Hocher and Wilmot

describe emotions as an "underlying arousal state" (Hocher & Wilmot, 2016, p. 190) and feelings as "how we learn to experience and give words and meaning to our emotional states" (Hocher & Wilmot, 2016). Katz, Lawyer & Sweedler note importance of describing feelings accurately. As a tool for personal reflection, they recommend reviewing a list of positive and negative feeling words for improved self-expression (Katz, Lawyer & Sweedler). Thus, even when feelings are conscious, there is still a challenge in correctly identifying the specific feeling.

The section refers to common *emotions* such as anger, disappointment, grief, and stress. On the other hand, *feelings* are used to describe how a specific participant experiences that emotion. For example, how a person *feels* about the stress. Participants comment on *feelings* with an awareness of their experience, whereas *emotions* better describe the participants' unconscious experiences.

A key finding was how these topics triggered powerful emotions. On the surface, conflicts may appear to be over issues like when to place a parent in a nursing home, or how to interpret a will. Beneath this surface lies a wide range of complex feelings, which played a much more influential role in the conflict.

Prior to doing research, I predicted that the major sources of conflict would be power and money. I was surprised that feelings emerged the leading category- it was the most frequently referenced of all categories. I note that most contentious conflicts appear to have been caused by power and money. On the surface certainly appears that way. Listening to the feelings and emotions of participants reveals otherwise. Conflicts over money reveal connections to other factors, such as motives/goals and beliefs/values.

For instance, Elizabeth was outraged that her sister overpowered her on financial decisions. One triggering event involved a fight between her and her sister over spending money on their dad. Elizabeth wanted to spend an extra $200 to purchase a first class ticket for her dad to make him more comfortable on a flight to Florida. Her sister declined to spend the money on their dad, and explained that she thought that was too expensive. She felt hurt and upset. Deeper analysis revealed that she was more upset by her sister's underlying motives/goals and beliefs/values. Elizabeth explained how she came to perceive her sister to have some concerns about maintaining assets. Elizabeth wanted to spend money on making her dad comfortable. She felt her decision to get her dad the ticket was out of care for her dad and his wellbeing. She was upset – not just because of money, but because of a clash over motives and values.

Elizabeth shared her feelings in the interview. She was upset because her sister's actions appeared to be more concerned with maintaining assets than with her father's wellbeing. This type of analysis illustrates the way that feelings were at the heart of conflicts. The analysis reveals how disputes over power and money were deeply rooted in emotions. These patterns echo the words of Maya Angelo's quote "I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel" (Angelou, 1967).

The "feelings and emotions" category emerged as one of four major categories. "feelings and emotions" encompassed other categories, including *stress*, *empathy/understanding*, *motives & goals, power & perceptions of power.*

Participants characterizing their feelings as complex. They noted the presence of multiple feelings simultaneously, and they noticed hidden emotions surface. Participants

commented on how feelings were frequently distorted. They describe feelings that were intense, with huge emotional blows, lows of depression and explosive rage. Other feelings that surfaced were depression from watching a parent getting older. Participants felt loss, grief and sadness for a loss of identity. As one participant commented "It's a phase in life that is very hurtful…my father was the strong hero. [Watching him] sitting in a hospital bed sick. You cannot process that…It cuts you in half. Aging parents is one of the most devastating blows to the children". Examination of these underlying emotions help better understand how and why feelings were so frequently out of proportion in the context of sibling conflict.

Participants also comment on the negative emotions that were present in sibling conflict such as anger, hurt and fear. As referenced by Hocher and Wilmot, "anger was termed 'the moral emotion' by the ancients because it is based on a fast, reflective judgment that we have been wronged or threatened. We feel anger when our safety or our core values are threatened" (Hocher & Wilmot, 2014, p. 201). For this reason, these emotions reveal expectations that many participants hold about how their sibling *should* behave, and it exposes the beliefs and values of participants. These were explored in greater depth with the 'beliefs and values' category which lie at the core of the hierarchy of contingency.

Responses from this category illustrate that participants were eager to share their feelings and reflect on them. Some participants shared how feelings of depression and disappointment emerged. One participant became emotional as she explained her feelings on caregiving, "One thing that is sort of discouraging as a caregiver. As a mother, you know you teach your kids to be independent, go to college, graduate, and be independent

on your own. As a caregiver the end game is not graduation….They're never gonna get better, they're always gonna get worse. There's no getting better the end game is death. And you're gonna watch them go downhill from here on. And that's sad but that's- That's very depressing". Participants also shared that they emoted differently- many expressed their feelings outwardly, sharing how sad they were, while some may have been more private. Experiencing these challenging feelings on top of the stress of caregiving was a common source of conflict.

Sometimes disappointment emerged when participants did not experience a more ideal sibling relationship. Many wished they had a friend, confidant, or someone to rely on for shared caregiving responsibilities. Or just someone who could help relieve them of caregiving tasks when they were overwhelmed. Often the feelings of disappointment revealed ideas of how participants thought their sibling out to behave.

One participant, Lily, noted how upset she was by the way her siblings treated her and spoke to her after providing care to their aging dad. "They just you know said, well you wanted to be a martyr, you know they would discount me. You want to be a martyr, so 'you be my guest sort of attitude', which is- it was sick." Lily added, "I think it would have helped me a lot if I felt any kind of gratitude or appreciation". Participants explored their feelings in ways that were self-reflective. Exploring why Lily felt discounted, unappreciated, and upset was useful for understanding the layers of feelings that were present.

Many participants also describe feelings of guilt. One participant noted "I sometimes feel guilty …when I notice the care that my mother is receiving and the dedication that [sibling X and Sibling Y]…they give their life to her wellbeing…to taking

care of her. And I say well… In other words, I'm very grateful to them and consider myself fortunate that I have them…I'm feeling some sort of guilt in a sense that I'm not there to do that because she's my mother…she's equally my mother as theirs so why should they be the one to do it…you know I feel that…". He explained that even though he has an excellent relationship with siblings, he wishes he could help more.

While this is common for out-of-town siblings who may be 'off the hook' of caregiving, these feelings of guilt stood out even with participants who were primary caregivers. Lachlan, who lived with his father for years as a primary caregiver explains how he felt, visiting his father in the hospital, watching a football game with him. He recalls:

> I can remember sitting there in the middle of the second quarter saying to myself, boy I hope Dad tells me to go home at halftime. Cus, I was so whipped, I was just tired from the days, I was so exhausted…I always felt bad. Ohh, I hope I can go at halftime…Usually at halftime he'd say 'go head home'. And then after he passed away, I used to say to myself. You piece of shit. You couldn't even sit there and watch the game with your dad. Now I realize, this is what I was talking about the stress that you didn't know. My sister will laugh about it "well you weren't cheating on him!

Despite recognizing the abundance of quality time he spent with his father, he still felt guilty—even when he acknowledged how he was not guilty of any wrongdoing. The sources from which guilt arose was difficult to identify.

Sub-Category - Stress

Comments from participants on stress were descriptive of feelings. Many felt pulled in different directions trying to accomplish multiple caregiving tasks under pressure. Participants shared how stress set the mood for conflict and mostly pertained to the caregiving experience in general. The code, "being an incredibly difficult time in life" sums up the experience. Participants often explained how the stress of the situation impacted them internally, experiencing "taxing feelings from long days". Many shared comments about the stress of caregiving and dealing with siblings, with comments "needing a break" "getting stressed out easily" and "struggling from it". Lachlan, explained how caregivers can often experience a "hidden stress" that is often present in sibling conflict. He explains:

> It's a hidden stress, you don't even know you're stressed out". He adds "Well, obviously, the number one thing was the stress of seeing someone you love pass away. So, you're on edge to begin with, so you're not your normal self. So little things, like someone saying they will be there at five, and not getting there tilt ten to six, normally you wouldn't bat an eye, but when you're Mother and Father are lying in bed dying…the stress, you think you're handling it well but there's unseen stress that you don't even realize. And you may end up snapping or snipping a little bit at each other.

In some instances, the stress of seeing a loved one pass away spilled over to their own sibling relationships. How participants handled stress varied among participants, yet this was largely determined by how well they managed their own feelings.

Sub-Category – Empathy/Understanding

The collection of comments in this category included several important realizations of participants. Often these comments were moments of awareness, and this awareness played a positive role. For instance, in challenging situations, Lachlan explains, "…you look at your brother and sister crying and you realize that the last thing they need is you being a jerk. You know they are just as upset as you are it's not just you". One participant, Ethan, explains how understanding his sisters feelings better prevented worsening of conflict. Ethan's sister lived in New York, and when his aging mother's health declined, she put pressure on her mother to move in with her. Ethan's mom lived in Florida, next door to Ethan where she lived happily and independently, having her breakfast while looking at the ocean every morning. Their mother had no desire to leave her house in Florida. This infuriated his sister who wanted her mom nearby. Her sister was terrified that her mother would experience a medical emergency and that she would not be there to help. This led to heated arguments.

Ethan was able to recognize that what his sister was really struggling with was control issues. She felt out of control of her Mother's situation. With her mother in Florida, she had no way to be directly involved in care and not be available for urgent health needs. "I wanted to tell my sister off so many times when she was arguing on the phone with my mother. And then I would see my mother, and just say later, don't worry, [sister name] she's just a control freak. I wanted to tell her off. For what she did to our mother. I loved her, she's only saying this because…she lost control". His empathy for his sister's situation helped him better handle his sister's difficult reactions. Empathy also prevented the fighting from escalating.

Many participants had moments of learning and reflection. Hearing a sibling take responsibility for past hurts and saying the words "that was wrong [I was wrong]" was tremendously positive for one participant. It was a moment that helped validate feelings. Others expressed gratitude for their siblings' involvement in caregiving. Positive statements include "I notice the care and dedication that siblings provide to mother. They give their life to her wellbeing. To taking care of her. I'm very grateful to them and consider myself very fortunate that I have them". Acknowledging how much his siblings contribute to their mother's caregiving was influential to their good relationships.

Participants also notice moments of empathy for themselves. Many touched on self-healing and forgiving themselves. Many participants had moments of awareness, changes in perceptions and deep reflections about their experiences. On participant, Ursula, had powerful moments of self-forgiveness.

You need to know how to be empathetic in conflict and I wasn't doing that-giving empathy to myself and other people…thankfully, [I had] a lot of tools- like how to deal internally- like let's pretend you'll never get kosher with that person'. Like 'they'll never engage in a non-violent communication'. What are you going to do to deal with yourself? And so it gave me like a construct. There were times when I would drive a lot, I would think OK I got 5 hours, and my mind would go to the things that were really difficult, and I'd say, OK, I've got these tools. How can I shift how I'm thinking about this. How can I provide the empathy internally first? How can I consider what that person might have been holding? How can I let go of that expectation that I had?

These were moments where empathy sprung forth naturally when participants went deeper into what their siblings may have been experiencing.

Sub-Category - Power and Perceptions of Power

Comments from this category were a direct reflection of heated emotions in sibling conflict. Codes included, "power struggle being ugly," "other siblings' 'say' not mattering," "being like her way or no way," and "losing control". The codes reveal details on how and why power can evoke strong emotions in conflict. In many cases, siblings experienced an imbalance of power. One participant, Axel describes himself as "being the one that got screwed…". After his older sister was appointed power of attorney, she took most of their inheritance. Axel was left with almost nothing. His parents enjoyed good health until their sudden passing. They had not pre-written wills or discussed possible arrangements. When their sister was appointed power of attorney, she had absolute power over their estate. Axel felt that had his parents been alive, they would have come up with a more fair and equitable way to divide the money. His emotions that emerged from the situation was from a deep sense of unfairness, that left him feeling powerless. He questioned himself in his interview, wondering what, if anything he could have done. "[What was I supposed to do], just let her be that way?...She was always kind of jealous of me. I don't know I guess that's like her way of payback". Axel still speaks with his sister, however the situation was difficult. He chose to let the situation go, and continue having a relationship. He added "I mean it's not fair, but what are you going to do, sue your sister?" Listening to this participant gave a clear picture of how a power imbalance unfolded, and of how he felt trapped with no power over his situation, resulting in conflict.

Some conflicts escalated to a lawsuit. After Elizabeth's dad passed, her older sister was left in charge of the estate. "When he was gone, there was no counter force. She could do whatever she wanted," Elizabeth had to hire her own attorney. She explained "We were still paying for the expenses of the house. But we were told we couldn't 'use it' not that we would want to – not under the circumstances [with the legal battle with sister]. So, we couldn't go up there…you can imagine we haven't spoken since". Her sister used her legal power to block Elizabeth's access to their parents' estate and their belongings. Elizabeth was emotional recalling the details of how the conflict unfolded. Her sister took control of the estate and inheritance, leaving Elizabeth with nothing. She excluded her sister from decision making. She was punitive over minor expenses and uncommunicative to Elizabeth. They were not able to repair their relationship.

Conflicts describing power struggles highlight some of the most contentious behaviors between siblings. At the surface, it appears that many fights appear to be over power, gaining control over the estate, having a power of attorney (POA) over parents. This category reveals that conflicts over power evoked strong feelings. An analysis of power revealed the layers of emotions and feelings that lie beneath the surface.

Ideas on high and low power situations provide additional context to conflict. Both Elizabeth and Axel identified as the party in low power. According to Hocher and Wilmot, "this can either lead to the parties just giving up or it can escalate when neither party wants to give in" (Hocher & Wilmot, 2014, p. 122). Often the party that perceives themselves to be in low power fights with even more intensity. They often try to 'one up' their sibling, driven by a desire to get even. Axel gave in to his sister's arrangements,

even though he thought her decisions were extremely unfair. For Elizabeth, the power struggle was followed by a lawsuit. Elizabeth and her sister were able to end the legal part of their conflict which stopped the fighting, but hurt feelings remained.

While the experience of being in low power was extremely disheartening, it offered valuable insight. One participant Bernard explained how he was able to maintain a relationship with his siblings throughout disagreements. His two older siblings were appointed power of attorney, thus he was in a situation where he had less power. He explained, "Ah, my older brother and child number 15 are the power of attorney. I am not... well I don't say anything with the decision they make. If I don't like the decision, I will say something. And I will always say, that's the decision ya'll make. If it goes south, they will have to suffer that consequence. That's not on the family, that's on you" DeShawn insists, "You have to cooperate! *Because that's Mom*!"

Even though Bernard had less power, he continued to voice his concerns. Instead of making threats or forcing his way, he points out the impact of his siblings' consequences. He communicates in a way that helps his siblings understand the best interests of everyone.

The comments and stories illustrate key findings in how power triggers emotions and feelings. It also illustrates how low and high-power dynamics can influence conflict.

Sub-Category - Motives and Goals

This category builds on influential sub-categories such as stress, empathy, understanding and power. It explores how these factors add complex dimensions to motives and goals in sibling conflict.

One participant, Ethan, explained how staying focused on long-term goals helped him avoid conflict escalation with his sister. Ethan advises "you have to keep the end in sight". His long-term goal was to provide the best care to his mom and not permanently damage his relationship with his sister. He insisted that he wanted to have a relationship with his sister after this conflict experience was over. He explained that "there were so many times I wanted to tell my sister off". Focusing on the end goals kept him from doing so. In emotionally charged exchanges with siblings, it can be easy to forget the bigger picture.

Many motives and goals applied to relationships and caregiving arrangements. Several positive motives/goals included "making a conscious effort to preserve the relationship," "wanting to be fair," "honoring parents wishes," which suggest a desire for cooperation. Comments such as "trying to help him do the right thing", "wanting to communicate" and "wanting to have the same vision" illuminate other goals. Often, siblings wish to be on the same page when it comes to sharing a common caregiving goals.

The codes from this category show how conflict can arise when siblings pursue different interests. Codes like "sister wanting it her way" applies to caregiving arrangements. It also shows how sibling may differ on how to achieve a common goal. Ramona explained that she struggled with her sister who had a different philosophy on how to help their mother after eye surgery. Her sister's approach was to encourage their mother to stay active following surgery. Her sister encouraged her mom practice walking on her own, rebuilding strength and get re-accustomed to doing things independently.

Ramona clashed with her sister over this approach. Based on Ramona's prior experience as a nurse, she stressed how important it was for her mother to rest after her surgery to allow her eye to heal and avoid re-injury. Ramona explained how their different outlooks led to conflict over their different goals. "So that's where the conflict will come in," she explains. "My sister is very confrontational. And she likes to say a lot. but the point is, its not about what you know, what I know, its about doing things smarter. There's a lot of her thinking I'm coming in and telling my mom what to do." Her sister also misinterpreted her sister's motives. She thought Ramona's goal was just to get her way.

In opposition to her sister's approach, Ramona discouraged her mother from being active. She advocated for rest. She encouraged her mom to refrain from her daily activities so she could heal and recover. Ramona remarked, "We just need to comfort her [their mother] and make her safe by any means possible". Ramona felt extremely frustrated that her sister was not on the same page with her. She thought it was dangerous for her mother to risk re-injury. She was concerned that her sister's approach could jeopardize her mother's health.

Hocher and Wilmot share insight on how goals can quickly change. Siblings may start out with a goal of helping their parent. It is common that all other goals can be tossed aside in the process trying to beat their opponent. For Ramona's sister, "getting it her way" interfered with caregiving for her mother.

Codes from the "Motives and Goals" category, show that motives are complex. Part of what can make these conflicts so difficult is the realization that "past behavior was not always motivated by good intentions" (Stone, Paton & Heen, p. 120). Conflict

often involved judgement about their siblings' intentions. Participants may accuse their siblings to be motivated by underlying goals or selfish interests.

Often, caregiving goals can become unclear. Siblings may encounter many circumstances where they genuinely do not know what to do to help their parent. It is common for participants to experience confusion of what goals they wish to achieve.

The category of feelings—anger, sadness, depression and guilt-- all show how multiple feelings are often felt simultaneously, pulling participants in different directions at the same time. This category illuminates the fact that feelings—often complex and distorted--were often the basis of responses to conflict.

Main Category – Roles and Expectations

Roles and expectations emerged as a main category in the context of sibling conflict. A key finding was that conflict emerged when participants were unclear on what their role was. The comments from participants illustrate how participants come to symbolically define how each family member *ought* to behave.

The sub-categories included in this category were useful to understanding how roles came to be defined. Factors that influence roles include, *birth order, planning & family wishes, occupation, geography, medical issues, legal issues, logistics, arrangements & decisions, geography* and *time issues*. This explains how the family comes to define who should be doing which task.

I highlight the relevance of roles and expectations in the context of modern "role conflict" (Henslin, 2016, p. 107) or conflict among many roles. Most participants experienced role confusion in some form. For instance, one participant, Naomi, tried to balance her roles as a student, employee, wife, mother and daughter. While her mother

battled cancer, she recalls she was "breaking my neck to get to her" indicating how challenging the experience was for her. Modern pressures have added new work and family expectations. These pressures were less common generations ago. These changes in role expectations were especially apparent for women in the "sandwich generation" (Henslin, 2016, p. 106) a term which describes people caught between caregiving for their parents and their own children simultaneously. Often women, are most likely to take on the duties of these multiple roles (Henslin, 2016).

Participants frequently shared how their roles and expectations connected to sibling conflict. Naomi shared her experience with family expectations and roles. She explained "because I worked at the church it was always felt [by my sister] that my time was more flexible. So there were times when there was an expectation. That I could do some things. Whereas I didn't want to always seem like I was taken advantage of…" Naomi continues, "In addition to her siblings' expectations, this also connected with her birth order and her leadership position in the family. There was the feeling of OK I'm expected to *do*, to pull it together". Her in depth reflection illustrates common feelings by participants with how families come to depend on different siblings to fulfill different needs. In Naomi's case, the family needed her to be the "do-er" the one to make things happen. These different expectations caused tension.

On a positive note, Naomi, shared the way that her mother, who was a former hospice nurse, arranged a family meeting to clarify her final wishes. The siblings met at the hospital, aware that their mother was on her deathbed. Naomi's mom specified her final wishes and delegated tasks to each child. She recalls:

So for about two weeks, she held court. She met with the family. She said what

she needed to say, collectively, and individually in order to give instructions. She

told me what to have done at the funeral. So she is the kind of person that takes

charge right up until the very end she did. And that also assisted in us not having

conflict as siblings. Because there was no question as to what her final wishes

were cus she made it known… there was no confusion. So we had no conflict on

final matters…It was like a last gift that she gave us…That was one of the magic-

that was one of the gifts that she gave us…as her children having any questions

about her final wishes.

Her mom was proactive; She assigned tasks when it became clear that her cancer

diagnosis was terminal. The clarity helped reduce conflict because each sibling knew

what was being asked of them. Funeral arrangements, decisions on money, medical

issues- all these tasks had all been delegated. The situation where a mom can assign roles

that she wants for her children is often uncommon. Naomi's mother had years of

experience as a geriatric nurse, and she witnessed families experience similar confusion.

For this reason, she took action to assign roles. This is usually not the case for many

families, who find themselves making decisions based on unforeseen circumstances.

Sudden medical emergencies often arise unexpectedly. Conflict easily follows in

situations with a need for urgent decisions and a lack of clarity on what to do.

Participants explained how they assumed that they would fulfill traditional

caregiving roles as their parents aged, yet this was hindered by a modern lifestyle with

more pressing work demands, financial burdens, time restraints and geographic distance

from parents. The challenges presented for participants were much different than those

experienced by their parents. These ideas are in alignment with comments in this category. Roles and expectations frequently left participants in a state of confusion. It was common for participants to feel conflicted about their role, and unclear on family expectations.

Sub-Category - Planning, Family Wishes, and Arrangements

The comments in this category describe the challenges of planning. In many cases thoughts on planning come from a place of unknown. For instance, many shared "not being prepared for the situation" which highlights the difficulty of selecting proper caregiving arrangements. Other comments speak to the challenges of how to take on the role of caregiving. These include, "finding the right caretaker," "employing people to care for mom," "sister not wanting to deal with mom's wanderings," "making decisions to stay at home instead of paying for care". Conflict over these arrangements occurred frequently, and this was intensified when there was no plan. I took note of how this sub-category connected with the category of magnitude of conflict. Clarity on arrangements seemed to reduce conflict. The conflict suggests that when siblings know what is being expected from them, they may experience less conflict. One participant advised "Pre-plan. Write out your wishes. Write stuff down for children- to prevent conflict".

Comments from participants also highlight how conflict often arose when it came time to make a decision. One of the major decisions that led to conflict was when to place an aging parent in a nursing home. This is illustrated by comments "siblings not agreeing to put them in a home," "promising parents never go to nursing home". The arrangements were further complicated by power and financial issues. Participants often encounter conflict over which sibling gets to make decision and how payment for care will be

arranged. Thus, this category overlapped with other categories, namely power, birth order and financial issues.

Sub-Category – Birth Order

This sub-category examined how the birth order of each sibling influenced sibling conflict. It exposed how the experience of participants connected with theories of common traits of first-borns, middle and last-born siblings. Birth order was relevant in discussions on roles and expectations.

Participants shared comments about how their birth order influenced their childhood role. They explained that part sibling conflict arose from the need for adaptation to new roles. For adult children, there was a strong tendency to revert to roles acquired in childhood. For instance, Naomi was the oldest of six children. Growing up as the leader in her family, her younger siblings tended to place more responsibilities on her, when she needed her siblings to step up and contribute more. Expectations on the oldest siblings to take a leadership role was common.

Many first born children took on extra responsibilities from a young age. In childhood, they were a leader to younger siblings, so for many adult siblings it seemed natural that they would continue in that role. Naomi shares how this was a difficulty with her and her siblings. She notes "And one of the other challenges was being the eldest, I think I was expected to be strong and be able to handle things, when I look back, I realized how much pressure was on me".

As children, Naomi's siblings always perceived her as the leader, and continued to behave in ways that fit their childhood family roles, despite the need for adaptation. This ties in with roles. Russo notes, "Most of us are familiar with the idea that each of us

has a different role in our family. I'm the achiever, you're the rebel, our younger sister is the peacemaker, and our little brother makes everyone laugh when things get tense. But its far more complicated than that. In every family there is a kind of emotional division of labor. Each person has a specialized part in keeping the family going." (Russo, 2010, p. 11). This is likely to change as families transition to new roles when their parents age. It is understandable why conflict may follow with these changes in role expectations.

Another participant, Hunter, the youngest of his family of five siblings shares how frustrated he was by his siblings' attitude towards him. He would accompany his father for doctors' visits, and when he made recommendations, his siblings often disregarded his suggestions. Hunter was angry with how his siblings would talk down to him. He stated, "What do I know? I'm 'the young dumb one!'" with sarcasm. He was frustrated that his siblings kept treating him as the 'baby' of the family. This was a common experience for youngest siblings. Jada, the youngest of eight siblings shared how she was constantly treated as "the child" of the bunch, when she took a leadership role in taking care of her parents. She shared that it was problem for the older siblings. When she made caregiving arrangements for their parents, she had to be careful that she was "not going above the older siblings".

Jazmin, the last born of 5 siblings, echoed this sentiment. Jazmin explained that her siblings looked at her with the thought of "why are you getting to make the decisions?" Having the youngest make decisions did not fit in with what they thought was proper or expected. Jazmin replied angrily, "Because I'm getting things done and done right!" Many of these youngest siblings expressed similar frustrations when their

siblings were not able to acknowledge their youngest sibling's ability to be a competent caregiver.

Middle born children often took on roles of being a peacemaker and mediator, which carried over to their habits as adults. For Samuel, a middle child, he describes a process reminiscent of "shuttle diplomacy" a tactic often used in international conflict in when the disputing parties refuse to talk directly and rely on a mediator to go back and forth (Brahm & Burghess, 2019). He and his brother used this tactic to mediate conflict between his oldest sister and youngest sister.

He explained "So the conflict--it does relate to my twin and I being "middle children". We always had to be mediators, or interveners between the older sister and the younger sister…So for most of it [the conflict] she just avoided action with the older sister. My twin and I sort of being like peace and quiet people, we wanted them to get along." The conflict between the two sisters never escalated to a point of contention, because their middle brothers would intervene as peacemakers. He spoke with each sister individually when navigating sensitive topics, and the siblings maintained a good relationship throughout the process.

The birth order habits described by Leman were applicable to many participants. For others, these patterns did not fit their experience. The codes and stories of participants illustrate that birth order was a significant influence on roles and expectations.

Sub-Category - Occupation

Comments from this category touched on conflict that was connected to professional expertise, work schedule and how caregiving tasks were delegated. Often,

this category overlapped with other categories such as financial issues, medical issues, logistics and geography.

Participants referred to occupation with codes such as, "going to lawyer-brother with legal questions" and "working out having lawyer brother have power of attorney" illustrate how tasks were divided in ways that were complimentary to the professional expertise of siblings. This also occurred with siblings who worked in healthcare. Codes like "wondering if because daughter is a registered nurse, mom prefers her to help with healthcare" and "relying on oldest, registered nurse, sibling". In many cases this was a positive. Tasks were often assigned based on the professional backgrounds of siblings.

In other instances, disagreements occurred. Many participants resisted when their siblings were assigned tasks. In some cases, professional expertise from siblings amplified conflict. Codes such as "refusing to listen to sister on medical stuff" revealed that the division of roles based on occupations can create problems.

Occupation also fits in with how tasks are divided when arranging simple tasks. Siblings with a more flexible schedule may be able to do more hands-on caregiving for their parents. While siblings with a more demanding work schedule may offer to contribute in different ways. Codes such as, "being retired, brother fixed her breakfast and did the caregiving" illustrate this tendency.

Ursula's, the youngest of three sisters, shared how her expectations and professional occupations contributed to conflict. Following the sudden passing of her mother, her aging father needed a full-time caregiver. She and her middle sister moved in with him. They reached out to their older sister, for help with financial issues. They were shocked when their oldest sister, a financial advisor, was declined to when they asked her

for help. Ursula described the situation as "maddening". She and her middle sister felt

shocked. They did all the hands-on caregiving. They also handled all of the legal

documents for their parents' estate. They were infuriated that their oldest sister- a

financial advisor- offered no help.

Ursula stated, "As a certified financial advisor, and someone who works for this-

How could you one: not take your parents by the hand? and now [when] your parents are

gone, and two: How could you at least not help your sisters figure it out?" Ursula

explained that she and her middle sister expressed their need for help to their older sister.

When she and her sister moved back to the house, they were lost trying to figure out

financial documents for their parents' estate. Since Ursula's oldest sister was working in

the field, it seemed only natural that she would be a resource. Both sisters were

disappointed with her lack of involvement. Ursula comments on the expectations she and

her sister held, explaining "While for me, I didn't have expectations that she would take

shifts at the house watching our dad. Watching people struggle- I had no expectations she

would change our dad's diaper, help him shower. Absolutely not. Just checking up was a

desire that both me and my middle sister shared. My middle sister wanted more actual

practical help. As well as you know the other thing, financial and legal guidance,

emotional support".

This story illustrates the connection between the occupation of siblings and family

expectations. Leadership and subordinate positions may be based on many criteria for

deciding who will do which tasks. Assigning tasks that align with occupations has

illustrated positives and negatives. Other categories that were common influencers

included geography, personal traits, and birth order.

Sub-Category - Money/Finances/Estate

Participants shared many details on how money, finances and estate influenced conflict. I was slightly surprised by the findings in this category. Prior to conducting this research, I would have envisioned this category to be a greater source of contention. While conflict over money was certainly present, it was not a primary issue. In fact, deeper issues, such as feelings, motives and values, seemed to be at the root of conflict over money.

Some common negative codes involving money include "fighting over money," "Taking most of the money after parents passed," "not getting an even distribution of money from sister," "saying that for most people 'money's money,'" "having frequent money problems" "arguing over money and control" and "experiencing a fiasco when the money came out". In connection with many of these negative comments on how money influenced the conflict, these quotes emerged alongside of stories involving trust issues, suspicion, and jealousy. One participant told her brother "I wouldn't trust you with $8!". Other quotes included "being suspicious about money at the root of it," "being jealousy and suspicion of the money," and "not trusting siblings".

Many more positive comments emerged as well such as "not fighting about money" and "money not being that big of a deal". In most cases the money conflict did not take place. Several participants expressed ease with dividing the estate when plans were pre-written, to avoid confusion.

Codes such as "helping sister more financially" reveal common issues with equal or inequal distribution. This brings up important perspectives on values, which differ among families. Many families tend to define fairness differently. Siblings are likely to

differ in their personal wealth and may have more need for financial help than others. In Samuel's family, the estate was divided among four siblings- but they cooperated to make an agreement that allowed for their oldest sister to have a slightly greater share. He explains, "That again was minimal conflict because they divided money that was leftover between the four of us and all the grandchildren at the time. Nine grandchildren and great grandchildren- anyways they got some money. In our case, we would have been better off if everything was between the four of us. Because the oldest sister had more children and grandchildren. We got less because of dividing it so many different ways." Many families accommodate siblings with a greater need with a greater share of the estate. The findings in this category indicate that financial conflict often overlap with legal issues and power issues.

Sub-Category – Medical Issues

Medical issues were a sub-category that often tied in with arrangements, decisions, power, and occupation. While these issues were important, they were frequently tied to more significant factors and usually a cause of conflict on their own. Issues represent key sibling conflict factors were expressed in codes such as "Calling sister to ask why she is not enforcing medications". These were usually part of conflicts where siblings disagreed with each other over what course of action to take when handling a medical issue.

A common issue with medical issues is confusion. Roles are in a state of ambiguity to begin with, and often siblings do not know what to do when it comes time to make important medical decisions. They may feel clueless. Under these conditions it is easy to see why this can lead to fighting between siblings. The code "asking sister 'what

do I do' on medical questions" shows a relationship between roles, occupations and medical decisions. Siblings often have a difficult time making simple decisions. This fits with codes such as "listening to the advice of doctor" "thinking mom would be better off following doctor's instructions/prescriptions. Disagreements may arise over what course of action to follow when selecting options. This also involves decisions on when to and not to follow the guidance of healthcare professionals.

Also diagnoses of the severity of a parents' condition may occur. The code "portraying a better image of health to out of state brother" reflects the tendency for some siblings to differ on the condition of their parents. Shannon experienced something similar, stating "my mother really tries to hide how they are more so from my brother who lives out of state than anybody else. 'everything's fine don't worry about us' [imitating her mother] but to me it's 'your father can't bla bla bla [cannot do certain tasks]'". Shannon notices that her mother may share more medical information with her, giving her a more accurate picture with their health limitations. Her brother may not see these details, which may hinder his ability to make an informed decision.

Similar differences of opinions over medical issues also created conflict with Anya and her family. She explained "Ok in our family, my oldest sister, she would pretty much take care of her meds. If there were certain medications my mom did not want to take then she wouldn't enforce it. She would prepare her pills for her. When she should have been on x-med and my mom said she did not want to take it. And my sister who was in charge of her medication ah would say, ok well then you don't have to take it then mom. And then she (Mom) would swell up. And I would call her and say "*What!* Why are you not enforcing this for her? Because my mom was a person who did not want to

take medication. She fought it. She wanted to take supplements. All her life she took supplements. She was pretty healthy all her life. She you know, a couple of siblings would say, you know let her, you know, do what she wants. And I would say, no we want her to live as long as possible." These types of decisions can easily become a point of contention in conflict. Anya went on to explain that this directly led to conflict. She explained "She just wanted to take as little [medication] as possible. I think she would have been better off if she would have followed the instructions of the doctor and done what he prescribed. And some of my siblings would just throw their hands in the air and say, eh whatever she wants. Then I'd go and I'd be harsh, and she'd complain [her mother] that I was being mean to my other siblings". The disagreements over the medication led to her mom and siblings teaming up against her. Other overlapping categories may also include finances, perceptions, values, culture, and personal traits. These all tie in with different approaches on how to give the best care to a parent.

Sub-Category - Logistics

This category showed findings similar to the decisions and arrangements category. Logistics included comments on minor decisions. Codes from this group included, "employing people to care for mom" "streamlining doctors appointments for convenience" "sister taking her to appointments" "disliking sister's house with stairs" and "managing house 'upkeep'". This fit with conflict in more indirect ways. Anya explains how coordinating a schedule with her siblings to care for her mother was challenge. She noted that it was stressful to have each sibling do shifts at their mother's house during the caregiving process. She recalls "We had jobs and our own families too. But we would make a schedule. And have our shifts and have to be there. It was stressful.

But these things pass. We're glad that we did all – take our turns. But that wasn't without conflict. Something else would come up. Everybody would get mad at each other if they were gonna miss their shift". Coordinating detailed plans were a challenge with the siblings. In most cases the logistic issues were a minor influence on conflict.

Sub-Category - Geography

Geography was often a factor when it came time to arrange tasks among siblings. Conflict often emerged when siblings who were more geographically close to parents took on added responsibilities. One participant commented on "being stuck in town" with a greater burden of work falling on her shoulders. She explained how her siblings had an "out" because they lived out of town and were considered "off the hook". One sibling noted that tasks were assigned in a way that was inconvenient. Jazmin expressed minor frustration when her sister, who lived 45 minutes from her mother, asked her to help with a non-urgent task for their mother, when she lived 2 hours away.

Another pattern that emerged illustrated how parents sometimes kept important updates from siblings who lived out of town. Shannon shared how this occurred with her mother, who would share more of these details with her than her brother who lived out of state. "You know when I'm home I'll go down steps to get their laundry for them. Or bring stuff up from the basement. I'm very keenly aware of their limitations right now. I think my – a little of my frustration I have with my siblings. Is that they don't see the limitations or understand the limitations that my parents have. I think they still see my parents as they were 10 years ago or something like that. Because I'm around them the most. I'm more aware of these limitations." Shannon sees her parents more frequently

than her brother, who lives out of state. Shannon wondered if that her mother withholds this information because her mother does not want to worry her brother.

Shannon and her siblings have a good relationship. When tasks are assigned, they note how she will do more daily visits with her parents, whereas other siblings make different contributions. She shared "So my brother lives the closest to my mom, and my sister lives a half hour [away]. And my older brother lives out of state. But his contribution is more like "hey we'll pay for the grass and the lawn". Shannon explained that each sibling makes a meaningful contribution to caregiving regardless of geography.

Sub-Category – Time (Future and Past Concerns)

This category shared how time concerns impacted roles and expectations. Future and past concerns included, "being concerned for future," "being concerned about a family rift" and "going to hit the fan when she passes" and "being too late now to reverse conflict". Other comments indicated that conflict flare ups appeared throughout various stages of the conflict. These were expressed in codes like "having problems afterwards," "something coming between us" and "thinking the real conflict came at the end of father's life". Some indicated the way that time influenced roles and expectations in a peaceful way. These were reflected in comments such as "knowing conflict would come to an end," "preparing for parents being gone" and "touched/moved by having the honor of having time with parents". Other comments on time refer more to caregiving. These include codes such as "being on 'their' time frame [Mom's]," "caring for 40 years," and "caregiving being constant. The way time influenced how participants came to see their role and expectations also fits with perceptions. For this reason, I note overlap with categories such as beliefs and values. Codes such as "thinking parents will live forever,"

"never going to get better," "always going to get worse," and "never knowing what tomorrow brings," reveal different thoughts and outlooks of participants.

The codes from this category illustrate how time was an influence in the context of sibling conflict. It was more a result of other more influential circumstances and a less directly a cause of sibling conflict.

Main Category - Responses

This main category explored the behavioral responses of siblings. Findings focus on how participants reacted. This category gives a better idea of what the participants said and did, and how their siblings responded to their actions. The main category includes sub-categories: *Competition, Cooperation, Tactics & Results, and Communication.*

As referenced in Hocher and Wilmot, Rahim classifies five common conflict styles: *avoiding, obliging, compromising, integrating,* and *dominating* (Hocher & Wilmot, 2014). Each of these patterns are observed among the 30 participants in the study.

Hocher and Wilmot characterize the *avoidance* style of conflict to include "denial of conflict, changing and avoiding topics, being noncommittal, and joking rather than dealing with the conflict at hand. The avoider may sidestep an issue by changing the topic or simply withdrawing from dealing with the issue" (Hocher & Wilmot, 2014, p. 151). One participant, Caroline responded to how she handles conflict with her sister, explaining "OK, I avoid it at all cost. I just avoid it. My younger sister. She is very domineering...She's a pushy dominant person". The relationship between her and her sister is challenging. Given her circumstances, opportunities for constructive dialogue do

not exist. With little hope for constructive dialogue, avoidance remains their main way of dealing with the conflict.

A form of avoidance includes postponement (Hocher & Wilmot, 2014), which Elizabeth encountered with her sister prior to their lawsuit over their parents' estate. When she would question her sister about important financial decisions, she would delay giving an answer, just replying "we'll see," when really she meant "no". This delayed conflict. After their mother passed, Elizabeth and her sister experienced tremendous conflict. Her sister could no longer delay the need to execute a decision on financial issues. The disagreements on money came to a head. This escalated to a lawsuit, and the two sisters no longer speak.

The *obliging* conflict style is associated with agreeing and giving in. Obliging "can reflect a position of 'I have no choice'. That power imbalance…harms ongoing relationship. (Hocher & Wilmot, 2014, p. 165). Axel's low power situation could be categorized as an obliging circumstance. This is reflected in the sense of helplessness he experienced. He questions, "What was I supposed to do?" and adds "I'm the one that got screwed" in response to his sister taking a far greater share of the inheritance and leaving him feeling overpowered. He felt that given his circumstances, obliging was his only option.

Hocher and Wilmot describe the *compromising* style as "an intermediate style resulting in some gains and some losses for each party. It is moderately assertive and cooperative (Hocher & Wilmot, p. 161). This often occurs when siblings are on the same page and involved in sharing power. Hocher and Wilmot note "if the other party is perceived as powerless, no compelling reason to compromise exists" (Hocher & Wilmot,

p. 161). This connects with Ethan's story. Ethan reminded himself that he wanted to continue to have a relationship with his sister, after she would lose her temper. He and his sister had joint power of attorneys over their mother's estate. They were able to get past the argument, continue to execute the tasks required in their POA, and maintain a good relationship. He emphasized how he wanted to have a relationship with his sister after the conflict was over, which was a powerful influence in his desire to compromise.

The *dominating* style is characterized by "aggressive and uncooperative behavior-pursuing your own concerns at the expense of another" (Hocher & Wilmot, p. 162). This is often accompanied the perspective of conflict being competitive, with little concern for the opinions of others. This style connects with the category on feelings – specifically empathy and understanding. Dominating styles of conflict illustrate aggressive pursuits of power, and can reduce all conflicts to two options…- either you are against me or with me (Hocher & Wilmot, p. 157)". Ramona and her sister may positively illustrate certain aspects of this style. Hocher & Wilmot suggest, "A dominating style is useful to show the other party how important an issue is to you…Competitiveness can be a sign of strength or commitment" (Hocher & Wimot, p. 157). Dominating styles are negative when each party gets too caught up in winning at any cost. While aggressive behavior is present, a potential positive for Ramona and her sister lies in their shared commitment to offering support to their mom.

Finally, the integrating style "shows a high level of concern for one's own goals, the goals of others, the successful solution of the problem, and the enhancement of the relationship" (Hocher & Wilmot, p. 168). Without forcing, he used clear communication, pursued mutual goals, and maintained strong sibling relationships.

Sub-Category - Competition

Codes from this category include descriptions of competitive behaviors in conflict. Participants described their situation and that of their sibling who they engaged in conflict. Codes include, "being the one that eats it," "being the one that got screwed," "sibling being domineering, pushy," "sibling talking down to us a little," "sister making digs," "[sister] driving over other people" and "other siblings 'say' not mattering. These fit with the dominating style of behavior, where a clear power struggle is enacted. They also fit overlap with the category on power. Other competitive codes connect with financial issues, including "being greedy and obnoxious," "disagreeing with sister over spending money," "charging sister money for being executor," and "keeping a list; charging sister for stamps [being punitive]".

In Elizabeth's conflict, much of the conflict appeared to be over money. Going deeper, the money disputes illustrated motives and goals. Elizabeth was interested in giving her dad the best care. Discussions illuminated how her sister had an interest in maintaining assets. This overlaps with the category on motives and goals in conflict. Deeper yet, this aspect of the dispute then emerged as a difference of beliefs and values. Elizbeth would become frustrated by her sister's perception of scarcity concerning their father's assets. In another story, she shared how she clashed with her sister over spending extra money on a plane ticket for a short flight to Florida. When she suggested they upgrade their dad to a first-class ticket, her sister declined. Elizabeth reasoned that in her father's advanced age, he would be more comfortable in a larger seat, and be able to board and depart more quickly. When her sister declined, she had no counter force, since

her sister controlled her parents' finance. Elizabeth bought the ticket for her dad with her own money.

Competitive behaviors also connected with upbringing. Participants shared how childhood rivalries were reignited during conflict. This was illustrated by codes such as, "parents comparing her to sibling," "youngest being the favorite sibling," "feeling sister experienced favoritism," and "mother fixating on other sibling after terrible divorce". This illustrated how participants associated their parents' influence as a contributing factor to sibling conflict.

On the surface the competitive behavior over money and upbringing had deeper implications. Thus, the competitive behaviors often overlapped with goals, motives, beliefs and values.

Sub-Category - Cooperation

Codes in this category described how participants worked together for caregiving tasks, often times, this indicated taking turns, dividing tasks and having consensus. Codes include "splitting things up," taking care of financial obligations," "getting away [for a break] when brother comes," "being included in decisions," "working together with no conflict," "learning from each other when making decisions," "having consensus," "being together on decisions," "taking turns visiting parents in hospital," "having a cooperative relationship," "having learned how to come together to try and work it out" and "working out pretty well".

One participant noted, "This [caregiving] could have only worked with lots of support," noting that working with siblings was the only way to meet the demanding job of caregiving. Listening to the interviews, cooperation connected with other categories.

Medical issues, legal issues, logistics, geography- all are relevant to the discussions on cooperation. In connection with expectations, these factors can be considered when making decisions and arrangements. This connected to the category on upbringing. Many siblings acknowledge their parents' role in raising them to get along. Roles and expectations also contributed to cooperative relationships, since having tasks divvied up reduced confusion. Power and financial issues also connected with the conflict; fighting over money and power was a common. However, when roles and arrangements clearly outlined the wishes of the parents, cooperation was more likely to take place.

Sub-Category - Tactics and Results

The category of tactics and results indicate specific patterns of engaging in conflict. These tactics and their results are explored for deeper analysis. They include patterns of engaging in conflict, such as fighting, defending, standing up for siblings, and teaming up. Codes include, "making a scene," "defending brother and sister in law," "having to pick up the ball and run with it," "always being conflict triangulation," "taking sides," "never giving in (in an argument)," "everybody siding against me," "taking the bull by the horns," "going back and forth with siblings on what to do," "hashing it out with siblings," and "[almost] coming to blows,".

In some instances, direct confrontation led to intense fighting. Participants described how loud arguments ensued. On occasion, a loud argument can sometimes help participants get things off their chest. Often, this was a destructive way to handle the conflict, and many relationships were strained as a result. This was especially true when fighting led to escalation and violence.

Other patterns involve siblings teaming up and forming alliances. This connects with power. Often, the sibling in low power will look for allies to offset the sibling in high power. On participant, Hannah, was able to use this tactic in a positive way. She explains that her brother is doing an excellent job as the primary caregiver to their father. However, if she and her brother have a minor disagreement, she goes to her sister-in-law. She maintains a great relationship with her sister-in-law and shared that she is just as close with her as she is with her brother. She explains "Sometimes I find it easier, that if I want to get my point across, (because he's sometimes stubborn) I go to my sister-in-law. And that helps a lot. So, I use my resources. I use my connections." Building allies can be done in a positive way to influence the balance of power in family dynamics. It can also have a negative impact when taking sides can cause retaliation and escalation.

Participants shared many patterns of engaging in conflict, including, sneaking/lying, and coping. These were met with positive and negative results. This includes codes like "checking out; absolving," "not speaking," "being done under my own nose," "trying to smooth the waters," "trying to set stuff aside," "not taking things personally," "not acting when siblings are disrespectful," "avoiding conflict when it will not help the situation," "avoiding involvement in conflict that 'doesn't make a difference'," "learning to step away in conflict," "taking mom and siblings out of my life," "conflict being 'I have to protect myself'," "freezing," "sister, 'retreating'," "shutting down while dealing with dad," and "coping by becoming a liar".

Ursula described how everyone has a different style of reacting to crisis. She explained that with her and her two sisters, they fit the "fight, flight and retreat" stress responses (Seltzer, 2015). She explained that when their dad got sick, her middle sister

faced the challenges head on. She moved in with her dad and did the majority of the daily caregiving tasks. Thus, her role was to 'fight' through the challenges. Her oldest sister froze. She took no part in daily caregiving. As noted in the category on occupation, her background was in accounting and financial planning. The result of her older sister "freezing" was a serious detriment to the relationship. For years, they were left feeling hurt that their sister left them with no help. Ursula was able to empathize with her sister when she learned how much it pained her oldest sister to see her dad age. She explained why her sister was not able to help, she explained "I - realistically, I know why. Emotionally, she can't sustain it. Emotionally and physically. She had psycho somatic responses to things...Moments of deep trauma and distress, her body will just shut down. And mentally she will shut down and then she has to heal her mind and heal her body get them both up and running…" This moment of insight illustrates how each sibling deals differently with the experience.

Ursula explained that she moved home to help with some of the caregiving tasks, but mostly her contribution was financial. She had a job which allowed her to travel and have a break from the difficult situation at the house. She self describes her situation as a "flight" since she was able to leave daily for work and escape the situation at home. These three responses highlight how common it is for siblings to have different ways of responding to crises related to their parents aging.

Participants noted a wide range of ways that they responded during the challenges of their parents aging. These various responses illustrate that each experience in conflict is different.

Sub-Category - Communication

In a comparison of all 25 key factors, communication appeared second in frequency after feelings. Communication was an essential part of sibling conflict. The communication patterns of participants illustrate several implications for analyzing sibling conflict.

Participants described examples of communication with their siblings. These included codes such as "siblings making suggestions," "saying 'no' [politely dissenting]" "reaching out to sister," "expressing how we feel," "keeping sister in the loop," "wanting to get things off chest," "talking to sister," "letting some of that stuff out," and "keeping line of communication open". These codes described communication in a collaborative relationship. They shared information and made suggestions about caregiving tasks. Participants references instances where they could safely disagree. Communication was involved listening to siblings and responding to caregiving needs.

Many participants shared how aggressive communication contributed to conflict. Participants described heated exchanges, insults, contempt, and threats. Codes included, "being nasty and abrupt," "starting to lash out over that," "mom blabbing to sister," "sister talking down to us a little," "sister making digs," "wanting to tell sister to give up trip," "wanting to tell my sister off," "being a lot of communication issues," "being many arguments and yelling," and "threatening to call the police". The aggressive communication indicated a forceful approach to pursue their goals. This communication was used by participants with the goal of getting their way or meeting their needs. For some, the aggressive communication led to hurt feelings, and severed relationships.

Some participants shared situations where they no longer speak to their siblings. This was described by codes "not speaking to brother because of situation," "not having contact with them in past few years," "cutting off communication for sanity," "not conversing between the four siblings," "rather not talk after what was," "stopped talking to me," "not speaking to my mother now," "nieces all stopped talking to me," "not speaking to me since," "maybe (not speaking) being better anyways," "not having contact with them in past few years," and "not speaking to siblings,". This was a common result. Of the thirty participants, seven participants described their current communications with siblings as limited; their relationship was severely strained. Four participants described how they had completely stopped speaking to siblings after the conflict.

Many participants described failed attempts to communicate with the siblings. They described factors that contributed to limited communication. Obstacles connected to factors such as culture and upbringing, where talking was uncommon. Carlee, one of the four participants who stopped communication with siblings explained how her upbringing and culture contributed to her current situation. She explained, "I didn't have a choice in my family growing up umm it was extremely dysfunctional so ideally it would have been a family…[where] we all got a say and we could communicate and talk about things…Because it's important to build that now umm but in my family growing up, like it's just 'do as you're told'". When interacting with her parents, she explained how communication that went against their wishes was interpreted as a threat.

Ursula described how communication with her siblings was strained throughout parts of her conflict experience. However, she and her sisters were able to work through the challenges by keeping focused on caregiving tasks. She acknowledges that direct

communication about some of the conflict would have just been too painful for her and her two sisters.

Ursula advised:

What helped for my middle sister, we were both committed to whatever needed to be worked out. "Like, 'I don't like you very much' [acknowledging anger at sisters], 'but I'm still gonna call insurance, get you the paperwork; appointments'. Because it must be done. I mean we'll get over it. We are never gonna have a healthy conversation about it but at least for the moment, we are never going to get stuff done. We did that for a year until our Dad passed. That was the very kind of destructive way that we dealt with conflict in the midst of caretaking."

She explained how the caregiving needs were still attended to, even when the relationships experienced tension. In some instances, the fighting prevents any tasks from being completed. Ursula and her sisters kept focused on caregiving even with a situation of limited communication. After her parents passed away, communication improved between her and her sisters. However, she still feels that direct communication about challenging issues still may not take place. She asserts:

You know, those conversations are just not gonna happened. [laughter]. I would love for us to get to the point where that happens, someday. We still have got a lot of life to live. We're still gonna have to do more forgiving in the future. I want us to gain those skills together. I don't know if we will, but to do that- we missed opportunities in the past to do it.

Ursula's acknowledges that communication can be more painful during certain parts of the conflict. After her parents had passed, tensions had subsided. The difficult

conversations still may not have taken place, but she explained that the outlook for communication had improved.

Summary and Conclusion

This chapter outlined the results of the study. It explained how the research was framed around the research questions. The chapter illustrated how the questions align with the study purpose of sharing information on the conflict experience to offer insight to future people who may find themselves in a similar situation and how greater understanding may help future generations respond to the experience. I share the details of the study's setting, the interview process and demographics of participants. I outlined how I collected data, analyzed my findings, and how I developed my grounded theory. I explained how the themes emerged from the codes and categories. The chapter ends with a write up of my 24 key factor that contributed to sibling conflict, where I share codes, quotes, and stories from participants.

In the next chapter, I share my analysis of these results. This highlights my interpretation of the findings, limitations, and implications. The chapter will explore the limitations of the study and offer recommendations on how this insight can be applied towards positive social change and greater understanding of the experience of sibling conflict.

Chapter 5 - Results

Introduction

The following chapter presents my results. I provide an analysis and an

interpretation of the key findings. I share conflict resolution insight and components of

emotional intelligence as recommendations for improving sibling relationships. My

analysis also covers limitations to the study and ideas for future research. I apply insight

on my findings to theories on birth order, power and psychodynamic theories. I share

implications for teaching and practice, exploring how this research makes an impact on

positive social change and a contribution to the conflict resolution field.

Analysis & Interpretations of Findings

The key findings of the study revealed feelings and emotions to be the primary

key factor in sibling conflict. This finding was significant. It is part of a larger discussion

on the role of feelings in sibling conflict, and the major research themes.

Throughout the analysis, feelings emerged as the most frequently discussed key

factor among participants. Coding revealed feelings and emotions as the top-ranking

category among all other factors. When exploring the key components of sibling conflict,

what really made a lasting impact was the way participants commented on how hurt

feelings contributed to the conflict.

Prior to research, I hypothesized that power and financial issues would be the

most influential key factors in sibling conflict. While these factors emerged as categories

with noteworthy significance, they were a part of deeper issues involving feelings. For

instance, sibling conflicts over a financial issue may appear to be a fight over money.

Digging beneath the surface, the disagreement over a decision on how to spend money

was less about finances, and more about how a participant felt hurt, disregarded, mistreated, or overpowered. Many conflicts presented as power struggles revealed deeper issues. What appeared to be conflict over power or money, was often more a human need to feel respected, heard and validated. The most contentious sibling conflicts were less about the actual content of the events, and more about the emotions that were experienced.

Analysis of my themes revealed that decision making often became a "triggering event". Conflict often emerged when it came time to make a caregiving arrangement. Power and financial decisions were common causes- along with medical decisions (nursing home placement), estate planning, and legal decisions. These triggering events are worthy of deeper exploration. I note that these events are often connected to values, beliefs, and motives.

In the context of feelings, Stone, Paton and Heen emphasize the challenges of recognizing feelings. "Feelings are more complex and nuanced than we usually imagine. What's more, feelings are very good at disguising themselves. Feelings we are uncomfortable with disguise themselves as emotions we are better able to handle, bundles of contradictory feelings masquerade as a single emotion; and most important feelings transform themselves into judgements, accusations, and attributions" (Stone et al., 2010, p. 21). These hidden feelings may often emerge in the form of blame and hostility towards siblings.

This idea is highlighted in Theme 4, where I note how the core beliefs of participants are often exposed in the conflict. As noted, a dispute over a medical decision or legal decision may ignite conflict for exposing motives or a ranking of values that may

not line up with their sibling's values. The feelings were useful for exploration. The

surfacing of core beliefs in conflict often exposed the participant's self-perception. These

triggering events may help understanding why these emotions are so difficult to

experience- this could be because these events often challenge deep rooted beliefs

participants hold about themselves. The nature of the conflict may lead participants to

question their identity and reflect on uncomfortable question about who they are.

As discussed by Heen, Stone and Patton, conflict can threaten one's identity.

They note, "…three identity issues seem particularly common, and often underlie what

concerns us most during difficult conversations: *Am I competent? Am I a good person?*

Am I worthy of love?" (Heen, Stone & Paton, 2014, p. 112). When exploring hidden

emotions and distorted feelings, the presence of these questions may be an additional

source of stress, adding complexity to the situation. These extend to "identity trigger"

questions, presented in the following Table 5.1.

Table 2

Core Beliefs & Common Identity Triggers in Sibling Conflict and Caregiving

Core Belief *Questions:*	Common Beliefs in Context of Sibling Conflict and Caregiving *Sub-questions:*
Am I a good person?	*Am I a good son or daughter?*
	Am I a good brother or sister?
	Am I doing a good job as a caregiver?
	Am I making the right decisions?
	Is this what Dad/Mom would have wanted?
Am I competent?	*Am I trustworthy with caregiving decisions/arrangements?* (With making medical decisions, estate issues, financial issues, planning issues?)
	Am I reliable?
	Am I knowledgeable?
	Are my suggestions for caregiving being taken seriously by my siblings?

	Are my concerns about Mom/Dad being heard? and acknowledged?
	Do I feel respected, heard, and acknowledged by my siblings?
	Do I feel respected, heard and acknowledged by my parents?
Am I worthy of love?	*Am I pulling my weight?*
	Am I doing enough?
	Do I feel guilt, shame? Why?
	Am I doing too much?
	Is my overcompensation a substitute for control?
	How do I handle feeling vulnerable/powerless?
	Is control in caregiving an attempt to make up for feelings of powerless/vulnerability?
	Were my motives really in the best interest of my parents? Was there some selfishness? Can I still like myself?
	What do my parents/siblings really think of me?

Self-Reflection on Beliefs

It requires courage to face these questions honestly. As advocated by Stone, Paton and Heen, it can be helpful for participants to take time to acknowledge feelings and self-reflect on the identity questions. Awareness of habits can be helpful. When confronted with difficult feelings and identity triggers, recognizing reaction habits may be useful. Exploring habits may illuminate important learnings and uncover important truths.

The self-reflection questions in the chart can help participants explore their own emotions. I note that this process is internal and requires no involvement with siblings, yet relationships may become enhanced simply by allowing participants to put to rest difficult feelings. Reflection may encourage participants to individually examine their beliefs and allow for greater acceptance of themselves as a good, competent, and worthy person.

Theoretical Implications

I used birth order theories of Alfred Adler and Kevin Leman, Peter Coleman's power theories and the psychodynamic theories of Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung and Erich

Fromm for my analysis. I share reflections on how my results compare with my findings.

I note the contribution that these three theories make to discussions on sibling conflict.

Birth Order Theories

In terms of significance, the birth order habits typical to first-born, middle-born

and last-born siblings were highly relevant to the conflict. The research revealed that

birth order was a key factor in the conflict. Many participants commented at length on

how their birth order had a lasting impact on their current identity. This fit with the birth

order habits in specific participants. Fiorella and Naomi, were both the oldest of their

siblings. Both shared that that they experienced an unspoken expectation that they take a

leadership role in caregiving, which was a significant part of their personal conflict

experience. Lachlan, Jada and Hunter, shared similar experiences of growing up as the

last born of their family, their families still saw them as the "baby" of the bunch. Tension

arose when they felt they were not taken seriously, or when their siblings perceived them

as unfit for a leadership role. Samuel and Carlee, both middle children, explained that

they fit the qualities of a middle child, being a peacemaker and negotiator. In Samuel's

case, this expectation was in alignment with how he wished to interact with his siblings.

He did not feel pressure from family to be a mediator. On the other hand, Carlee

experienced pressure to compromise in a way that caused damage to their relationship.

A common source of conflict occurred when siblings experienced a pull to revert

to familiar birth order roles. University of Miami nursing professor Victoria Mitrani notes

"When people are in crisis, they usually fall back on ways of behaving that feel familiar

to them, with one person doing everything" (Russo, 2010, p. 57). Siblings may revert to

the patterns of their childhood roles when reacting to their parents aging. This can create conflict when too much pressure is placed on oldest siblings.

Going back to old roles, was false sense of comfort for many. Falling back into old habits created false sense of expectations. Siblings are no longer the same person and family roles must adapt for healthy transitions. An awareness of these common conflict patterns may help future people in similar sibling conflict situations.

Power Theories

I acknowledge that power arose as a key factor in sibling conflict, yet power was not as prominent as I predicted. Prior to conducting research, I imagined that power over decisions and the POA (power of attorney) would be a root cause. I was surprised by the way several participants felt thankful for their siblings being appointed a power of attorney. Also, most of the participants stressed the importance of clarifying leadership roles prior to their parents decline. Prior to conducting research, Coleman's criteria for the basis of legitimate leadership came to mind, where leaders may be chosen based on their intelligence, wealth, legitimacy, and affection (Coleman, 2014). I predicted a power struggle with which sibling would be named a POA, based on these criteria.

While power and control issues did arise, the POA appeared to be less of an issue. I was surprised to learn in Ethan's case that both siblings carried out the role of POA together. They both had power of attorney documentation. His sister's control issue was that she was unable to convince her mom to move home and live near her, where she could have power over her daily life. Behind these control issues were unspoken emotional issues. Her real struggles were how she felt powerless over not being able to help her mom from out of state. And how uncomfortable she felt living in constant fear of

her mom having a major injury. She worried daily that her mom would fall or become ill. Not being present to help her mom caused her extreme stress, and this spilled over to her relationship with her brother. She would lash out at him with blame and anger. I note the way that these emotional issues may appear to be about power, when hurt feelings are more at the heart of the matter. Thus, the theories by Coleman were less relevant than I predicted.

In other instances, power struggles between the siblings were a direct cause of the conflict. The conflict between Elizabeth and her sister ended in a lawsuit. Yet, there was never an issue with the power of attorney over their parents. The dispute became contentious after their parents had passed. The lawsuit was over their parents' estate. Elizabeth explains how the items in the house, the assets and the property were a part of the conflict. But more importantly, she explains that the conflict was more about how her sister treated her. This included punitive behaviors such as making an issue over being reimbursed for a .50 cent postage stamp. She would also belittle her sisters' suggestions.

I imagined situations where siblings would use Coleman's insight to offset balance of power struggles. I pictured situations where only one sibling would have a power of attorney placing them in high-power over their other siblings. What I learned is that dynamics are complex. Both sisters shared power and cooperated prior to their parents' death. Elizabeth was in a leadership position for the medical decisions, and her sister complied with her recommendations. They worked cooperatively until their father passed.

It is possible that Elizbeth's sister may have perceived her sister to be more well-off financially, and less in need of money. Having spent more time with her dad, and

having a sister with more financial power, she may not have even perceived herself to have high power over her sister. Thus, identifying a clear party in high or low power can be difficult to identify. When Elizabeth's sister overpowered her to assume control over their parents' estate, it was rooted in many factors. Power alone does not sum up the multi-faceted motives, such as upbringing, prior unresolved rivalries, beliefs, values, feelings, and emotions.

Theories of Group Behavior

Prior to conducting interviews, I selected the theories of Alfred Bion on group dynamics. I predicted that this would be applicable in terms of authority, dependency and legitimacy in group leadership. I also thought that this would be a useful lens for understanding unconscious motivations of siblings. Bion's works are highly applicable to my research results. However, the way in which my research results yielded findings about hidden emotions was much better suited for analysis through the lens of psychodynamic theories of behavior, therefore I made a substitution for psychodynamic theories instead of group theories. I felt that discussions on hidden emotions were better understood using psychodynamic theories on defense mechanisms. I explain how these theories, namely the concepts of denial and displacement, apply to the conflict.

Psychodynamic Theories of Behavior

Psychodynamic theories of behavior and conflict was highly applicable to the hidden emotions in sibling conflict. Common patterns that emerged illustrated defense mechanisms, namely denial and displacement.

Denial was a common behavior pattern that played a role in sibling conflict. Carlee explained how challenging it was to make medical decisions for mom after she

had a stroke, when her siblings were in denial. She explains "I was trying to advocate for her to get the care and they were all in denial…It made me the bad one in the family, because I was just stating things for what they were and everybody was mad at me because of it." This was a significant obstacle to offering care. Carlee knew that after her mother's stroke, lifestyle changes and new arrangements were necessary. Her siblings' denial limited their ability to make plans. Moreover, her siblings were angry with Carlee. Raines notes "One chooses what one sees by ignoring evidence that possibly contradicts one's preferred vision of the world or of events" (Raines, 2013, p. 41). This helps explain why her siblings refused to acknowledge important truths about their mother's condition. It also may explain why they were so hostile when Carly brought the subject up for discussion. It is likely that the anger the felt towards Carly was because she threatened their defense mechanism, at a time when they were not able to face the truth of their mother's situation.

Displacement was another defense mechanism used by siblings in conflict. As referenced in Raines, Sandy, Boardman, and Deutsch describe displacement as "changing the topic to avoid dealing directly with a problem or acting upset about one issue when it is really a different issue that has caused one's upset" (Raines, 2013, p. 41). Lachlan shared how displacement over a minor conflict may mask deeper emotional issues. He comments on the hidden stress that often occurs, explaining "So, you're on edge to begin with, so you're not your normal self. So little things like, someone saying they will be there at five, and not getting there till ten to six, normally you wouldn't bat an eye, but when you're Mother and Father are lying in bed dying…you may end up snapping or snipping a little bit at each other."

Jada also pointed out similar frustrations with her siblings using displacement when important decisions needed to be made. Jada shared "OK after mom had the stroke, she was in the nursing home rehab. Everybody was going to be there. The intention was to map out how we were gonna give care to mom and dad. A couple days before that, my sister had a panic attack. Everyone knew the meeting was planned. The sister who lived in Florida, never came through to say, 'I don't think we should do this; cancel the meeting'. She didn't think it was fair for me to be having a meeting when the other sister had the panic attack. She had the panic attack because of her issues, not because of mom. The world didn't stop going around. Mom still needs care". Jada acknowledged multiple factors contributing to the stress of making a decision. However, it is likely her siblings used displacement because they were not ready to confront the painful reality of their mom's medical situation. Much to the frustration of Jada who was ready to make a plan, the siblings may have postponed the meeting for reasons unrelated to their sister's panic attack.

I feel that these psychodynamic theories make a strong contribution to discussions on sibling conflict. In terms of hidden motivations, these defense mechanisms offer explanations as to why behaviors and actions appear so erratic. This insight helps understand why emotions are so are so frequently distorted. These are useful lenses for exploring conflict because, denial, displacement and disassociation may severely limit cooperation among siblings when they are dealing internally with their own overwhelming emotions.

Russo advocates for sibling to make "an effort to understand what motivates us and them" (Russo, 2010, p. xv). She asks, "Are we overburdening ourselves with

caregiving because we feel guilty or needy? Are we avoiding involvement with an aging parent because it's too hard to face their mortality, and therefore our own? Are we watching a sibling struggle with the lion's share of responsibility because we're angry at our parent? Or because this sibling won't let anyone else help?" (Russo, p. xv). Reflections on the awareness of defense mechanisms offer insight in better understanding the complex behavior motives that are typical in sibling conflict.

Anxiety, shame and guilt are common emotions that many participants experienced throughout the process of caregiving for an aging parent. I feel that the theory is highly useful for better understanding the sometime illogical and erratic behaviors that commonly emerge in sibling conflict. The theory is highly applicable because it emphasizes how powerful feelings are in influencing behavioral responses. It also offers a relevant explanation for the role of underlying emotional factors in conflict.

Recognizing the role of defense mechanisms may help siblings become more aware of their own behavior patterns and their impact on their siblings. This awareness may encourage people to become more aware of their own feelings. Awareness of these common scenarios may prevent defense mechanisms from hindering caregiving arrangements. It may also foster greater compassion for siblings when acknowledging the hidden struggles, they may have with processing their emotions during this challenging time.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations to the study include variation among interview collection methods. Prior to March 2020 during the onset of the first COVID-19 lockdowns, I conducted several in person interviews. From March to June 2020, opportunities to meet in person

were limited, and I used Zoom for remote interviews. I note that using one data collection method would have been idea to keep consistency. I also note that personal rapport is likely to be enhanced in situations where people meet face to face. In general, I recognize the way that meeting in person is a more ideal interview setting, that is more conducive to gathering rich data. Although I feel that I was able to collect excellent information from participants via Zoom, I note inconsistencies that could be present with multiple data collection methods.

I also note that recruitment for participants was altered by the COVID-19 lockdown. My initial plan was to recruit participants by visiting senior centers, medical facilities and rehabilitation centers. My goal was to locate venues where seniors were likely to be present with their adult children to share my flyer. I also imagined visiting in person to meet prospective participants in person, introducing myself and asking strangers to volunteer for interview. Visiting these facilities in person would have been impossible with lockdown policies. Instead, I was able to gather more of a convenience sample (Creswell, 2013) that came straight from my social network. I was also able to use social media to share a video, where I introduce myself, the purpose of my study and invite participants to contact me at their convenience. I shared the video in an NSU Conflict Resolution Community Facebook page. My recruitment process took on characteristics of a snowball sample, (Creswell, 2018) since participants were eager to recommend friends or acquaintances to participate. I recognize that this as a limitation since some people in my social network may be more familiar with conflict resolution as an academic discipline. They may be more likely approach ideas with a similar focus and emphasize conflict resolution practices to share common interests. It could be the case

that their stories were shared using a conflict resolution lens, which may or may not have reflected their actual experience. Given the restrictions of COVID-19, I had to be flexible. However, I note that the study could be revisited and adjusted by adding more participants who were outside of my social network.

I was pleased to have gathered participants from a wide variety of diverse backgrounds. My participants included participants of various genders, religious backgrounds, social class and geographic locations. While participants were from upper class, middle class and working-class families, I note that no participant was in extreme poverty. I note that these circumstances are likely have a different impact on caregiving for aging parents and sibling conflict. I acknowledge this as a limitation.

This made me curious about exploring certain factors exclusively, such as social class and sibling conflict to learn more about the variation among upper class, middle class, working class and participants who live in poverty. This could look specifically at how financial stress impacts the conflict. The results of my study point to emotional factors as a key factor—more so than finances. It is worth investigating questions such as 'to what degree, if any, do economic factors influence the conflict?' among families of diverse financial backgrounds. I note that lawsuits over money and estate issues occurred in each economic group among my study.

I also acknowledge the fact that feelings are likely to vary during the multiple stages of the conflict. For instance, Elizabeth and her sister only experienced contentious conflict after their siblings had passed. For other participants, relationships were on the mend after their parents passed. This indicates the potential variation in experience that results from different stages in the conflict timeline. This generates new questions for

exploration. I would be curious to see if significant events, such as nursing home placement, correlate with higher instances of conflict. Mapping the conflict in a timeline could be a useful tool for observing fluctuations in conflict intensity.

A final limitation acknowledges inaccuracies with hidden feelings and emotions. While I note the way that hidden emotions surface in sibling conflict, these emotions are complex. When sharing examples of defense mechanisms of denial, displacement, and disassociation, I note that this may fit in with how a participant viewed their reality. Participants could be oblivious to instances where they glamorize their involvement in the conflict to maintain a positive view of themselves. It is possible that participants minimized their mistakes and exaggerated the actions of their siblings. Social psychologists Carol Tavris and Elliott Aronson offer insight on how cognitive dissonance plays a role in self-justification of hurtful acts. Tavris and Aronson define cognitive dissonance as "a state of tension that occurs whenever a person holds two cognitions (ideas, attitudes, beliefs, opinions) that are psychologically inconsistent…" (Tavris & Aronson, 2015, p. 15). Tavris and Aronson characterize cognitive dissonance as "the engine that drives self-justification, the energy that produces the need to justify our actions and decisions—especially the wrong ones…" (Tavris & Aronson, 2015, p. 15). I described how behaviors can often become distorted, and I shared examples where the stories of participants illustrate defense mechanisms. These stories are prone to inaccuracies. Their opposing sibling may have acted from completely different motives. Siblings may have a wide range of other circumstances that influenced their behavior. Also, participant may have shared accounts of their siblings were distorted by memory. As a researcher I note that even though subjects shared their take on their experience,

their reality may contain inaccuracies and distortions. I acknowledge these ontological and epistemological limitations are present when considering multiple realities (Charmaz, 2010) among siblings.

Implications for Future Research

Addressing the limitations of the study helps to offers considerations for future research. For instance, this research could be replicated in a case study format to examine key economic factors exclusively. A research design from this study would emphasize how the financial background of participants influences their conflict experience. It could draw an even number of participants from upper class, middle class, working class and poor families. It could highlight the experience of participants who come from poverty to contrast differences among social class.

The study also made me curious about the experience of sibling conflict in other countries. Future research could include a case study in three different locations to compare the experience among participants from different cultures. I would be interested in exploring how this phenomenon is experienced in countries with a long-life expectancy, such as Japan, Italy and Sweden. Given the long life expectancy, I would question what factors contribute to this, and how this may (or may not) connect to conflict? I would be interested in observing how these countries provide care for their seniors and how other countries can learn from each other. Perhaps these three countries could be compared to results from the American participants to explore cultural influences. I would be interested to see how key factors such as birth order, gender expectations, feelings, religious beliefs, social-political policies, and upbringing vary from country to country.

Finally, I consider the possibility of enhancing the current study by adding interviews from participants siblings, to include their perspectives. When participants shared stories of events, details, and feelings, they did so from their own perspective. I note the likelihood for variation in interpretations. Siblings would recall their siblings' behaviors and responses in contentious conflicts- often, they shared an interpretation of their siblings' motives. I am curious to hear more on these topics from the perspective of opposing siblings. I note that the opposing siblings may hold different beliefs, feelings, expectations, and motives for how and why they responded as they did. I would be curious learn how they reflect on their upbringing, their birth order expectations, and their personal traits. This type of study could reflect the different ways siblings experience the conflict. Participants may have ideas about the complex motives of their siblings. Often, these observations are wrong. This type of research could surface hidden key factors that were previously unknown to siblings. I feel that this could offer useful insight for better understanding sibling conflict from multiple perspectives.

Recommendations

I offer several recommendations on how the results of this study can improve the way people approach this conflict. My recommendations explain how emotional intelligence can be used as a tool to reduce conflict. I reference examples of how participants used components of emotional intelligence such as self-awareness, self-management, social skills and relationship management to improve their conflict outcomes. I introduce conflict resolution skills such as reflective listening, interest-based problem solving, and assertion, to improve outcomes. I also emphasize how personal reflection can be used to help people be more aware key factors in sibling conflict. I offer

a vision of how these recommendations may be applied to sibling conflict to improve decision making, manage relationships and better understand complex motives.

Emotional Intelligence

As referenced in Cherniss, Peter Salovey and John D. Mayer, describe emotional intelligence as "a form of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions" (Cherniss, 2000, p. 4). In addition to personal reflections, I advocate for participants to use emotional intelligence when engaging with their siblings. I recommend they apply components of emotional intelligence such as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management as a recommendation for resolving and managing sibling conflict.

Self-Awareness

In the context of emotional intelligence, self-awareness refers to the degree to which people are aware of their impact. Being self-aware would refer to knowing how they are being perceived by their counterpart. This includes how cognizant a person is of how their counterpart sees them. For instance, a self-aware person knows when they are coming off as aggressively and can pick up on cues that they are being received negatively.

One participant, Imani is highly in tune with how her siblings hear her feedback. She expressed how she feels that bulk of the responsibilities are constantly dropped in her lap for caregiving. A common topic is asking her siblings for more help and support. At times, she has to ask for more money from them. When she communicates with her six siblings, she is so careful to avoid making them feel like they are not doing enough.

Keeping this in mind, she shares updates to ask siblings what they can do as a team effort, to care for their mom. She presents the situation with clarity and makes her siblings team-mates in problem solving. By constantly being in tune with how her siblings may hear requests for more money, she is able to keep communication gentle and effective.

Ursula points out that stress of from the caregiving situation can be an obstacle to self-awareness. Siblings can be so focused on their own issues, it may hinder their ability to consider their siblings feelings, and they may be less likely to notice how they are being received by their sibling. She characterizes sibling conflict as a time when self-awareness may be obscured. She described her thoughts on the subject, stating "There is a high level of self-awareness in that most people- they don't operate [from]. And even a higher call. When you are doubled over in grief that you did not anticipate. We were anticipating my dad. Zero anticipation for my Mom, and my mom came first. So, in that context, imagine being in that position and you are gonna start [working with siblings]. And the best you can do is survive." From this perspective it is easy to see why seemingly easy communication can be hindered when siblings are so absorbed in their own issues.

Self-Management

The concept of self-management refers to how well a person can regulate their emotions during conflict. This includes how a person responds to their emotions when triggered. It involves knowing when to react or when to handle an issue internally.

Naomi used self-management to control her reaction to her brother's triggering remarks. She recalls, "There times when I did wonder. Are they expecting too much of

me? Once when there was a funeral service, (in Florida where she and mom lived) and part of the family was flying to Jamaica, and my eldest brother he said to me- this was the night after we had the funeral service here. OK, so you coming to take care of things here in Jamaica? [asking for her to plan another funeral] And I thought that was selfish. I was going to react and respond. Because of how I felt in the moment. But again, because of my training. I calmed myself. I recognized that emotionally he was not able to handle what I was able to handle." After having taken the lead in caregiving for her mother who was dying of cancer, then after making the hard work of planning and arranging the funeral in Florida, her brother's question suggested an expectation for her to oversee a second funeral gathering for their international family members in Jamaica too. Had Naomi reacted, a fight may have ensued. Her ability to find calmness when triggered indicate adept self-management skills.

Using emotional intelligence when managing emotions involves knowing when to raise concern and when let things go. Another participant, Molly explained how she was able to identify conflicts that were not worth her involvement. She shared "I think there was a big issue when picking out the casket for my mother. And the owners of the funeral home came to our house. And my Aunt came in to the room where I was sitting, and was like 'you should be in there helping them make decisions' and I was like 'is it going to make a difference?' Is it going to bring my mom back or change her condition? And they said no. And the next day after they thought about it, they had to go back, because it turns out they picked out the wrong color for mom. And I said, 'OMG you gave her that!'. [Laughing]. I mean, if its not going to help the situation, why get nervous or aggravated about it."

Molly was able to manage emotions by reframing the casket issue as less significant. In other instances, decisions are highly significant, making self-management even more of a challenge. Hunter was able to use self-management to avoid tempers flaring when disputes arose over medical decisions. After doing research on how to help his father's infection, he decided to give his dad a garlic capsule. His siblings vehemently protested. He recalls "I got so much flack for that!" He shared that his siblings made him feel as if he was "the young dumb one" being the youngest brother who had no college education, and no medical training. He managed his emotions, stating "I'm not going to be insulted by it. By your thoughts on my lack of education. So, I was used to it". He knew not to let the opinions of his siblings distort his confidence in offering relevant suggestions that may help his parents. He also knew better than to allow his siblings to dismiss his ideas. He explained that following that incident, he was angry, and he shared his frustrations with his siblings. They were able to reach an agreement. He was able to manage emotions in way that shared his hurt feelings. He had to raise the issue in a way that would get through to his siblings. He shared his angry feelings, yet he used discretion. He did so without exploding on his siblings or damaging relationships.

Using self-management often involves skills for knowing what issues are worth pressing and having a sense for how to approach their counterpart. Naomi reflects on her experience, noting "When you are peacemaker, you may avoid the external conflict, but it causes you to have a lot of conflict actually. But there are some conflicts that I chose to avoid, and it causes internal conflict." In the context of emotional intelligence, she advises "At a sensitive time, when you are taking care of a loved one. Especially a parent. I think it would be helpful if we try to put ourselves out of the picture and focus more on

the person who is dying- who is bound to have a lot of conflicting emotions and try not to add any negativity to that experience." This may offer guidance to participants. As Ethan, a participant who struggled with his sister, recalled, "You have to keep the end in sight". He shared how he wanted to "tell his sister off" so many times, but also knew that he wanted to have a relationship with his sister after the experience was over. Re-focusing on the long-term goals, and the importance of relationships offers useful insight to self-management during sibling conflict.

Social-Awareness

While self-awareness examines the degree to which a person is aware of themselves, social awareness examines how well a person is in tune with the emotions of others. Social awareness, also referred to as social skills, pertains to how well a person can read the room- or analyze the mood of a setting and act accordingly. It pertains to how well a person addresses and responds to other people's feelings. Lachlan's comments illustrate this concept. An example of how he was able to read the room took place when he and his siblings were gathered in their dad's hospital room, a setting where heightened emotions were present. He observed, "You look at your brother and sister crying, and you realize that last thing they need is you being a jerk. You know they are just as upset as you are it's not just you." A component of social skills involves empathy. A sense of compassion for siblings sprung forth naturally for Lachlan, who wanted to be considerate to the emotional needs of his siblings.

Lachlan points out how common it is for people to become consumed by their own feelings during this time. Grief and stress can be overwhelming. He advises for people to remain aware of other people's feelings. He recalls, "When someone dies.

You're not even sure what's going on. So I don't know, be aware of other people's stress. Know that it's not just you. Sometimes you think you're the only one who has this loss." This awareness of other peoples' emotions sheds light on compassion and empathy as important factors in applying social skills.

Relationship Management

Relationship management refers to how well a person manages their relationship with others. It explores how they influence others and make an impact. It applies to the person's ability to make others change, help them come to realizations, and resolve conflict.

Bernard, a participant from a family of 18 siblings, illustrates relationship management skills in how he deals with his brothers. He explained that his two older brothers have a power of attorney. He explained, "I am not [POA]...well I don't say anything with the decision they make. If I don't like the decision, I will say something. And I will always say, that's the decision ya'll make. If it goes south, they will have to suffer that consequence. That's not on the family, that's on you" Earlier, he noted, "You have to cooperate! *Because that's Mom*!" He is able to inform his siblings of consequences that may harm them. His ability to manage relationship with his siblings may connect to the strong rapport he shares with them.

Bernard's relationship management connects with the advice of negotiation expert William Ury. Ury states "Instead of using power to bring your opponent to his knees, use it to bring him to his senses" (Ury, 1991, p. 113). Bernard appears to have done that in communications with his siblings. Rather than protesting and making threats, he points out how the decisions of his siblings will impact everyone.

Bernard does not have the power of attorney, but he is successful in collaborating with the two siblings who do have the POA. As referenced by Fisher and Ury, Sun Tzu, recommends the advice "build your enemy a golden bridge which to retreat across" (Fisher & Ury, 1981, p. 100). This advice applies to his approach. When confronting conflict, he keeps the focus on how these decisions will impact his mom and all other siblings.

He accredits the rapport with his parents' upbringing "They raised us a unit to be together as one." Similar to the conflict resolution insight from Stone, Paton and Heen, he makes his siblings allies in joint problem solving, rather than an opponent. (Stone, Paton, & Heen, 2010).

Self-awareness, self-management, social skills and relationship management, may all be useful tools for reducing conflict. Pavel Mischenko, business speaker and counselor, explains how "The BOTH model" (Mischenko, 2018, p. 1) or the *Birth Order Typical Habits* model can enhance one's emotional intelligence. He explains that the model creates a "road map" (Mischenko, 2018, p. 1) for understanding habits, strengths, and blind spots (Mischenko, 2018). He explains how an awareness of birth order may be used to improve the capacity for using the four components of emotional intelligence. His article highlights how mindfulness practices may be especially useful tools for improving self-awareness on typical habits. In particular, he notes how mindful meditation can be used to access one's core self (Mischenko, 2018). This is highly useful for reducing conflict with siblings through greater consideration to personal habits derived from birth order. Mischenko also argues that this awareness may be offer insight on "how to control 'old' habits and develop 'new' more effective ones" (Mischenko, 2018, p. 1). This

illustrates how siblings may use personal reflection to gain improved self-management and relationship-management.

Conflict Resolution Skill Set: Teaching and Practice

      Reflective Listening. According to Katz, Lawyer and Sweedler "Reflective listening is a special type of listening that involves paying respectful attention to the content and feelings expressed in another's communication, hearing and understanding, and then letting the other know that he is being heard and understood. It requires responding actively to another while keeping the focus of your attention totally on that person" (Katz, Lawyer, & Sweedler, 2013, p. 18). I emphasize the importance of using this skill, because listening allows siblings to gather spoken and unspoken messages. Giving time to listen to siblings meets a human need to be heard and acknowledged. More importantly, it gives an opportunity for siblings to express how they feel.

      Stone, Paton and Heen stress the importance of acknowledging feelings in a difficult conversation with siblings, reminding participants "sometimes feelings are all that matter" (Stone, Paton & Heen, 2010, p. 107). Stone, Paton and Heen emphasize the importance of simply acknowledging feelings. They explain, "It means letting the other person know that what they have said has made an impression on you, that their feelings matter to you, and that you are working to understand them" (Stone, Paton & Heen, 2010, p. 106). This type of listening also allows for goals to be clarified to avoid misunderstandings. It also allows for interests and needs to surface as a listener gathers information (Lewicki, 2016).

      Listening may begin with statements that acknowledge that they are hearing both the content and feelings of their siblings. Katz, Lawyer and Sweedler recommend using

"door openers" (Katz, Lawyer & Sweedler, 2011, p. 17), statements that "invite the other

to talk, either stating or implying that you are able and willing to take time to listen"

(Katz, Lawyer & Sweedler, 2011, p. 17). These may include statements such as "You

seem upset…" (Katz, Lawyer & Sweedler, p. 17) which may help open a discussion on

feelings. Participants may then reflect-back to their siblings, what they are hearing, to

show that they hear and understand. Siblings may also choose to offer validation. It

simply recognizes emotions, without condemning, blaming or problem solving. This can

be a powerful step in creating rapport between siblings. This may facilitate

communication between siblings and lead to joint problem solving. Keeping in mind how

overwhelming and stressful the situation of caregiving for an aging parent may be, this

type of listening sheds light on the emotions their siblings may be experiencing- thus it

may help siblings find a way to communicate more gently.

Interest-Based Problem Solving

In interest-based problem solving, parties approach the problem cooperatively

rather than competitively. This negotiation tactic applies to sibling conflict and can help

empower siblings to collaborate on solving problems by focusing on their interests and

letting go of deeply held positions. Lewicki characterizes interest-based negotiation,

which "allows both sides to achieve their objectives," (Lewicki, 2016, p. 60). They note,

"one party's gain is not at the other party's expense" (Lewicki, 2016, p. 60). This

approach recognizes the potential for win-win solutions and uses tactics to re-frame the

conflict in a way that is mutually beneficial to both parties.

Siblings may recognize mutual benefits in working together when they share

common caregiving goals. Lewicki explains, "When parties believe they are likely to

benefit more from working together than from competing or working separately, the situation offers greater potential for successful integrative negotiation" (Lewicki, 2016, p 81). When considering the context of conflict while caregiving for an aging parent, siblings may find several common goals. These may include wanting to make their parents as comfortable, happy and healthy as possible in their final years. It may be wanting to make the best medical, legal and financial decisions. Common goals may include offering support and love. Revisiting common goals through interest-based negotiation may help promote unity among siblings. Conflict may be reduced with the shared understanding that these goals are more achievable through adherence to an interest-based approach.

Building on prior reflective listening skills, I would advocate for the parties to share information, since effective communication allows for interest to surface. This type of listening helps establish rapport and build trust. Creative solutions often emerge when participants are engaged in mutual problem solving and when information can be shared freely. Listening also helps create an opportunity for siblings to establish a ZOPA or "Zone of Possible Agreements" (Lewicki, p.22, 2016) This is useful in an integrative negotiation to let each sibling know what is on or off of the table for negotiation.

Another tactic I would rely on during the information sharing stage includes identifying a BATNA or "Best Alternative to Negotiated Agreement" (Lewicki, 2015, p. 30). Lewicki notes that "alternatives are important because they give negotiators the power to walk away from any negotiation when the emerging deal is not very good" (Lewicki, p. 32). In the case of sibling conflict, the alternatives to not reaching an agreement are likely come with high consequences. For instance, not reaching an

agreement may result in compromised care for parents or a fractured family. Keeping at

BATNA in mind may be useful for restoring unity among siblings.

Assertion

It is likely that siblings will encounter many situations where they become

frustrated with their siblings' responses when trying to work collaboratively on

caregiving. Assertion is a way to address these challenges.

Siblings may encounter common reactions such as solving, evaluating/judging or

withdrawing (Katz, Lawyer & Sweedler, 2011). Katz, Lawyer and Sweedler identify

common reactive responses. "Solving is sidetracking the other person's communication

by moving right away to a solution" (Katz, Lawyer & Sweedler, 2011, p. 45) Siblings

may make common mistakes such as trying to solve their siblings problems *for* them

instead of approaching these issues collaboratively. They may order their sibling around,

threaten them, advise/moralize and question motives and facts. They may use an

evaluating/judging response which includes disagreeing, diagnosing, criticizing, and

blaming. Or siblings may engage in withdrawing responses by diverting or reassuring

(Katz, Lawyer & Sweedler, 2011). When encountering pushback from these reactive

responses, several assertion tactics are useful for managing conflict.

Assertion "is essentially expressing yourself to stand up for your own human

rights without infringing on the human rights of others. It is expressing your thoughts,

feelings, opinions and beliefs to another to achieve your outcomes without infringing on

another, damaging your relationship with the other, or injuring his or her self-esteem"

(Katz, Lawyer & Sweedler, p. 48). Assertion involves how one goes about getting needs

met, to influence their siblings to modify their behavior. It can be a useful tool for setting

boundaries with siblings in a way that is firm and fair. Being assertive on boundaries can inform siblings of important limitations. Setting clear limits may prevent future conflicts. It offers a way for siblings to know where you stand on certain behaviors or arrangements. Assertion and re-assertion may be a way to communicate your stance on an issue without wavering. Using assertion to articulate healthy boundaries can be an empowering step in fostering healthy, respectful sibling relationships.

Katz, Lawyer and Sweedler offer guidelines for assertion skill practice. They recommend to "focus on the feelings first" (Katz, Lawyer & Sweedler, 2011, p. 76) when sharing a message. I feel that this is highly relevant in sibling conflict where feelings are of high significance. This can be applied to communication with siblings by using what Katz, Lawyer and Sweedler describe as a "three-part assertion message" (Katz, Lawyer, Sweedler, 2011, p. 56) which usually fits the following sentence formation:

Three-Part Assertion:

"When you_____ I feel _____ because_____."
(Katz, Lawyer, Sweedler, p. 56)

This statement can be created to bring a difficult message to the attention of a sibling. It can be used to notify them of a behavior pattern that is problematic, how you feel about their behavior and the negative way it is impacting you. These three-part assertions can express a negative behavior, or it may offer affirmation for a positive behavior.

Example 1: When you re-scheduled the family meeting about Mom's caregiving arrangements, I felt frustrated, because it interfered with my holiday schedule.

Example 2: When you stayed past 10 PM at the house to visit Dad and I, I felt exhausted, because I had a long day, and I wanted to go to sleep.

Example 3: When you streamline mom and dad's doctors' appointments, I feel thankful, because it makes planning these visits so much easier.

Delivering assertion messages requires consideration. Using these messages helps communicate feelings without attacking, blaming or criticizing which may escalate a conflict. Also, using these feeling centered approaches may help in *creating pull* instead of pushing (Lewicki, 2015). This can be accomplished by reframing an issue that aligns with a sibling's interests. This reflects Sun Tzu's advice of building "your enemy a golden bridge from which to retreat across" (Ury, 1991, p. 24). Rather than overpowering siblings, the approach is an invitation to problem-solving solutions that are beneficial to both parties. This avoids the pitfalls of pushing siblings or forcing them against their will. Assertion can be used as an incentive to draw siblings towards a desired outcome. Using this conflict resolution skill may help re-direct time and energy to keep a focus on problem solving and common interests thus maintaining sibling relationships.

Personal Reflection

I believe that one of the most powerful tools for improving sibling conflict would be for people to make in-depth personal reflections. I recommend for them to use the insight from theory and application to better understand themselves. In the process of making sense of how and why one personally responds to conflict, I would then use these self-reflection techniques for gaining a greater understanding of siblings and how they may be experiencing the conflict.

Reflections on the key factors mentioned in sibling conflict could be an initial way to begin the process. For details on these 24 key factors, see Chapter 4, Table 4.2 *Key Factors of Sibling Conflict and Caregiving for Aging Parents: Beliefs, Roles, Feelings, Emotions and Responses.* This is a useful step to acknowledge the ways that various key factors influence conflict. I would advocate for people to use the hierarchy of contingency to explore the relationship among the main category key factors: behaviors & responses, feelings & emotions, roles & expectations and beliefs and values. Using the theory as tool may be helpful for tracing the source of issues. For instance, when considering a particular response that occurred in the conflict, it is possible to use the theory to examine the responses that emerged from feelings, and how roles and expectations made an impact. Participants can use this as a tool to question their expectations. They may re-consider what they want from a sibling relationship and clarify their expectations. At the core of the issue, reflections on values can help re-center caregiving goals. This can be used as a tool when making decisions. It may also help to expose limiting beliefs that are no longer serving a purpose. Reflections can help people let go of these beliefs. Shedding these limiting beliefs may lead a person to breakthrough moments of understanding and healing.

I would advise for people to be aware of hidden emotions and triggering events, which were mentioned in my research themes. This helps people become more aware of how conflicts commonly flare-up when decisions and arrangements must be made. It also highlights the presence of hidden emotions that may surface in the conflict. It alerts people of common challenges that coincide with decision making and arrangements. This may encourage people to reflect on what triggers them and why. From self-reflection on

personal triggers, people may then try to learn about their siblings' trigger points. Exploring questions about core beliefs and identity may be a guide to better understanding feelings. For questions to guide the reflection process, see *Table 5.1 Core Beliefs & Common Identity Triggers in Sibling Conflict and Caregiving*. Reflections may offer reassurance of the core beliefs that they hold about themselves allowing for greater self-acceptance and self-love.

Personal reflections can be enhanced with insight from birth order, power and psychodynamic theories. These theories help offer explanations on the root causes of conflict. For instance, the birth order theory may help participants understand how they acquired their character traits and why these traits may be contributing to conflict. Understanding the experiences of others may allow for greater compassion and empathy to arise. When considering the defense mechanisms of psychodynamic theories, it may become evident that a sibling illustrates patterns of denial, displacement or disassociation. Knowing that these behaviors emerge as protection from overwhelming situations may make people privy to their sibling's emotions. Because of this, they may choose to be gentler in their interactions. Reflections on this theory may also empower a person to identify their own use of defense mechanisms and face uncomfortable truths with greater courage.

When caught up in overwhelming feelings it can become easy to forget about how this situation may be impacting siblings. The insight on emotional intelligence helps participants focus on their self-awareness, social awareness, relationship management, and social skills with greater consideration on how they influence others. Using emotional intelligence insight can encourage people to make a more heart-centered

approach in sibling conflict with less of a focus on logic and a greater concern for feelings. Personal reflection may help enhance conflict resolution skills such as listening, interest-based problem solving and assertion with greater concern for how their sibling is responding to their efforts. Reflecting on these application skills may improve a person's ability to improve their influence on their siblings and better manage conflict.

Conclusion

As I reflect on the results of my study, I observe how relevant this research is during the present time of social, political, health and ecologic crisis. The research calls attention to complex, inter-connected nature of this conflict, and it highlights need for social change. I am hopeful that the key factors of this grounded theory can help expose new ways of understanding this conflict that better serve human needs.

As a society there is a need to for improvement for how we respond to sibling conflict during this difficult transition for aging parents. I feel that my grounded theory improves the way people approach this conflict with greater awareness of the complex emotions and personal challenges that are commonly experienced.

Participants shared how their caregiving experience was a lesson in navigating uncertainty. They shared how confused they felt when trying to make medical decisions and arrangements for their parents. They explained the common challenges they experienced when making difficult decisions. They discussed how they managed stressed and coped with hurt feelings from their siblings. Each participant offered new insight that helped me come to understand this conflict in a new light.

I gained a better understanding of the key factors that led to their conflict, with consideration on how to revisit these conflicts for an improved outcome. I am grateful to

them for sharing their wisdom with me. I hope that other are able connect with the stories of the participants in ways that may open them up to new possibilities.

I am hopeful that conflict resolution skills can help people respond to this conflict with a more emotionally intelligent, compassionate, empathetic approach. I believe that knowledge of theories and in-depth personal reflections can help people be more mindful of the hidden feelings that are commonly experienced. I feel this can help enhance communication, to allow for more creative solutions, and improved relationships. I am confident that this research contributes to the field as useful insight for academics and practitioners. I am convinced that this insight can help transform our approaches to sibling conflict- to improve sibling relationships and enhance our capacity for collaborative caregiving.

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Appendix A: Interview Questionnaire

Required Criteria Questions:

Do you currently reside in the United States? YES _____ NO _____
Do you have at least one sibling? YES _____ NO _____

Are you currently in the process of giving care to an aging parent? YES _____ NO _____

(OR) Have you experienced the process of giving care to an aging parent? YES_____ NO _____

Background Questions:

1. Name:

   _____

2. Phone/Email
   Address:_____
3. Number of Siblings:_____
4. What is your birth order? (First Born, Middle Born,
   Youngest)_____
5. What is your
   occupation?_____

MAIN INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

6. What has been your experience of caregiving for your aging parents?
7. What do you feel are key factors that lie at the root of sibling conflict during the caregiving process for your aging parent(s)?
8. How do you manage conflict with your siblings?
9. What has/has not worked from your perspective?
10. In your opinion, what would be an ideal sibling relationship during this process? What key factors would help in establishing this?
11. What caregiving decisions/arrangements do you feel would be ideal for your parents?

Follow Up Questions:

12. How far do you live from your parents? How far do your siblings live from your parents?_____
    _____
    _____
13. Do you or your siblings currently have a power of attorney over your parents? (Y/N, plus please indicate who has POA)_____
    _____
    _____

14. If so, what has been your experience with the POA? Or what has been your experience with your siblings appointment of POA?_____
_____
_____

15. Please feel free to comment on any concerns for your parents: medical concerns, financial concerns and legal issues and how they may contribute to sibling conflict.

_____
_____
_____

16. Is there anything important that you feel that you want to share regarding this topic?_____
_____
_____

Appendix B: Flyer for Recruiting Participants

PARTICIPANTS

WANTED

Research Study on: SIBLING CONFLICT AND CAREGIVING FOR AGING PARENTS

Participants must reside in Broward County, have at least one sibling and be able to talk about their experience of sibling conflict during the process of providing care to one or both parent(s). Must also be able to meet for an informal interview.

If interested please contact Jennifer Lawer, Researcher (724) 840-0440 jl2380@mynsu.nova.edu