Sibling Relationships in First-Year College Students: Family System Predictors and Psychological Well-being Outcomes

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Abstract
The current study assessed the predictors and outcomes of sibling relationships in a sample of 432 college students. Positive associations were found between parental marital satisfaction and sibling closeness and between sibling warmth and life-satisfaction. Sibling communication was found to mediate the relationship between parental marital satisfaction and sibling closeness.

Introduction
The limited work available on sibling relationships has primarily investigated these relationships in childhood, adolescence, and older adulthood (Milevsky, 2011). When considering this breach in the literature, in the context of recent studies suggesting that sibling relationship warmth is associated with multiple positive well-being outcomes throughout the entire lifespan (Avioli, 1989; Milevsky, 2008), it is evident that studies examining the predictors and outcomes of sibling relationships in emerging adulthood should be undertaken.

More specifically, in line with systems driven approaches to the study of development (Levitt, Guacci-Franco, & Levitt, 1994; Magnusson & Stattin, 1998), the current study assessed the family system factors associated with positive sibling relationships, and the outcomes linked with sibling relationship warmth, in emerging adults. Due to the social network reconfiguration that often occurs during the college transition the specific focus of the current study was on college freshman and their siblings.

Participants and Procedure
Participants in the current study included 432 first year college students (166 men and 266 women) between the ages of 17 and 22 (M = 18.23, SD = .60) from a mid-size state university.

In addition to surveying about several demographic variables, participants were asked to report on their parental marital status and perceived marital satisfaction.

Furthermore, sibling warmth and conflict were assessed using the Adult Sibling Relationship Questionnaire (Lanthier & Stocker, 1992) and sibling closeness and communication were assessed using an aggregate score on items developed for this study inquiring about feelings of closeness for and frequency of communication with all siblings.

Finally, life satisfaction was assessed (Campbell, Converse, & Rodgers, 1976) as well as depression (Andresen, Malmgren, Carter, & Patrick, 1994; Radloff, 1977).

Results
Females scored significantly higher on sibling warmth (M = 3.63, SD = .77) and lower on sibling conflict (M = 2.52, SD = .81) than did males (M = 3.47, SD = .67, M = 2.75, SD = .84 respectively).

Conclusions
The current study contributes to a growing body of literature assessing sibling relationships in emerging adults. The study highlights the diversity in experiences with siblings and the value of sibling communication during the first year of college.